

ICMC 2011 Reviews
Centre for Research in
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Concert 4
Monday, 1st August 2011
The Graduate
by Patricia Alessandrini

The late-night concert of the first full day of the ICMC conference, Concert 4 of 13, began with Simon Atkinson's introspective, well-crafted acousmatic piece *interiorities iii*. This piece would not have been at all out of place at one of the midday concerts, but it turned out to have resonances with some of the other works on the program, particularly in its use of feedback. Despite the informal setting, *interiorities iii*, the third of a series of works intended for a CD release, demanded intensive listening, and indeed the composer himself described it as a 'deep-listening' work. Unfortunately, despite the high-quality speaker system (which once again belied the bar setting) and the sensitive diffusion of the first work, the concert subsequently suffered from levels which were unnecessarily, and sometimes painfully, high.

Mike Fregel's performance of his own *Hotbird* for electric guitar featured ingenious use of the instrument as a controller for the electronics. The piece opened intriguingly with processed bird sounds inextricably linked to the instrumental gesture and at the same time strangely disconnected from it, as the guitar was played at relatively low position on the strings to produce these high-pitched sounds, while the sound of the strings themselves could not be heard. It was therefore disappointing that somewhat common electric guitar sounds made their appearance soon after and dominated the succeeding sections. A welcome coda-like section of sustained chords seemed to want to end the work on a different note, but was too quickly cut off by a distorted guitar lick which insisted on having the last word.

The possibilities of guitar and electronics were further explored in *Whistle Pig Saloon*, with John Ferguson on hybrid guitar and Robert van Heuman performing electronics with tactile controllers. The experience was both aurally and visually engaging, especially for a duo including a lap-top performer, and well paced for a mostly improvisatory work, and they managed to communicate well enough to avoid too much awkwardness in ending the performance. Unfortunately, the performance lost some clarity due to the

overly-loud diffusion; I've seen the guitar and glitch duo perform on a previous occasion (at the Sonorities Festival this past Spring) at edgy but reasonable levels, and the experience was much more appreciable.

The works up to this point had some interesting correspondences, not only in the obvious relationship between the pieces employing guitar, but between the pulsations of the duo and the beatings of the acousmatic work. This latter theme of the concert was neatly taken up once again in the performance by Nicolas Varchausky, *Speaker Performing Kiosk [The Huddersfield Sessions]*. As soon as Varchausky took his place in the midst of a circle of six speakers, it was clear that he was going to perform with his body, and his performance did not disappoint, constantly renewing itself with new gestures and positions with unexpectedly rich sonic results. In addition to his black jumpsuit, he was equipped with a wireless microphone in each hand, which allowed him to expressively control feedback and to use his body to affect the results. The possibilities offered by different hand and body positions allowed Varchausky to create both a new sound world and a new choreography for each section of the work, and to develop new correspondences between gesture and sound.

Speaker Performing Kiosk inscribed itself in another theme which emerged from the program, that of physical performance and visual staging in relation to electronics. While in *Hotbird*, the identity of the guitar ranged from electronics controller to the more common tool of the 'guitar hero', the duo of van Heuman and Ferguson sought out a somewhat equal performability of the guitar and the laptop, and Varchausky brought gestural control of sound to its most literal and physical extreme. The last performance, *Gracht* by Donna Hewitt and Julian Knowles, nicely framed the concert by consciously confronting notions of roles and staging: the duo deconstructed the conventional stage image of an accompanied singer through sensor technology, most strikingly by using the singer's microphone stand as a controller. Although the performance was somewhat undermined by the prominent presence of a laptop onstage, the consultation of which seemed vital to the performance and thus distracted from the stage image, the transformation of mic-stand gestures into functional and expressive musical actions left a strong impression, and the desire to see further creative exploration into the potential of exploiting existing musical gestures for the expressive control of electronics.

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Monday, 1st August 2011

Audiovisual Works

by Andrew Connor

As I have a particular interest in audiovisual compositions, I've approached the idea of reviewing ICMC performances from a slightly different angle. Instead of reviewing concerts in their entirety, I have specifically focussed on individual audiovisual pieces shown in the concert halls and in the listening rooms.

Starting with the listening room works, we had three audiovisual pieces on show today: Louise Harris's *Fuzee*, Andrew Hill's *Perpetual Motion*, and my own *Study No. 2* (which I cannot really review objectively).

Fuzee relates to a clock mechanism, a cone-shaped pulley with a spiral groove. As the screen fades from black, it is perhaps then surprising to see a jumble of what looks to be thin straight plastic strips in layers fading into an unfocussed

white background. However, the sound immediately establishes the context with clock chimes, ratchet clicks, and winding noises, and the lines quickly move in response, twitching in sympathy with the clicks and curling into tight spirals with the chimes. The piece progresses through an exploration of the sounds of clocks, initially quite gently with chimes dissolving into and out of harmonics, and gradually introducing ticking clock mechanisms. The mood moves from a gentler introspection into a greater, relentless drive, particularly fuelled by the ticking, with the lines now curving and tightening into small, thick circles. The detail of the ticking sound is also mirrored visually in striations within the curled lines, an internal skeleton also moving in quick, jerky but regular rotations. The pressure builds with the increased ticking, noisier ratchet sounds, more insistent chimes, and the spirals on screen lock into ever tighter and smaller circles until, with a final decisive click, the tension is released and the lines straighten out gradually to the return of a gentle clock chime.

