
Random musings on TUG 2020 online

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It happened! It worked!

The coronavirus pandemic threw a monkey wrench in the plans to hold TUG 2020 at the Rochester Institute of Technology. So a decision to hold it online was inevitable, if the conference was to be held at all. With the help of many people, everything came together and an exciting program was presented with remarkably few glitches.

First of all, thanks to everyone who worked so hard to make the conference a success. Will Robertson obtained permission from his institution, the University of Adelaide, for use of their Zoom license. Paulo Ney de Souza's experience with online presentations was invaluable in putting together the technical setup; Paulo was also the most visible host during the program, introducing presentations and conducting two live interviews. Other hosts included Arthur Rosendahl (né Reutenauer), Ross Moore, Norbert Preining, Tom Hejda, and probably others while I was asleep. Jennifer Claudio produced the poster, and helped in many ways with the new online world. Paulo Cereda created the attendance certificates and provided feedback on many fronts, as well as his usual much-needed good cheer. Thanks to all!

Arrangement of the schedule was done largely by Karl Berry, with consideration given to the time zone inhabited by each speaker, so that their presence would be slotted in a "comfortable" time, not when they would normally be asleep. Since speakers were located in almost all parts of the world, with the largest gap being the watery expanse of the Pacific Ocean, the relevant time zone was requested at the time of registration. The schedule as presented to potential viewers was tailored to give times in *their* local time zone. (This feature also worked for some who hadn't registered, as my husband determined when he added the schedule to his calendar so he would know when he could interrupt me for dinner.)

Most speakers made videos of their presentations. This provided some insurance against unforeseen scheduling problems (in the event, only one speaker was unable to be present at the scheduled time), and also makes it relatively straightforward to reprocess what was seen by online viewers, for a permanent presence on YouTube. Reprocessing is expected to take some time, perhaps a few weeks, but, with luck, it should be possible to watch via YouTube links by the time the proceedings are published.

In addition to the primary Zoom feed, the entire conference (including "dead" hours) was streamed to YouTube, and I believe there was another secondary feed. (Using a new laptop, not fully configured, I wasn't able to connect via Zoom, but watched the YouTube feed, and was thus unable to post interactive questions or participate in the apparently active chat.) Chat rooms were set up (on Zulip and Gather Town) for asking questions during talks as well as for social interaction; this was managed by Rohit Goswami in Iceland.

The backgrounds shown in most speakers' videos were either obviously book-rich or rather minimal—this latter being recommended for video presentation. But one background stood out: Dave Walden sitting on his porch with his back to an enticing marsh. Unfair to those of us sweltering at 30+ °C with humidity.

The wide geographic distribution was made real in views of two of the hosts, during setup and shutdown time: Ross, wrapped in a hoodie, commenting that it's cold during the Australian winter! And Arthur, saying goodnight in Sweden at local time heading on to midnight, with bright sun still streaming in the window.

I heard after the fact that one of the talks had been Zoom-bombed. Although a disruption at the time, the talk had been pre-recorded, so later viewers won't have to suffer the indignity. Oh, for the days when politeness was the norm, and not a rarity.

When the videos are posted, I shall first watch the talks that I missed—too many of them that I really wanted to see but just couldn't stay awake. Then I shall watch the others again, starting with the virtual tour of the Cary Library at RIT. (It's posted at <https://youtu.be/7Cm2AcQiUuk>.) I've been there before, but it's a little different every time, and I've never had a fully guided tour; Amelia Hugill-Fontanel clearly loves her charges, and I'm hoping that we're free enough of this virus by next summer that we can visit in person. For the rest, there's something interesting to be learned from every talk, so I won't pick favorites here.

Finally, an unintentional feature appearing during the live interludes between talks was the presence of cats insinuating themselves into camera range with many of the speakers and hosts; cats have their own imperatives, namely curiosity and being "in the way". I think I'll miss that when we can all get together in person again.

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