

Considerations about the International Computer Music Conference 2021

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Between July 25th and 31st, 2021, the International Computer Music Conference ICMC was held in Santiago de Chile, organized this year by the International Computer Music Association and Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. The conference, which should have taken place in 2020, was held online in 2021 due to the pandemic. In my role as music co-chair I could see that this new format meant new challenges, but also new opportunities.

It is true that trips and the opportunity to know another country, another culture were missed this year. However, accessing a paper or a workshop held in a distant country from home seemed to give a different dimension to the technology with which we work and whose musical scope has always been reflected on at the ICMC. Curiously, technology – always coming to the conference from different levels of our work such as analysis, sound, or algorithms generation – found a dif-

ferent dimension now: if it was used to gather us together to meet our interests, now it also brought us the opportunity to meet each other and listening to each other in a much broader sense.

Through pandemic times it was comforting to meet – via Zoom – with several colleagues in the real-time spaces of papers and workshops. In fact, these rooms for conversation balanced certain coldness and distance from the previously recorded exhibitions; because these probably were too perfect, too direct. All sum up, the essence of what summoned us in this type of activities seemed intact: the exhibitor managed to communicate the achievements of his artistic or research work and a frank and open dialogue was generated between him and the attendees. However, at the end of the paper presentation, when the questions and the conversation with the author finished, a void was suddenly opened: the private conversations with some of the attendees outside the exhibition hall was replaced with the closure of the application (Zoom) and the subsequent silence or local noise of our own environments.

When the concert time had come, we join from the now ambiguous comfort of our own home, our own space, we once again missed, already more radically, the space itself. Something was missing from those stereophonic concerts. An essential part of our works, since the years of the pioneers, is the relationship between sound, us, and space. Although this problem can be solved through binaural techniques and the use of headphones, it was clear that a vast majority of the compositions did not aim at a work on this field. A considerable distance appeared here between these concerts and a face-to-face instance. Noticing this lack of proximity, a retrospective question for the papers related to the study of spatialization emerges. This year these reached the status of impertinent due to a technical deficiency that we never imagined: the impossibility of being together.

Despite this, just imagining an encounter like this around another kind of music seemed difficult. Somehow, the pandemic scenario and the online version of the ICMC 2021 to which it pushed revealed a dimension of our music that we do

not usually think about: the technological resource seems to be physically present with discretion today, endowing our creative processes with a kind of immateriality that allows us to connect with great fluidity, putting reflection and knowledge at the center of our activity: the thought at the center of everything. At some level, our work tool - the device - was never so absent as it was this year conference; it seemed like its only job was to connect us. In this 2021 conference we were witnessing a single technical deficiency: the impossibility of getting together physically. The lack of physical proximity has been saved by the technique itself, which this time seems to act inconsiderately in the background, allowing our reflection to be brought to others and to other areas, a reflection that arises from technology and finds its possibility in it.

We had a great remote conference, but we want to meet again. I think that in the next face-to-face ICMC we should take everything that allowed us to be together this 2021. Technology has gained a new space that I think should not be suppressed. Thus, I imagine an ICMC like

the ones before, but with the presence of colleagues that present themselves in a virtual way, adding another dimension to the Conference, an immateriality that is heard. It will always be relevant to be in person to listen to the space that sounds and resonates, but another dimension has been opened for the Conference. Therefore, I believe that a certain number of papers dictated remotely by those who cannot face the trip to the organizing city should be kept in a face-to-face conference.

After ICMC 2021, physical distance should not be an impediment to hearing everything that can be said. Therefore, it would be interesting to keep the "listening room" from this year Conference. The next one could include a certain number of stereo works and, why not, it could be available, from now on, to the general public, an audience that, interested in this type of artistic-musical expression, begin to deepen their listening experience. From technology itself, the International Computer Music Association would establish an unprecedented liaison with the non-specialist public.

Finally, I believe that we must think about how we can relate to this new reality that the pandemic has brought: being able to meet despite the distance. The virtual format can provide a door into a space which is traditionally filled by the conference's local space, being open to all those who, for any reason, are far away; a space for works and papers exhibited remotely, which can be accessed online from different countries; a space to talk, to comment, and to meet.

Although we can only imagine the future from this new situation, we know that it has been made possible and will continue to be made possible by computer media, the media that are our element, which have served to articulate our artistic, scientific and research work and thought.