This work is well structured, taking enough time to establish the correlation between sound and vision. Just at the point where the connections have been made and the piece could have outstayed its welcome, the increasing tempo and building of tension as everything speeds

up and gets more constricted draws the audience in, with the release and relaxation providing a satisfying ending.

Andrew Hill's *Perpetual Motion* is also very satisfying. The work starts with an indeterminate meeting of three lines and a gradual introduction of a repetitive mechanical noise. It develops into upwards movement in screen and sound, an ascent to an apotheosis of white and an introspection of high frequency rising notes and highly processed upwards movements on screen. The following middle section is stable in pitch, with horizontal movements on screen – here the reality of the source material bleeds in, with the delicate texture of wood offering an optical interest against the mechanical noise of machinery moving against itself. The sounds start to move downwards in pitch, and the visuals change to match for the final section, a descent downwards to a final resting state of full inertia.

Both the video and audio materials were recorded from a single source, a paternoster lift. The processing of both elements allow for a highly ambiguous interpretation as the piece starts; it is difficult to even establish what the base material is behind the manipulated colours, changes in focus and the processed sounds. The development into an identifiable visual source does not

detract from the sound world; rather, it adds the interest of a definable texture, but retains an ambiguity about the exact image source, again allowing for a variety of interpretations. The final descending sequence feels never ending, with constant downward glissandi implying an eternal decline, yet the disappearance into a reverberant emptiness still offers closure. The entire piece is extremely well realised, with each section contributing to a very engrossing whole experience.

In the lunchtime concert (2a), two audiovisual pieces were programmed, though we were able to see three due to an unfortunate plane delay for one of the performers.

Chikashi Miyama's *Quicksilver* tantalised with its programme notes – organic unprocessed audio accompanying a very artificial animated rendering of liquid mercury. The visuals were definitely stunning; having used Blender a few times, I am very impressed with the skill shown in creating a believable world of heavy liquids, a succession of images of mercury droplets being thrown up from a main body, scattering through the air, and merging back into slow-moving reflective rivulets. On the visual side, this work delivered big time.

However, the audio, for me, really did not stand up to the video element. The

majority of the sound was quite light in tone—a sequence of fairly high pitched vocal noises—apart from a single much more satisfying episode of growling and throaty gargling. Miyama notes that he is investigating contrasts, so it may be that the lighter audio tone is a bold move to contrast with the heavy visual movement, but the resultant mix is imbalanced, and I ended up feeling that the piece might actually have been better presented as silent video—a strange sensation in such a sound and music rich environment.

Due to Alexander Schubert's unfortunate plane problem, Jean Piché had the opportunity to introduce his programmed piece *AUSTRALES* with its antecedent *BORÉALES*. Both pieces had highly intricate video elements, delicate ever-mutating and highly defined particle streams based on underlying video footage.

In contrast to others I spoke to after the concert, I found *BORÉALES* a slightly more interesting experience than *AUSTRALES*, although I found both to be highly engrossing. The shifting, shimmering sounds in *BORÉALES* seemed to me to fit more closely with the images, giving a more satisfying overall experience, while the voices heard in the audio element of *AUSTRALES* came across as a bit intrusive, too 'real', seeming to divorce an otherwise equally

appropriate soundtrack from images which actually seemed more engrossing than the earlier work. However, both impressed with their overall composition and retained full interest throughout.

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Tuesday, 2nd August 2011

Audiovisual Works

by Andrew Connor

The second day of the full conference has been quite exhausting, with so much of interest to try and get to. It's definitely a good place to see how people are interpreting and creating work that can be seen as audiovisual. In addition to the more straightforward sound and video work to be experienced in the listening rooms, the concerts also had a couple of performances that linked audio, video and live performance. It's been inspiring – and a bit daunting – and certainly very impressive.

Listening Room 2b featured two audiovisual works today. Min Eui Hong's

Between Sleep and Wake starts off with low frequency sounds and harmonics, leading into ominous low tones against scattered, rattling noise. The visuals consist of high contrast monochromatic shots of light glancing off waves, rippling lines of white against a heavy background of black. As the work develops, the harmonic filters produce longer sustained pitches against gestural noise while the rippling waves on screen increase in animation, overlaid with larger, slightly out of focus versions of the same monochromatic ripples. The sound and vision build, then dwindle down in intensity as the work draws to a close, almost (but not quite) resolving the sense of tension and unease.

The use of a monochromatic palette focuses the eye on the wave movements and interactions, while the sounds are equally simple in isolation but combine and build to shift and merge in the ear. The combination works well, and inspires a sense of unease that is sustained throughout. From the notes, the composer's intention was to represent the dreaming, REM portion of sleep, which I think has been accomplished here, although I think the dreams involved are not blissfully happy ones.

The second piece was David Hyman's *Other Music To Dance To*. In this, Hyman has taken video and audio content from a performance by the dancer Maya

Plisetskaya. He manipulated both to create an exploration in controlling the expression of her dance by varying the speed and direction of the playback, mirroring the control of movement for which Plisetskaya herself was famed.

