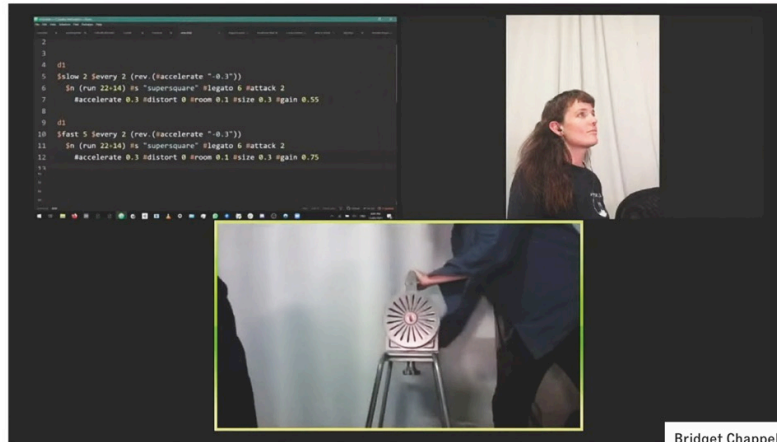


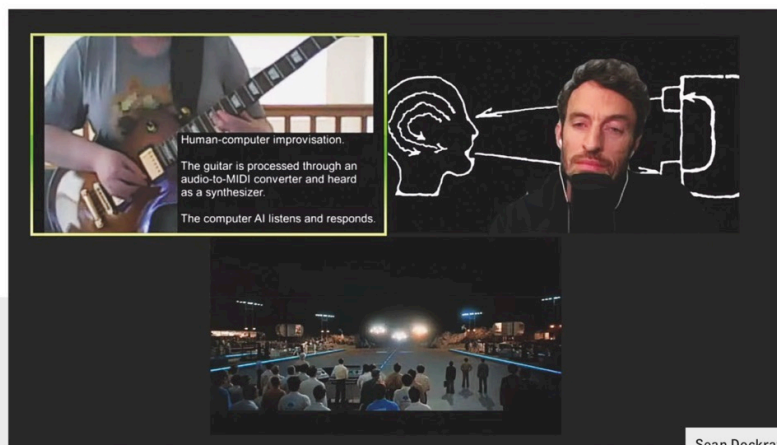
On Location

Festivals, concerts, clubs



Bridget Chappell

Australia's **Liquid Architecture** links up with Poland's Unsound for a networked symposium on machine listening, showcasing feedback experiments within the Zoomiverse. **By Bruce Russell**



Sean Dockray

Machine Listening: Improvisation And Control

Liquid Architecture/NTU CCA Singapore/Unsound/Zoom/ Youtube/Facebook

New times, new pleasures. This event might best be described as a symposium, since it took place on a Saturday evening in the Asia/Pacific region, and amid the educational and artistic content, there was a certain amount of social intercourse and quite possibly drinking to boot. The participants included a diverse range of artists and academics, united by some connection to Australia's well-established and widely esteemed Liquid Architecture brand. The proceedings were loosely MC'd by Joel Stern, Sean Dockray and James Parker, and consisted of a sequence of talks, mixed media presentations and collective actions hosted within the now familiar confines of what I am moved to call the Zoom-iverse. It's a weirdly normalised nonplace in the age of Covid, though a year ago we would have struggled to get our heads around the medium. But, of course, not now.

The project began in October 2020 with a series of events in the Polish Unsound festival, exploring connections between improvisation and control, framed through the lens provided by the discipline of machine listening. A keynote of sorts was delivered

on this subject by Lee Gamble, though a noteworthy aspect of the proceedings was the feeling that not everything was 100 per cent serious. The most interactive and playful was the piece presented by Basque provocateur Mattin, which consisted of a simple set of instructions to enable all the participants to get their computers' mics and speakers to feedback simultaneously. The idea being that everyone should ride the gain to just barely allow feedback, but still prevent it getting out of control. The outcome was an ecology of sounds reminiscent of David Tudor's *Rainforest*, though there were some technical issues with sharing all the audio streams simultaneously, but over all it worked pretty well, and the collective authorship aspect of the piece nicely manifested some of the political drivers behind the theorising. Mattin espoused a position that rang true with me, when he asserted that improvisation manifests precarity in culture.

Other noteworthy pieces were a collaboration between Bani Haykal and Lee Weng Choy, from the Singaporean and Malaysian part of the consortium. Their piece reflected on harmony as a political experience, combining a musical track comprised of vocal sounds, a narrative talk and real-time digital drawing generated by AI as a kind of graphic score.

The piece nicely manifested showing, doing and describing all at the same time. The effect was like listening to a (very) slightly less trippy version of The Hafler Trio's *Netherlands Lectures* – baffling but thought-provoking. Bridget Chappell and Allison Walker presented an experiment in what they laughingly termed extreme deep listening. This involved a hand-cranked siren, a talk proposing the audience conduct various experiments in audition and cognition while listening to the siren, and a baffling video of some parrots ripping trim off a parked police car. It was serious and playful.

Indeed overall the atmosphere was of a pretty good postgraduate creative research seminar, even though some of the messages being conveyed were themselves deliberately obscured by the chosen medium of transmission. But that was all part of the underpinning proposition, that different forms of listening dictate different modes of communicating, and that an analysis of how machines listen and speak might help us to understand the underlying sensory experiences, and how they respond to improvisation as a performative strategy.

To gain all this from a quiet evening in with the Zoomiverse is perhaps the best measure of how life has changed under the impact of pandemic reality. □

Liquid Architecture