



Take Me Somewhere, but Don't Leave

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The performance *Take Me Somewhere, But Don't Leave* explores the relationship between humans, technology and communication through the lens of the theories of philosopher and media theorist Vilém Flusser. With a series of live generative visuals and soundscapes, the performance takes the audience on a journey through shifting landscapes representing different stages of the technologization of society and our consciousness in this telematic society. From a primitive, listening world with no direction, to a historical linear consciousness, and now, through the power of the apparatus, we are back in a new mystical world with the consciousness of going nowhere, as the artist feeds her Instagram live into the visual and uses feedback techniques to re-synthesize the technical images and her voice. We are left in a state of inner reflection, as the directionless world is created by technology, leaving us feeling lost and unsure of our surroundings. The artist tries to wake up the person which is presented, but she seems to have fallen into a deep sleep and a dream-like state. The performance is created using generative sound with SuperCollider, and live visuals with TouchDesigner, manipulated and improvised in real-time by the artist which offers a rich immersive sonic and visual experience.

Keywords: Generative Audiovisual Performance, Algorithmic Composition, SuperCollider, Improvisation, Technical Images, Re-synthesizing, Live Feedback, Social Media.

Figure 1: Live at MaHalla Berlin CTM
Vorspiel 2023.



Inspiration

The works of philosopher and media theorist Vilém Flusser have been a source of inspiration for artists and creators for decades, exploring the relationship between human beings, technology, and communication. In this performance, I seek to capture Flusser's ideas and bring them to life through a unique audiovisual experience.

The idea for *Take Me Somewhere, But Don't Leave* also stems from my own experience of returning to the city after a ten-day silent retreat. It became clear to me that I am already a receiver and creator of a immersive, imaginary world of new media.

In particular, I am intrigued by the concept of feedback in technical images and how it leads us to a “dimensionless” (Flusser 2011) state.

This feedback enables the images to change, to become better and better, and more like the receivers want them to be; that is, the images become more and more like the receivers want them to be so that the receivers can become more and more like the images want them to be. (Flusser 2011, p. 54)

The telematic society we live in today is marked by a constant inner dialogue intertwined with outer dialogue, a perpetual creativity driven by self-forgetting, and it is a new listening world with “an eye for an ear”. This new dimension is shaped by the constant re-synthesis and projection of technical images and sounds, leading us to question what constitutes us as individuals and our collective memory and dreams.

Through a combination of immersive visuals, soundscapes in a live performance, the audience will be taken on a journey through a series of shifting landscapes, each representing a different stage in the technologization of society and our consciousness.

Composition and Concept

It is a journey starts from primitive/listening world with no direction, to a historical linear consciousness, and now, through the power of the apparatus, we are back in a new mystical world with the consciousness of going nowhere. This Performance has five parts:

Part 1: Intro – Directionless

The performance begins with a sequence that evokes a world before technology, where the relationship between human beings and the environment is more direct and intuitive. “First rung” – in Flusser’s term, – “Animals and ‘primitive’ people are immersed in an animate world, a four-dimensional space-time continuum of animals and primitive peoples. It is the level of concrete experience” (Flusser 2011). This is a listening world without visual clues, where the focus is on the “deterritorialization of sound” (Cox 2003), its movement and intensity, and the experience of the moment, instead of the division in space. Using SuperCollider and pulsar synthesis, a live-generated soundscape is created, where the sine waves are constantly slightly changing.

Part 2: Directional

As the visual elements slowly fade in, the contrast between direction and directionlessness becomes apparent. In this part, the audience travels down a forward-facing tunnel, where linear thinking and minimalistic ascending twelve tones dominate. This section represents our historical consciousness, where the world is experienced in a linear and predictable manner.

Figure 2: Screenshot of Composition Part 3.

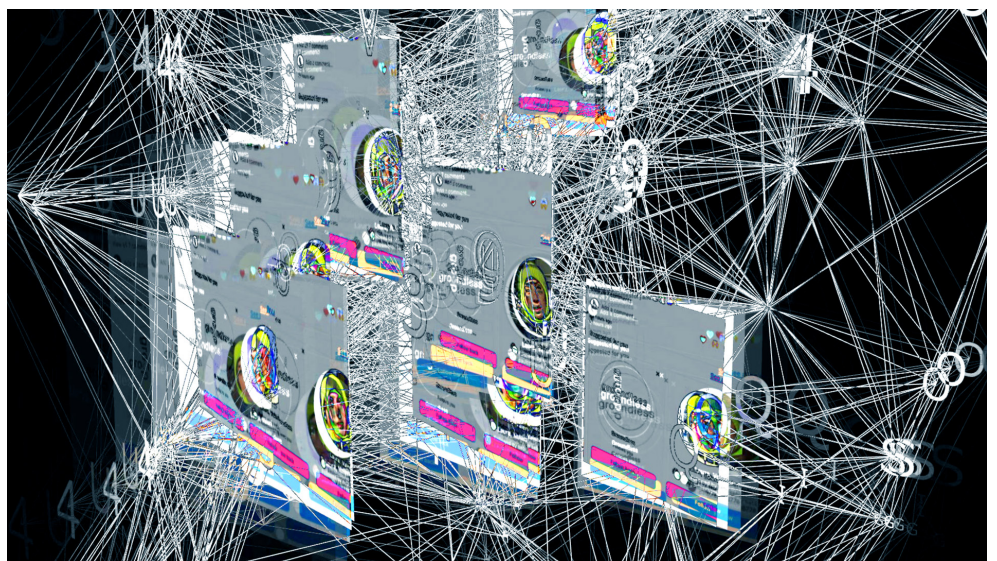
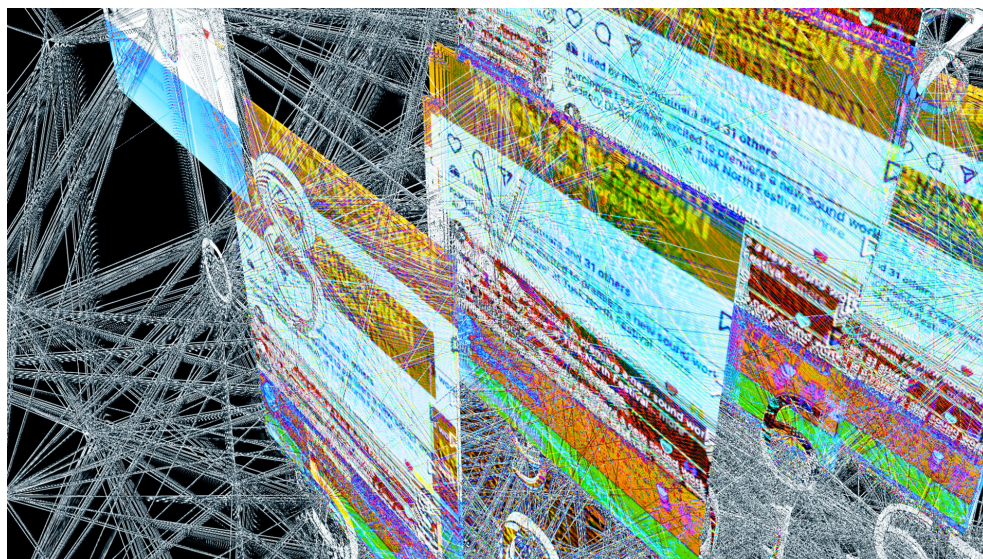