Another monochromatic work, the starting image is an abstract, unfocused grey blur against a defined melody that contains glitches and archival artefacts. The visual focus resolves to reveal the dancer on a stage setting, frozen in place, then released to follow the dance in time with the music. As the work continues, the footage speeds up, slows down, and reverses to review and explore moments in the performance. For me, the most effective manipulations occur as the dancer hangs still in the air, the sound completely stops, and the image is processed to change the contrast, thin the arms and blur out the features until the pose is everything. But the other parts of the work are a bit too much; by the time it finishes with the dancer poised mid jump, it has all been a bit too busy, too manipulated. The work has some great moments, but I ended up feeling that in some ways it was more of a technical exercise where the emotional impact of the content was obscured by technique.

When planning out my attendance schedule for the day, I little thought that I'd also want to write about some of the

live performances at the concerts, but a couple of them combined instruments, computer music and video in exciting formats. In Concert 5, Patrick Saint-Denis presented *Trombe*, which combined flute, audiovisuals and a feather! On stage, we were presented with a large projector screen at the back, a smaller freestanding screen on the right, Richard Craig on flute on the left, and a highlighted feather beside the smaller screen.

The combination of flute and processed sounds worked well, and meshed with a video presentation of 'noise' (lines and dots running across both screens). At intervals, the breathy short pulsing of the flute matched perfectly with a series of horizontally pulsing dots on screen, while at other times stylized landscapes appeared on one of the screens, with an almost water-colour wash effect softening the images. On a couple of occasions, the feather was singled out with a spotlight. This was the weakest part for me, as there seemed no reason for this, although there were a few technical hitches during the set-up at the start of the piece, so that might have affected the feather's 'performance'.

The overall impression was a busy, constantly changing immersive experience. It was possibly a bit too much of everything all at once; I kept switching attention between screens, flautist and

feather, always feeling as if I was missing something happening out of the corner of my eye. But I'd very happily go and experience it all again.

In Concert 6, *Chute libre* by Julien-Robert Salvail made full use of the excellent space afforded by St. Paul's Hall. A sizeable ensemble of instruments played live against processed sound while a screen hanging above their heads depicted an engrossing narrative. An aeroplane is seen, preparing for and then taking off, accompanied by suitable uplifting music. We move with the plane to reveal a cloudscape, which grows and changes to show increasing turbulence, and the music grows in intensity and detail to match. We move into a storm, then into a vortex of streaming red lines and curves, objects battering into the screen as we fall further into the eye of the storm. The music reaches a climax as the peak of the visual action also hits: an explosion into white, which is revealed as the music relaxes to be a light fabric, billowing and folding as it collapses. The white turns to a deep rich red as the music draws to a final, quieter, finish.

The combination of all the elements felt very well accomplished. I found it interesting as well that, while the action on the screen built towards a climax, the majority of the audience stared fixedly at that instead of at the musicians, who

were equally interesting as they built up the effort and exhibited their technical skill in performance. The dominance of the visual element, particularly where an on-screen narrative was presented, was definitely in evidence here. But this did not detract in any way from the work as a whole, as this was obviously how it had been designed to work.

Despite beginning to flag, I was very glad I also made it to the late night Concert 7 in the Graduate bar. On stage, in her *TSC 3*, Angela Guyton threw paint and pulled brushes against a pristine canvas to create an abstract painting while the sounds of her efforts were collected by microphones and fed to Rodrigo Constanzo and Anton Hunter. They then created an accompanying soundscape using only these sounds of artistic creation as sources. This was a new version of audio-visual art again, an eventually still image developing and morphing as we watched, with the act of creation emphasized by the sonic interpretation. It was engrossing and exciting to watch, though I am left wondering: if she does this a lot, where on earth does Guyton store all those huge canvases?

Concert 8
Wednesday, 3rd August 2011,
11:00/4:30
Phipps Hall
by John ffitch

Concert 8 was given twice on account of the room size. I attended the second performance, in which there were five tape pieces and a video.

The concert started with a bang that made me jump, as Horacio Vaggione's *Points Critiques* began. Throughout the work, the prevailing sounds were of percussion, and that unified the piece. The other main sound was a swarm of clicks, probably from percussion as well. Structurally I described this to myself as a sequence of grand gestures ending with the swarm of clicks. These gestures were short and usually of a similar length. I was just getting a little bored with this small scale structure when there was a change to the grand gesture + a chord, twice and it ended. This is mainstream acousmatic work with continuous sounds; if that is what you like, it was good of this style.

The second piece was Peiman Khosravi's *Convergences*. It started VERY quietly, a great contrast to the first start. A feature of the piece throughout was the amplitude range. In contrast to the first

piece, the phrases were long and had considerable variation, with new material emerging organically from the previous parts. There was energy, reflection and—above all—control. As you can tell, I really liked this piece, but to be fair I had heard it before, and this was better. The other feature was the use of space; there was variation, but also intent.

Video is not my thing, so my comments on *Sinus Aestum* by Bret Battey may be unduly biased. At least the images did not make me cover my eyes from flashing and strobing. Also unusual for a video piece, the images changed with the audio. The visual component was a large collection of spheres that moved, leaving a decaying trail. The effect was of strings of beads in many changing configurations. I was less happy with the sound, which was mainly chords with some swept parameter. I suspected some kind of FM but the paper on Monday says otherwise. I did not attend that presentation and it is possible that as a consequence I missed something. I did also wonder why, after all that synchronisation, the audio stopped before the video.

