

Alter Audio

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This group is building on past discussions and decisions taken in the last Montreal meeting and subsequent online exchanges.¹ In yesterday's sessions we:

- identified some basic questions about the experience we were designing
- imagined a simple instantiation of the experience
- considered some alternatives and expanded functionality
- planned a series of scaled prototypes
- identified internal metaphors
- and then shifted our focus by considering entirely different applications of the system

Basic Questions

The core experience we were designing uses a collaborative audio/musical authoring scenario to enhance, measure, communicate and interrogate our physical and virtual experience of the site with interruptive elements, through parallel and convergent play.

Since we previously agreed that we were developing an audio experience that would involve choreography, sampling and depositing we chose to focus on player-level agency, the effect of location on design and device and our methodology itself. These are woven into our preparation and design of some buildable, iterative prototypes.

In considering the audience for this experience we spoke about visitors who are over-acclimatized to the location and as a result do not get as much enjoyment as they might have or once did. Users who find the natural trail experience perfectly satisfying are unlikely to benefit from our enhancements.

Since our experience is largely musical we needed to think about required levels of technical proficiency or musicianship. We decided that, while repeated play could result in an improvement of the experience, each and every experience should be perfectly satisfying unto itself.

¹ See: Treatment, Choreography Diagram, Draft Technical Specification

Simple Instantiation

We pictured a situation in which players (note: instrument players more than game players) with attached musical sounds moved in space, toward and away from each other, causing sounds to turn on and combine, or to affect or alter each other. We think players will create their own activities once they learn the mechanics of the system, moving, collaborating, separating, or possibly overlaying other social game playing like hide-and-go-seek.

We also considered the levels of control players would have over the sounds themselves, starting with simple triggering, mixing and manipulation of pre-recorded musical tracks and leading eventually to sampling (natural sounds), synthesizing (or generating new music), recording (locally or online) and depositing into the game for future users.

Alternatives and Expanded Functionality

Where specific location data could be very important in some activities, it might not really matter in some others. The scenarios we will test could in fact be rolled out in any number of locations but we will customize them for a natural mountain trail both through the introduction of different content (e.g. sounds of birds, waterfalls, wind, echoes or animals) and the inclusion of additional functionality (such as altitude-related features or group dynamics specific to trail hiking like bunching or helpfulness). The actual device enabling the experience could, for example, be built into a walking stick or other wearable medium. With the trail, we can take into account sounds that are created by specific gestures such as a 'skid action' when someone slips on steep icy spots in the park or recording and then playing reproduced and enhanced sounds of walking on snow. The user will be able to probe, filter and frame their environment from multiple sites and viewpoints, as they move from the physical to the virtual, the built to the natural environment and the base to the summit.

Scaled Prototypes

These scaled prototypes will be implemented with test 'content' moving from highly structured to moderately structured to loosely structured and finally moving in a different direction with a narrative-audio pastiche.

At each stage, we must analyse the effectiveness of the content within the structural design before moving to the next. (For example, if participants do not enjoy an experience is it because the technology was inappropriately implemented or because it presented a musical experience in a style they are not fond of.)

I. Early Audio Scenarios

1) Band/orchestra

Structure: pre-recorded², looped musical sounds (of instruments), group activity, sounds turned on and off by self-control

Content: music, musical types, music + sound, duration of loop

2) Choreography I

Structure: work in *proximity* to other instruments- sensing via Bluetooth

3) Choreography II

Structure: (requires further thought) pre-recorded sounds of instruments, group w/ proximity, *or individual activity*

4) Caching

Structure: pre-recorded musical sounds of instruments

plus: data *caches in locations (via phone/gps)*,

multiple tests for data caches:

a) *signaled by alerts on phone; volume increase and decreases when move away*

b) *signaled by sensor in environment*

5) Metaphor

Structure: travel on path allows certain collaborative or choreographic options

* see **metaphors** below (how environment causes effect; environment as participant), effects that come via data caches, lots of layers

6) Sampling

Sampling option added

Structural and content add-ons

7) Sampling & Effects

Synthesizer

Synthesizer added (to mediate sample sounds via phone)

8) Synthesizer

phone as musical instrument

9) Gesture

gesture option added

- gesture toward data cache or another phone and obtain data/sound

- using walking stick

² **Keyed, tempoed together, actual notes are melodic**

10) Uploading
user uploading to **data caches** added

II. Pastiche Scenarios

*Reflecting subliminal nature of the environment; continual surprise in game;
destabilizing player/users*

- Opens up to people playing off-site
- instruments off-site
- Storing collaborations in phone? In cache? Others can take and alter?
- Phantom

Once we had sketched out a series of prototypes we considered how we could lay another level of experience or meaning on this structure. So we started integrating a ghost scenario into our collaborative sound experience. After discussing some authentic, first hand ghost encounters we chose to leave aside the idea of a ghost 'story' and simply introduce a ghost 'sighting'.

A brief summary of the overlap brought the observation that the natural experience, the joy of making music with others and the spiritual/supernatural encounter all shared an element of the sublime. We thought this might be further extended to include the experiences of death and birth, violent nature, sex and/or magic.

11) **phantom sound** added; only some phones hear

12) phantom plus **possession** possibility

13) phantom /music scenario

Scenarios/metaphors to add in:

- Death/ Birth
- Sex
- Grizzly Bear

Metaphors: Architectures (music/mountain)

Spaces / Locations:

Mountain Game

Sports Field
City Game
Multi-location game

Mountain Game:

Metaphors linking musical collaboration and choreography with hiking a trail in Banff (metaphors related to nature of / trends in travel/movement in that space, and human interaction experiences in that space)

Common Practice: Groups climb trail, individuals and people break off, re-gather, reorganize groups, seeking to make the summit.

Hiking	Jazz or classical or dubbed sound base
Gaining Altitude/ approaching summit	Crescendo
Summit	Jamming Accelerando/ accelerando
Lookouts	jamming
Sudden climbing challenge	small jams/ solos
Flat path	sampling a simple rhythm, (ie walking)
Turns	looping
Leadership	orchestration
Forks	divergent
Getting lost	dissonance
Getting found in the zone	organized jam/ “pockets”
Stopping	silence

Other metaphor/content tests to think about:
- chord change, phase, bending a note and space

Other Locative Environments

Sports Field:

Common Practice: Team sport aiming to get one person down the field/ get ball/artifact into a particular space

organized

club/trance music

Punting/kick off

Scrambling

Leadership

Goal

orchestration

orchestrational closure

Urban café/bar environment:

Diverse/fluid/heterogeneous

Hip hop? Mixed genre?

In and out

People talking back to environment

Smaller groupings

volume/ sensing proximity