

IMPROVe

Mobile architecture for sonic socio-cultural exchange

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ABSTRACT

In this poster, we introduce IMPROVe [1], a mobile architecture for socio-cultural exchange on a sonic scale.

Keywords

Improvisation, Non-Linear Music, Soundscape, Sonic, Musical Interface, Practice based Community, Everyday, Open Source.

1. INTRODUCTION

IMPROVe is a mobile architecture for sonic socio-cultural exchange. Sonic realities of the everyday are improvised live in a non-linear mode. Local and remote audiences contribute and access open content. The project is done as our Master Thesis project for the Master of Arts in New Media program at Media Lab, University of Art and Design, Helsinki. Our approach in this project is artistic and experimental.

2. IMPROVe

Improvisation has been practiced by professional musicians to create compositions spontaneously. Melodies, harmonies and rhythms are combined within the traditional structures of music that the professional musician has been trained in. Musical instruments tear away from their established histories to accommodate and challenge each other. When the mobile device is used as a musical instrument in an improvisation, what musical structures, if any, emerge?

Improvisation is a collective activity. Professional musicians practice it to scope the boundaries of the musical form. What pursuits will the untrained improviser indulge in when involved in sonic improvisation?

The following two scenarios apply the idea of IMPROVe.

2.1 Scenario 1

Trained music practitioners like tabla masters record soundobjects and soundscapes through a mobile device. The group meets in a concert hall. They perform a group improvisation with the collected sounds. The exchange is an exploration of the formal aspect of aural compositions that build on traditional music structures and create new forms of music.

2.2 Scenario 2

School going children, untrained in music, record soundobjects and soundscapes from their daily life through a mobile device. The group meets in the classroom, where there is a soundsystem for playing the gathered sounds. They perform a live-remix of the sounds controlled from their mobile devices. The aural exchange affects at the cultural and social level through a sharing of the everyday soundscape.

3. FUNCTIONALITY

IMPROVe collects sounds via a mobile device and sends them to a location where they can be played back into a soundsystem. The same mobile device controls the playback of the collected sounds in the soundsystem. Playback control occurs in the physical location of the soundsystem. The playedback sounds are processed live via interaction on the mobile device. The output of the processed sound can be directly heard through the soundsystem.

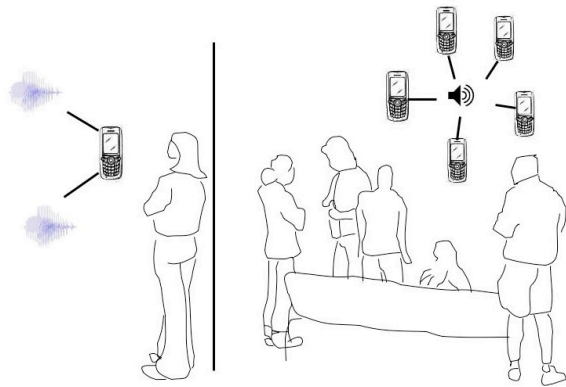


Figure 1. Sounds are recorded with a mobile device individually and then improvised in a common physical space collectively.

4. ASSUMPTIONS

4.1 Awareness of sonic reality

The mobile phone makes it possible to record sounds. Therefore it is interesting to explore a mobile phone as a sound recording device for everyday practice.

4.2 Mobile phone as an improvisational musical instrument

The possibility of recording sounds and then processing and playing them back into a soundsystem makes the mobile device a musical instrument.

4.3 Musical communication using mobile devices

To practice music in a group normally means meeting in a physical space to communicate with sounds made by instruments. With this proposal we encourage meeting in physical space and communicating as a musical group.

4.4 Improvisation as Event

Improvisation is an event-based activity. Aspects of it can be captured but the experience of it cannot be recreated. We therefore encourage live improvisation of recorded sounds instead of recording for archival purposes.

4.5 Interaction

The proposed system will have a Graphical User Interface (GUI), which will among others make it possible to control the processing parameters of the playback. We attempt to make an interface which is easy and "fun" to use and will be understandable by people from different cultural and musical or non-musical backgrounds.

5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

5.1 Soundscapes

Does a mobile device with its technical limitations work as a tool for recording sounds other than speech?

5.2 Sharing

Why would one want to record and share sound within a group? And what does this mean for the socio-cultural exchange within the group?

5.3 Users

Can IMPROVe be applied in different cultural contexts with people from different ages and backgrounds?

5.4 Interaction

How does a GUI in an improvisational musical context look like?

5.5 Open

We will try to make the system as open as possible. The system should be customizable for the groups that are using it. What other kind of usage will a system like this offer?

6. ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Richard Widerberg is a mediaartist mostly working with soundrelated projects. He is also a musician attending different improvisational contexts using both electronic and acoustical instruments. Widerberg is completing his thesis at the MA program in New Media at the University of Art and Design in Helsinki.

Zeenath Hasan is an independent media researcher involved in tracing the trajectories of mobile and networked technologies in pre-literate societies. She is an ethnographer by practice. She has been producer for symposiums like the Doors of Perception East 2003 conference in India. Hasan is currently completing her thesis at the MA program in New Media at the University of Art and Design in Helsinki.

7. REFERENCES

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