Following a short interval, the concert restarted with *La cite de verre* by Valérie Delaney, which started with what could be best described as footsteps on a metallic surface. I was enjoying this when abruptly it changed to a physical recording, people

talking and a piano, as if in a piano bar. I was wondering why when it became more abstract. The piano made a short reprise but I felt happy when the footstep sound returned. That proved to be the ending except for one note afterwards, at an unrelated pitch, perhaps suggesting there is a continuation somewhere. The program note which I had managed to read in the interval did not give me much of a context.

The fifth piece, Sam Salem's *Dead Poets*, was very long at over 20 minutes, and in 4 sections (at least according to the notes). Abstraction of recordings in an extreme *musique concrète* style were interspersed with voices and traffic. I was not sure I could call it a soundscape or not. For me the effect was of a lack of emotion, a cold observation of events without involvement. There was a rare section of humour with telephone tones and an operator announcing failure, mixed rhythmically with traffic horns. This piece was not for me; it was interesting but somehow lacked music.

The concert ended with Dan A. Tramte's *Nomos Delta*, which started with a duet for spring sounds and scrapers, with a growing undercurrent of ringing gongs. I was enjoying this and the interactions when abruptly we were in glitches and fragments of noise and lots of silence. The piece evolved through other scenarios

before providing arguably the best ending of the concert. I wanted to hear the piece again.

At ICMC concerts I often wish I had time between pieces to read program notes and prepare for the varying sound-worlds. I realize that this might increase the required time, but a little more light during the desk handover might be all I need.

So, in sum, it was a concert with variety and some very satisfying pieces.

John ffitch has just retired from the Chair of Software Engineering at the University of Bath.

Wednesday, 3rd August 2011

Audiovisual Works

by Andrew Connor

It is the halfway point in the Conference. My body is beginning to remind me that sleep is a necessity, not a luxury. Due to the keynote speech and conference banquet, the schedule contained fewer concerts than the other days, but there was still plenty of audiovisual work on offer.

In Listening Room 3b, I came in halfway through the cycle to start my day with

Joseph Hyde's *Vanishing Point*, a work that from the start established a frenetic pace in sound and vision. Although the composer notes in the programme that the colossal number of images seen are deliberately wide ranging, my abiding impression is of a train ride through memory, with some of the rapid, speeded up video elements appearing to me as snapshots from a train window. The monochrome images pass by and morph into each other at high speed, with recognisable elements such as a child's face, or a sea shore, juxtaposed against the pattern of light on waves, a white noise snowstorm, and an insect's view of long grass, amongst many others.

Accompanying this visual array, the sound all stems from a single noisy source, processed only using comb filters. However, this process has been exploited to the fullest, allowing a high degree of correlation between noisy images and the noisier sound, while harmonic and inharmonic chords mingle to good effect, particularly in a late sequence where low noise and harmonics accompany what looks to be smoke passing across the screen. Overall, the time and care taken to select the images and the appropriate manipulation of the sound source add together to create a very satisfying whole.

The next audiovisual work to pass through the cycle was *A Cancelled Glow* by composer

Stephen Stanfield with visuals created by video artist Matthew Stafford. This also had quite a busy, frenetic pace in both visuals and sound. Here, the intention behind the piece is given as an expression of oppression, with the images and sounds getting darker as the light fades.

For me, the sounds and visuals were individually good and striking, but I didn't feel the sense of connection between the two that the creators intended. The music does indeed progress through discordances, lowering of frequencies, as if everything is closing in, and the video also uses recognisable objects and animated painted sequences (I appreciated the nod to *The Scream* at one point) to then break them down, overlay and re-reference them as a closing in of kaleidoscopic images. However, apart from the occasional moment such as a match between pulsing microbes on screen and a beat discernable in the sound, there was little synchresis or synchronisation in the work. That's not necessarily a problem, but in this case it seemed a necessary part of the experience that was somewhat absent.

From the frenetic video and sound of these two works, *Pranayama III* by Elliott Grabill (sound) and his father Vin Grabill (image) headed into much calmer waters. Here, Elliott has based the sound around a single note, D, mainly using piano

harmonics with some added vocal and synthesized elements. The work starts with a low, resonant harmonic chord, which continues in a cyclic, modified form as successive chords pulse against the onscreen, highly abstract visuals. These progress from colour saturated processed images, possibly based on landscapes, through interacting horizontal and vertical ripples, to slightly busier (though still fairly abstract) scenes. The music is low, soothing and contemplative. The images possibly come across slightly busier, but still also lead the viewer into a meditative state.

The fusion between sound and vision seems to have worked better for this work, and it does exactly what it sets out to do: provide a relaxing, contemplative audiovisual immersion.

At lunchtime, Concert 8 featured only one audiovisual work, but it was an excellent choice. I have to admit to a familiarity and appreciation of Bret Battey's work in general, and welcomed the opportunity to see *Sinus Aestum* in such a suitable venue.

Earlier in the conference, Battey had outlined the creative process behind the design of his sound in this piece, using SuperCollider and Max/MSP to apply a large number of control parameters to an expanded recursive comb filter (for

details, please refer to Battey's paper in the proceedings). By manipulation of the parameters, he has created an immersive composition of shifting pitches and noise, all stemming from a single source input. Against this, he has also created a highly detailed visual experience, made up of thousands of swirling and shifting points of light, warping and transforming to create waves of patterns sweeping across the screen in sympathy with the audio. As with his sonic creation process, Battey has translated an animation process initially created using the Processing environment into a bespoke plug-in for Apple Motion 2.

