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Sound Geofiction and Mobile Interaction: The Sound in the Environment as Support for Composition

Laurent Di Biase

Abstract

I will describe the research I undertook during a three month residency with Locus Sonus in spring 2014. The resulting performance was presented during the Symposium *Audio Mobility*. The project is an investigation into interaction with the reality of an environment, using the technological medium of digital sound; a real-time audio creation between the everyday and fiction.

Four mobile tracks is a performance or concert piece using the process of audio streaming. The title refers to the mixing of four audio tracks, a common process in studio based musical creation. However, it also refers to four paths followed by the mobile microphones during the performance.

Audio Track 1: *Four Mobile Tracks* at Locus Sonus Symposium #8, *Audio Mobility*. Seconde Nature, Aix-en-Provence, 2014.

The piece requires four performers equipped with microphones and smartphones, allowing them to capture the sound environment through which they are moving. The captured audio is simultaneously sent via an Internet connection to be mixed in live,

inside the concert space. The auditorium is organised as an immersive space using a four-speaker surround spatialization system.

The path taken by each microphone in the terrain is determined by a written score with a “route” defined for each of the performers. This gives them instructions and actions to be accomplished with the aim of interacting with the context. The scores of the Fluxus movement as well as John Cage’s artistic approach to the everyday might be considered a reference in this work of composition.

Laurent Di Biase

4 Mobiles Tracks

on April 17th, 2014

7h30– 8h30 pm

Robin's Score

19H30 : Partir du sommet à pied en courant

Courir le plus vite possible jusqu'à essoufflement puis s'arrêter sur place immobile
pendant le temps de se reposer
Jouer de la percussion
Ecouter les oiseaux chanter

A 20h : Décrire l'environnement autour de vous

20h10 : Prendre une voiture pour rejoindre la périphérie de Aix

Faire du bruit avec se que vous trouver sur place
Ecouter de la musique
Téléphoner à Chloé, demander où elle se trouve
Discuter avec un ami

20h20 : Prendre un scooter pour rejoindre Seconde Nature

20h30 : Rendez-vous à Seconde Nature

Pied == 40min environs;
// descante de la pointe
Voiture == 10 min;
Scooter == 5min;

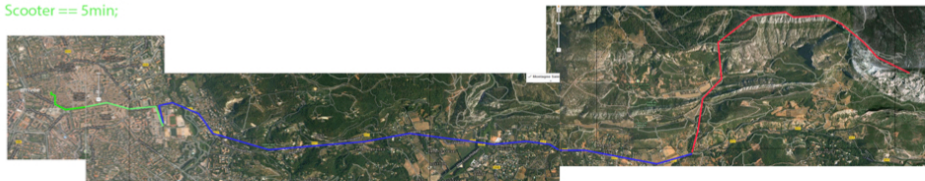


Fig. 1: *Four Mobile Tracks*. One of the scores.

The performance starts with the simultaneous departure of the four performers from different points on the map. They follow the route that is dedicated to them and execute, according to the conditions, potential sound actions mentioned on their score. Their

smartphone and microphone uses the *Locustream* application to transmit the sounds of their surroundings, streaming via the Internet. At the same time, a Pure Data program allows me to collect, mix and play these four audio fluxes live in the concert hall. A new fictional soundscape is thus created, lasting for the duration of the four different walks. The concert ends when the performers arrive at the end of their path, which leads them to enter the concert hall.



Fig. 2: Aix-en-Provence city centre. Satellite view.

The reality of our environment becomes a terrain for a new form of fictional experimentation, by dynamically re-mapping and remixing sound sources captured in

real time. The action of capturing sound thus becomes an inherent element in the musical “interpretation”.

Current broadcasting tools (real-time streaming software) allow both the action and the mobility of the subject (mobile microphones) over an hypothetically unlimited terrain. This opens the possibility of apprehending and interacting with the various sound sources available in the field and their capture and transmission to an auditorium in real time. Thus, I propose that the path taken by the microphone(s) can be considered as a score and the person carrying the microphone as an instrumentalist.