Figure 3: Screenshot of Composition Part 3.



Part 3: Dimensionless

As the performance progresses, the audience is gradually introduced to an imaginary world with new apparatus and forms of communication. This section explores the “dimensionless” state created by the constant re-creation and re-synthesis of technical images. Which is a constant upward spiral movement of “disintegrate into particles — envision a concrete world — disintegration into particles...” (Flusser 2011).

A network-like graph is slowly grown. A live-generated visual landscape is created, fed by my Instagram feed live, it represents the telematic society, a constant world wide dialogue (Fig. 2, Fig. 3). I incorporate feedback techniques to further distort and re-create the visual elements. The technic of “Buffer rewriting” is implemented here for the voice with SuperCollider. It shows how information in the world and information in general is generated: “by synthesizing previous information” (Flusser 2011).

The performer scrolls the screen, interacts with social media, and reads out the information, which is the bubbles generated through the feedback of recommendation algorithm. We and machine engage with image and sound in a playful game in this telematic society for the purpose of generating information (Flusser 2011). It reflects on the idea of the outer dialogue of a telematic society, that there is no isolated genius creator, rather “the person of the future will be absorbed in the creative process to the point of self-forgetfulness” (Flusser 2011), and this is a work where “many people participate and where the work [...] cannot only be endlessly reproduced but also continually changed” (Flusser 2011).

Part 4: Wake Up, Go where?

As the performance reaches its climax, the visuals become more complex and the soundscape becomes more synthetic. It is a close

feedback loop, that the technical images translate historical events into infinitely repeatable projections. And through the power of envision, we dry out the history and project ourself onto the future — but it is an eternal return of the same boredom.

We are left in a state of inner reflection, as the directionless world created through technology leaves us feeling lost and unsure of our surroundings. The performer tries to “wake up” the person (Fig. 4, Fig. 5), make her get up from the bed, and go out of her room, but it seems as though she have fallen into a deep sleep and a dreamlike state.

Figure 4: Screenshot of Composition Part 4.



Part 5: Outro — A New Spiritual World

The journey ends with a return to a mysterious, spiritual world that is sucked into the fullness of history. This final section brings the audience back to the primordial listening world, with a focus on the intangible and mystical qualities of sound. A world where the dimensionless state created by technology is experienced in a new light.

Figure 5: Live at MaHalla Berlin CTM Vorspiel 2023.



Generative and Audiovisual

The soundscape of the performance is dynamic and ever-evolving generated through SuperCollider. This open-source programming language for audio synthesis allows me to interact with and shape the sound in real-time, allowing machines to surprise me with their inner dialogue and interactions. It promotes a new level of improvisation, a creativity in the way we play with apparatus for creating sounds and images through its capability of self-programming.

One technique of this performance is “buffer rewriting” in SuperCollider, which allows me to re-synthesize my voice on the fly. The algorithm constantly writes my voice into a buffer, which is then read in an unpredictable manner for a certain period of time until the buffer is overwritten with new information. This creates a constant cycle of rewriting and re-reading, resulting in a unique and evolving soundscape. It is a improvisation with “continually reprogrammed memories will replace the score” (Flusser 2011).

Furthermore, I live feed my instagram live into the generative visual via OBS and NDI in TouchDesigner, which is also an important part of the algorithmic composition. As the posts and ads are filtered by my personal instagram recommendation algorithms, it represents a concrete level of the close feedback circuit of our collective brain.

The soundscape and visual incorporate generative strategies for feedback, adding to the overall movement and fluidity of the performance. These generative work in tandem with the post-digital visual aesthetic to create “sounding images and visible sound”. Sound and visual are both raised to a new level, the audiovisual — “once they have both become electronic, the visual and acoustic technologies will no longer be separable” (Flusser 2011).

References

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