The resulting amalgamation of crafted sound and vision is intensely attractive to watch and hear, and has so many passages of fascination, I will only highlight my personal favourites to give you a flavour of the whole. A few minutes in, the swirling patterns stop, coalescing into a delicate spiral filigree of particles, seen from the side, hanging and rotating slowly in space as the sound holds and expands on a richly augmented humming pitch. Suddenly, this spiral starts to rotate at speed, creating more patterns from its own interference trail, culminating in a sudden stop and freeze into a new position as the sound then takes its place in the limelight, rising or lowering in pitch until a new equilibrium is reached, at which point the cycle starts again for the visual

element.

A later sequence has a high-pitched skittering frequency, reminiscent of a bow just skipping on top of a high violin string, as the patterns on screen form a minimal swirling set of curves along a central horizontal line. With even higher crystalline white noise behind the main pitch, I had an impression of alien hieroglyphs corresponding to a form of radio broadcast. This then rapidly disintegrates into a sea of noise and descending pitches, against images of light blue and green clouds battling against each other and pouring across the screen.

This work is richly detailed in both media, and is best served by its presentation in a multi-speaker format with a large screen. With the added bonus of the earlier presentation giving us some of the secrets of its construction, this has to be my favourite audiovisual work at ICMC so far.

Concert 9
Thursday, 4th August 2011,
12:30pm
Phipps Hall
by Howard Kenty

Phipps Hall, a fairly acoustically dry space with a surround speaker configuration,

seats approximately 100 people. This program was repeated at 2:00 PM the same day; this review deals only with the 12:30 concert.

The first performance consisted of two short pieces from Eric Lyon's *Selected Noise Quartets*, featuring the Noise Quartet (Steve Davis, drums; Eric Lyon, piano; Franziska Schroeder, saxophone; and Paul Stapleton, electric guitar). The performers generated all sounds acoustically (save the guitar's amplification); the electronic elements here wirelessly delivered text instructions to the performers via synchronized computers. These instructions were apparently often new to the players and/or impossible to execute literally, and as their selection and order was chosen live by a computer program, each performance is different. It was indeed quite "noisy," in the manner of avant-garde free jazz. The players were all gifted improvisers, and handled the abrupt starts, stops, and aggressive dynamic and tempo changes with aplomb. Though the pieces are by nature of an uncertain structure, and would perhaps have benefited from a more composed form, the performances were enjoyable to watch, and an interesting variation from standard ICMC fare.

Next was Bruce Hamilton's *Pental*, an acousmatic work. The brief program

notes listed "noise, xenharmonic tunings, drone, soundscape, improvisation, and periodicity" as used in its creation, but left the composer's conceptual intentions opaque. Though I was unable to distinguish the five continuous movements mentioned in the notes, the piece proceeded very naturally, constructing a sonic narrative while successfully integrating the diverse compositional strands, often exploring the chaotic points in which the material degraded into "noise." The source materials all seemed synthetically generated, or processed as to be practically so, save for the piece's last, faint minute of actual humans talking, perhaps at a family gathering. This provided a very compelling and effective coda, giving the previous material a satisfying conclusion via this new but somehow related contextual framework.

mikro:strukt was an audio-visual piece composed by Alo Allik in collaboration with Satoshi Shiraishi, who performed live on the e-clambone, a proprietary wind controller activated by blowing, utilizing button sensors, and changing the instrument's length, position, and orientation. This produced little acoustic sound, but its miked output was used to control the audio and visual electronics. Though augmented by the responses of autonomous listening agents, the performer's interaction was largely apparent as the piece

gradually progressed from sparse, low-register ambient textures with the odd click or thud to more spectrally complex, aggressive swirls of swooping, pixelated synthetic grains whose density occasionally verged on noise. As the piece built in intensity toward its latter half, the interaction between performer and output became somewhat less apparent. Visually, though the mutating grids of colored blocks and shapes responded appropriately to the performer's actions, I feel that more could have been done to make the visual material as central to the piece as the audio, instead of using these simplistic forms and color palette. Though texturally and conceptually interesting, I think *mikro:strukt* would be well served with more structured improvisation to make a similar but more concise artistic statement.

Dale Perkins' acousmatic *Cuckooborough*, a minimalistic piece, established a major 7th chord bed of a hypnotic, low-register pulse and sparse diatonic synthesized phrases, accompanied by an unprocessed female voice softly vocalizing scratchy, wordless melodies. The timbral and spacial differences between the synthetic and human elements contrasted nicely, and the primal nature of the vocalizations evoked the titular avian. After essentially remaining in stasis for two-thirds of its duration, slowly incorporating processing into the vocal variations, the entrance of

a heavily vocoded, dissonant vocal sample marked the piece's descent into a more climactic, chaotic state, and the steady pulse was replaced by erratic glitchy percussive noises while the vocals agitated toward growling and shouting. Even on the pulse's return, the glitches and singer's distress remained, evoking the simmering tensions of society mentioned in the notes. It was an enjoyable piece, though I feel a more complex structure, less abrupt ending, and performance with a live singer would enhance its impact.