Fig. 3: Streaming equipment.

This shares some goals with the practice of soundwalking when considered as the re-appropriation of the urban space in which we live and as a response to the acceleration of our way of living, which imposes a change in our way of thinking in relationship with contemporaneity (Schafer 1977).

Sound capture becomes performance; re-mixing takes the shape of a sound geofiction, reality is script-written. It is possible to predefine the paths (tracks) to be taken by the performers carrying the microphone and/or to designate specific actions (or types of actions) and temporalities within which they are to take place. A narrative dimension is thus generated which can borrow techniques from domains such as cinema, radio art, and performance, Daniel Deshays (2006), for example, considers the paradigm of sound capture as being a choice, the re-creation a new reality based on prior decisions. Everyday life and its unpredictability become a support for composition – exploratory sound writing dialogues with improvisation.

In a sense this process might be assimilated with a documentary practice. The fact that the “streamers” integrate the outside environment, that they infiltrate the world outside the closed space of the auditorium generates a different type of social perspective to that which might ordinarily be perceived in a concert. This is augmented by the fact that the process is taking place in real-time – the world outside is transmitted live. It might be argued that this is similar to live radio. However, here the multiple audio positions that are mixed and confronted are designed to generate or recreate a new audio-spatial situation an acoustically impossible soundscape.

Special attention is required in the perception of a temporality appropriated for the purpose of listening and the direct porting of actions in progress inherent to the environmental context could be an innovative and experimental method, a new approach to the writing of sound. A sort of mixed reality which leaves space for the listeners' imagination and, at the same time, for the direct or indirect implication in their own temporality, in the present, through movement and corporeality. Unlike works by Janet Cardiff and George Miller such as *Alter Bahnhof Video Walk* (2012), where interaction through the mobility of the subject "enlivens" carefully prepared, recorded (fixed) tracks, here the performers journey is through the now and the fiction is in the remix.