Shawn Greenlee's *Endolith*, for live audio and visuals, followed. Both were generated using "graphic waveshaping" via input from a live camera, in front of which were placed mixed-media paper works, with the composer additionally operating a "multi-touch trackpad and turntable-like spinner." Unfortunately, this did not translate into an effective piece. The sonic palette varied little from record-scratch-like squiggles of almost-noise manipulated via the controllers, overlaid on a slowly evolving, low-register drone. The visuals never changed from a pixelated, shifting horizontal center line that ranged up and down, dividing the screen into two portions, the bottom containing moving vertical lines of processed input, and the top containing static, striated cross-sections of material affixed by the horizontal center line as it moved. Though both audio and visuals

occasionally produced engaging material, and Greenlee maintained an admirable intensity during his performance, this would have functioned better as a technique demonstration, or a shorter piece with a more varied palette and form, rather than a lengthy improvisation with little development.

The last piece was Jordan Munson's *Those That I Fight I Do Not Hate*, for bodhran (Scott Deal), electronics, and live video. Deriving its title from the Yeats poem, "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death", the visual element consisted of old footage of soldiers heading to war, marching, running, and eventually falling on the battlefield, looped repetitively and increasingly processed into a gauzy haze. The piece had a simple structure, beginning quietly, with the rubbing and scratching of the drum head melding nicely with electronics of similar timbre. This eventually crescendoed into waves of rhythmic beating on the head, sides, and back of the drum, building to a climax of greater intensity mirrored in the visual images, before a gradual decrescendo was accompanied by the haunting shot of a soldier slowly shaking his head and a fade to white. The overall effect was simple, somber, and rather moving.

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Concert 10
Thursday, 4th August 2011
St. Paul's Hall
by Miriam Akkermann

Scheduled as an evening concert, No. 10 took place at St. Paul's Hall, a former church built in the 18th century. I mention this because the venue did a great job of creating a light but focussed atmosphere, especially for the works that appeared on the first part of the concert (after changing the program schedule), which all presented smooth, pensive sounds.

Joao Pedro Oliveira's *Entre o Ar e a Perfeição* for flute, piano and electronics opened the evening. Flo Menezes' diffusion techniques underlined the included gestures, but at the same time integrated the tape, flute (Richard Craig) and piano (Sebastian Berweck) to a common sound representation.

In his work *21st Red Line* for 20-string Koto, Ai Kamachi extended the traditional Japanese instrument with a

laser string, so Yumi Kurosawa could include the control of live electronics in her performance on the Koto. The visual programming by Saturo Higa underlined the phrase-wise seeming improvisation, but also gave contrast to the subtle sound and appearance of the Koto.

Thin, quiet sounds emerged from the electromagnetically prepared piano (played by Sebastian Berweck) in Per Bloland's work *Of Dust and Sand*, which sometimes seemed to be even too quiet despite the sounds of the alto saxophone (Eleri Ann Evans) when creating an almost-static but increasingly dense cloud of vibrating frequencies.

Performed by Se-Lien Chuang on bass recorder, Evans on saxophone, Heather Roche on clarinet, and Andreas Weixler on laptop, *Momentum Huddersfield* (by Chuang and Weixler) incorporated sensitive improvisation and live electronics into an initially static, then cumulating sound, which was contrasted by real-time visuals. The spatialisation was especially notable, enhancing the acoustic impression of the venue from that of a concert hall back to a church.

After the interval three very different works followed. In contrast to the more sound-focussed works of part one, the following pieces concentrated on conceptual ideas including ironic surprises

and interaction of the audience.

In *Oli's Dream*, Jaroslaw Kapuściński reacts on the video that was produced in collaboration with Camille Norton. Virtual protagonist Oli manifests via the onscreen emergence and dissolving of letters from Norton's poem. These events are also closely watched and responded to by the pianist, opening a further, more emotional dimension besides the illustration of sounds to the video.

An unconventional start had Mike Solomon's *Norman (age 1)* in presenting a basically white browser window with three links for the three movements of the work, with the cursor starting the files, and projected on the screen behind the soloist (Roche). The clarinetist accurately followed the score that slowly started to transform in movement 1, and culminated in movement 3, jumping between outspread fragments, including graphics and sound descriptions that were guided by a computer generated, laser-pointer-like red dot. Not only was the ironic visualization of the composition enjoyable; so was the clarinetist's performance.

The last piece was Dan Weymouth's *Unexpected Things*. Starting like a conventional piece for tape, violin (Darragh Morgan), and piano (Sebastian Berweck), it increasingly varied from this.

With a “start” sign, the pianist indicated the audience to begin their participation of slide whistling, encouraging them and also stopping and thanking them. The performance ended with the recorder-playing pianist leaving the room followed by the imitating violin. Especially successful was the integration of the audience’s interaction in the middle of the piece, which underlines the remarkable overall impression.

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Thursday, 4th August 2011

Audiovisual Works

by Andrew Connor

It is the fourth day of the main conference, and my last, as I have a prior commitment requiring me to leave early tomorrow. But it’s a great day for audiovisual work, with a fine example on show in the listening room, and visual elements cropping up in a swath of the concert pieces.

Diego Garro’s *Patah*, in Listening Room 4b, carries me on from the high of

yesterday’s *Sinus Aestum*. This is another work I’ve encountered before, but the opportunity to experience it with a good screen and set of speakers is not to be missed.