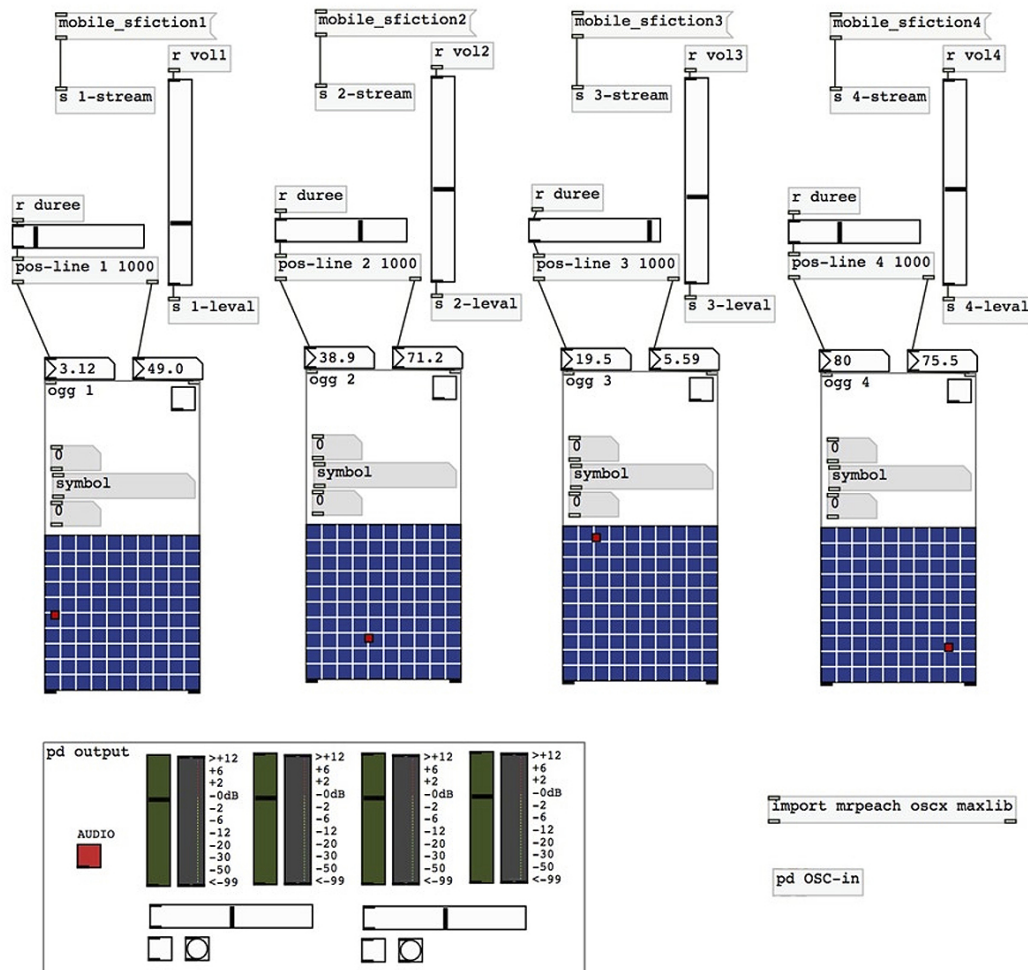


Fig. 4: Patch Pure Data for stream reception and quadrasonic mixing.

In the context of the presentation which I made during the Locus Sonus Symposium #8, the development of my project implied a commitment on the part of the performers, since the narrative approach I have adopted requires the interpretation of actions and movements indicated in a “score”. The moving positions of the smartphones used to stream the sound from the mobile microphones are transcribed live for the audience via a dynamic map showing the GPS localisation of the performers (microphone carriers). Thus the listener/spectator, is embarked in an “alternating realty” where they shift

between the location in which the remote geo-localized microphone is situated in an imaginary projection – because they can follow it on the map – and the actual experience of the sound in real time. They participate in a fictional remix in which the streams are spatialised in the local auditorium creating an acoustically impossible telescoping of the exterior environment. The distance between the corporeality of the moving individual and the apprehension of the context through imagination are modified by the interaction between the various media (map, real-time audio stream, spatialised remix), between fiction and reality, and between the author, performers, spectators and the artwork.

The tools of digital mobility and audio projection combine to offer an imaginary audition of the city. This takes place in a complex redeploying of shared public spaces – the street is projected in the auditorium but through the seemingly private spaces of subjective microphones.

*Video 1: **Four Mobile Tracks** video documentation.*

To conclude – the first presentations of Four Mobile Tracks open numerous possibilities for experimentation with this approach. My intention is, on the one hand, to develop the compositional process of scoring the paths taken by the performers, exploring different ways of scripting and orchestrating their actions; on the other, I would hope to further develop social, historical, geographical and human elements through live interviews and dialogue.

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Biography

A Visual and sound artist, Laurent Di Biase lives and works in Paris, he graduated from Ecole Nationale des Beaux-Arts of Paris and works in the domains of the sculpture, installation, sound creation and media art.

His work revolves around the possible links between the fine arts and experimental music, favoring the technological misappropriation and processes of recycling or reversal of obsolete media and new digital technologies. His thinking is influenced by the avant-garde movement and adopts the forms of sound sculptures installations, multimedia performances and sound creations. Through this approach, he questions the nature of the artwork in its relationship to the environment and the public. Recent project include: Superstructures, 6b, St Denis; Broken Silence, Plateforme Gallery, Paris; Paris Fiction, NUMA, Paris; BLASTéME #1, Brussels. <http://laurent.dibiase.perso.sfr.fr>; <http://soundcloud.com/laurentdibiase>; <http://vimeo.com/laurentdibiase>.