Patah is an Indonesian word for fractures, and Garro notes that in this work he is exploring how the sonic material interacts with the fractures in the visual material. The sound is introduced over a title sequence, but immediately set a rich, textural scene, laden with dissonances. The visuals also add to this impression of rich texture, with intricate interlacing lines creating shifting entities of colour on screen, interacting with the sonic movements to amplify the eerie and slightly uncomfortable world being created. Every so often a discernable voice will break free of some background whispering, adding to the unease. The visual equivalent, a flash of the underlying source video being manipulated by the animation process, will also break through on occasion.

While this work has much to impress the audience, the most attractive part of it to me is the space it gives both sound and video to develop and feature their own pathways, as well as interact and reinforce each other. As a single example, at one point a central, slightly oval shape begins to develop, in tandem with an expanding textural sonic shape. A single lens flare

suddenly flashes across the screen and is gone – there is no direct sonic match, but the flare adds that extra dimension to the animation. Highly recommended.

The lunchtime Concert 9 offered another three pieces with a visual component. In Alo Allik's *mikro:strukt*, the sounds produced by Satoshi Shiraishi's bespoke instrument, the e-clambone, were augmented by processing based on signals from integral haptic sensors. Allik took the incoming audio and used it as a further source to trigger changes in the accompanying visuals. The initial impression was of a screen full of regular cells, mostly green, which started to pulse in sympathy with the audio. As the sound developed in depth, texture and complexity, so did the structures on screen, with more colour and variation, moving from cells to a dot matrix, with the regular spacing deforming as the sound gained granularity and texture.

The direct correlation between the sound and visuals tied this piece together well, and I was impressed with the overall impression of complexity afforded from quite simple structural elements on screen. I was a bit less satisfied with the sonic element – in some ways, it would have been good to see the instrument and its operation on its own at some point, as the undoubted skill it took to play was lost in the darkness surrounding the projected

images.

Shawn Greenlee's *Endolith* definitely took the idea of combining audio and visuals and played with it convincingly. His starting point was a paper multimedia score, scanned and interpreted on screen in expanded pixels. The images were also used to feed a sonic synthesis process. As with *mikro:strukt*, this immediate correlation between sound and image created a strong synthesis between the two, which could be manipulated further by the performer using trackpads and other sensors.

The close match between sound and image worked well for this piece, and the performance element was visible as Greenlee was illuminated by the lower part of the projected image. The pixellated images worked well with the sonic interpretations, and I particularly liked the moments where the scanning lines produced images reminiscent of the stacked paper edges of books lying on their sides. The piece's duration was also nicely judged – enough to illustrate the concept and develop it, but not so long that it became overly repetitive.

The final audiovisual work in this concert was Jordan Munson's *Those That I Fight I Do Not Hate*, a combination of live bodhran, processed sound and accompanying video. The instrument and

its player, Scott Deal, were highlighted on stage, allowing his movements and concentration to be seen clearly while the images played out across the screen behind him. The source sound from the instrument was clear within the processed sound, which added some pitched material and reverb. The images were from battlefields, showing soldiers marching to the front, the squalor of the trenches, and the aftermath, broken men and corpses.

The use of the bodhran was very effective, and the light but appropriate processing added well to the sound. However, the visuals just didn't quite work for me – while I appreciate the inspiration the composer quotes in his notes and I could see the connections he was making, there was little true synthesis between sound and image. I ended up only glancing at the screen every so often, as I found the bodhran caught much more of my attention.

The evening Concert 10 continued to feature audiovisual work, mainly in combination with live instruments. The first of these, Ai Kamachi's *21st Red Line*, made use of a laser beam attached to the soundboard of a koto, which when broken would add a transformative process to the instrument's sound. I have a particular fondness for the sound of the koto, so this was always going to appeal sonically. The

visual component was a developing field of intersecting lines, flashing with red when the red laser beam was disturbed, and cycling through a series of geometric transformations.

As with the earlier bodhran piece, I found the visuals were possibly an unnecessary addition. In this case, the synchronisation was very close, and it had the unfortunate effect of bringing media player visualisation software to mind. Again, I ended up concentrating much more on the koto and the skill shown in playing it, with only the odd glance up at the screen. I ended up feeling the visuals were a bit of an afterthought rather than a key element from the inception of the composition, and they really didn't add anything.

The start of Se-Lien Chuang and Andreas Weixler's *Momentum Huddersfield* had me worried that the same problem would surface again. A collection of excellent musicians were on stage, married to granular synthesis, and it all created a rich sonic texture, very well realised, that made good use of the acoustics of the venue. And against this, a screen where simple pixel interactions led to moiré line interactions, and on to increasing intensity and complexity. However, here the visual realisations felt more in sympathy with the live music, and did appear to be manipulated and

crafted *in situ* as the music progressed, particularly in a quieter, breathier passage which was perfectly captured visually with a blue fractal image. The end came as a slightly abrupt but very effective full stop, and left me wanting a bit more, which is always a good sign.

From the concert notes, I really wasn't sure if *Oli's Dream* by Jaroslaw Kapuściński would achieve its aim of synaesthesia. In the execution, I don't think it quite managed it, but it was, for me, the highlight of the concert anyway. This collaboration with the poetry of Camille Norton made use of keyboard sounds, both piano and typing, allied to visual manipulation of text on screen. Judicious use of recorded sounds, such as the sound of drips or a baby crying, added to the interplay between audio and visual. The overall effect was impressive, and made excellent use of the juxtaposition of the written word and its sonic—or occasionally silent—accompaniment.

The final audiovisual work on offer was Mike Solomon's *Norman (age 1)*, which offered up a view of a multimedia score being read and performed live by Heather Roche on the clarinet. This idea was a nice conceit, particularly as each movement shown grew progressively more intricate and often slightly more confusing. The second movement of the three had a slight problem with dynamics,

where the clarinet was directed to be so quiet that the sounds did not reach to the back of the audience. I appreciated the idea behind the work and thought it came across well, although I think it would be hard to create another similar piece, as the surprise and affectionate use of the score would be hard to replicate again.

Unfortunately, I will miss the final day, which looks to have an equally enticing line-up of audiovisual work. Despite the occasional criticism in my reviews, I have really enjoyed the audiovisual work shown at ICMC 2011, and believe it shows a vital, flourishing avenue of creativity. This was my first ICMC, but from conversations from veteran conference attendees, I gather that there has been a great increase in audiovisual work shown at the conference over the last ten years. Long may this increase continue!

Concert 12
Friday, 5th August 2011,
12:30/2:00pm
Phipps Hall
by *Diego Garro*

Hosted in Phipps Hall in the imposing Creative Arts Building at Huddersfield University, Concert 12 was the last of the series of ICMC 2011 lunchtime events and, regrettably, failed to excite as much

as the previous, thoroughly outstanding concerts. The medium-size venue, not more than functional in its architectural feel, boasted a state-of-the-art audio/video projection system capable of delivering pristinely accurate sonic detail. On occasion the power conveyed by the multi-channel system was excessive, a painful reminder that unlimited possibilities in the manipulation of amplitudes, frequencies and spectral densities can hurt an audience of audiophiles as much as it can transfix it.

The acousmatic works by Manuella Blackburn and Felipe Otondo were authentic sonic treats. Blackburn's *Karita Oto*, inspired by the sonic and musical iconography of Tokyo, indulged unashamedly in phonographic tourism while crafting a joyful work of immaculate precision and compelling character. The superb quality of the microphone recordings, along with the attention given to their spatial presence, gave the myriad of dense streams an irresistibly charming, almost tactile feel: it was wood, skins and metal of a Japan suspended in time and space, tingling playfully, echoing who knows what ancient myths, roaring with all their might.

Otondo's *Ciguri* exploits yet another cliché of the acousmatic genre (bell sounds). What initially appeared not much more than an étude on inharmonic

spectra became a beautifully musical extravaganza of metallic resonances and polyrhythmically criss-crossing sequences, building a surprisingly lush sonic texture out of relatively simple timbres.

Blackburn's and Otondo's works (as well as David Berezan's or Natasha Barrett's, just to mention a few of those presented in this year's conference) are a revealing testimony to the present position of the acousmatic-electroacoustic culture, its innovative propulsion perhaps ebbing away as the decades roll on, but still expressing musical gems in what we may regard as new 'classics' of the genre.

The audio-visual features in this concert were frankly disappointing, especially in view of the lofty standards set not only by the aforementioned acousmatic works but, more importantly, by the generally very high quality of all works presented throughout ICMC 2011, including much better accomplished audiovisual compositions and performances programmed during the other lunchtime concerts, evening shows and day-long listening marathons.

Mark Pilkington's *Cameradown* utilised a technically effective, thoroughly detailed, and often extremely frantic audio and video montage. But these commendable qualities failed to disguise a sonically crude language and a visual

design deprived of the morphological richness one would expect in a modern, technologically aided presentation.

Todor Todoroff and Laura Guerra's *Beyond the Divide* was a work originally created as an intermedia presentation of electroacoustic sounds + dance, and one wonders whether it should have remained so. The version presented here (sounds + video track) featured high-resolution, strongly contrasted imagery that contemplatively explored some plastic, textural qualities of the actresses' bodies and gestural motions, but quickly entangled itself into an over-conceptualised montage. The sonic and musical qualities of the soundtrack are side-lined, as the viewer's attention is captured by the cold physicality of the women on the screen, their roles and their stories, whose meanings are all impossible to make sense of.

The version of Maurice Wright's *Darwiniana* presented at the ICMC is a reduction for electroacoustic sounds and video track of a work originally written for ensemble, tape and visuals. Without the live musicians performing the score, the work loses its most engaging dramatic element, exposing the unrefined nature of its sounds and imagery, a fragmentary construction and an unmistakably passé character of both sonic and visual design.

Edgar Barroso's *Binary Opposition*, the audiovisual work that closed the programme, showed a good degree of sonic cohesion albeit articulated through countless instances of broadband noises continuously fighting each other for spectral space within the mix. The video track, with its focus on saturated colours, provided a somewhat convincing counterpart for the unfocussed materials in the soundtrack, a sort of audio-visual spectral dissonance. The great variety of visual archetypes failed to assemble into a cohesive whole and the piece generally lacked as much definition in the audio as it lacked purpose in the video.

Diego Garro is a composer of electroacoustic music and video. He holds a lectureship at Keele University (UK) where he teaches Composition, Music Technology and Video Art.

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