

Building Materials

Owen Lloyd

A realtime installed composition made, in real time, by sounds and events within Exeter Phoenix arts centre (UK).

<http://www.repeat-to-fade.net/projects/building-materials>

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Overview

Building Materials is an installed composition, the first iteration of which was made, in real time, by sounds and events within Exeter Phoenix arts centre (UK) in November 2010. Audio and event data, harvested from the building, came together to create a constantly evolving, generative musical composition, an indeterminate, open work, abstracting the sounds to be found around the centre, its rhythms of use and the actions of its users. A network of wires running through the building connected sensors and contact microphones to a computer running a Max/Msp patch. This program composed the music and played it back into a listening room within the galleries. The framework of analogue sensors, recording real world data and interfacing with digital equipment allowed what went on in the architectural space to dictate the structure of the composition, through human activity, light levels, temperature or its functional, operating life.

Audio and event data wound their way around the building, their trajectory made visual through lines of coloured tape carrying wires along walls, floors and ceilings, like an over-sized London Underground map. The network was there to be explored, playing on one's natural curiosity to locate the origins of the sounds or their triggers. The end of a line might have led you nowhere in particular therefore homing in on areas of the building in which ordinary activities would play out: the squeak of a floorboard, the whir of the air conditioning, light on a window. In other instances the end of the line might have led to a disused piano in a corridor or a lift door opening and shutting, where deliberate interaction became irresistible. Thus the sonic and visual nature of the piece became mutually affecting, it drew attention



to the possibility of conscious interactive dialogue between the building, the viewer and the artwork.

The underlying storyline in *Building Materials* was left open, as indeterminate as the structure and the instrumentation of the composition. New protagonists entered the narrative as new patrons entered the building. New lines of communication were drawn across the floor-plan of Exeter Phoenix as the sprung floor of the dance studio entered into discussions with the lift door whose language was modulated by the temperature in the bar. And once the connection between building and music had been made, the listening experience was completely transformed by trying to tie what one heard to what one knew of the building. These insignificant happenings were re-presented in the final composition, transformed, altered or rearranged, leaving fragments of traceable sound. The narrative therefore was rarely explicit or linear, but disseminated obliquely in indistinct sonic languages inviting speculation and intrigue rather than direct translation.

In common with Exeter Phoenix, the RWA has a multiplicity of spaces and routes for the work to inhabit. The prospect of revealing the inner audio life of such an institution, sonifying its behavioral quirks, is hugely compelling.

As its form is responsive to and largely determined by its environment, *Building Materials* at another moment in a different site will appear in a whole new guise. It is this evolving sense of an organism behind the composition that seduces; the idea that a hidden network of signals and actions is creating the work separate from the composer; that what has been made is simply a set of vocal chords with which the building communicates.



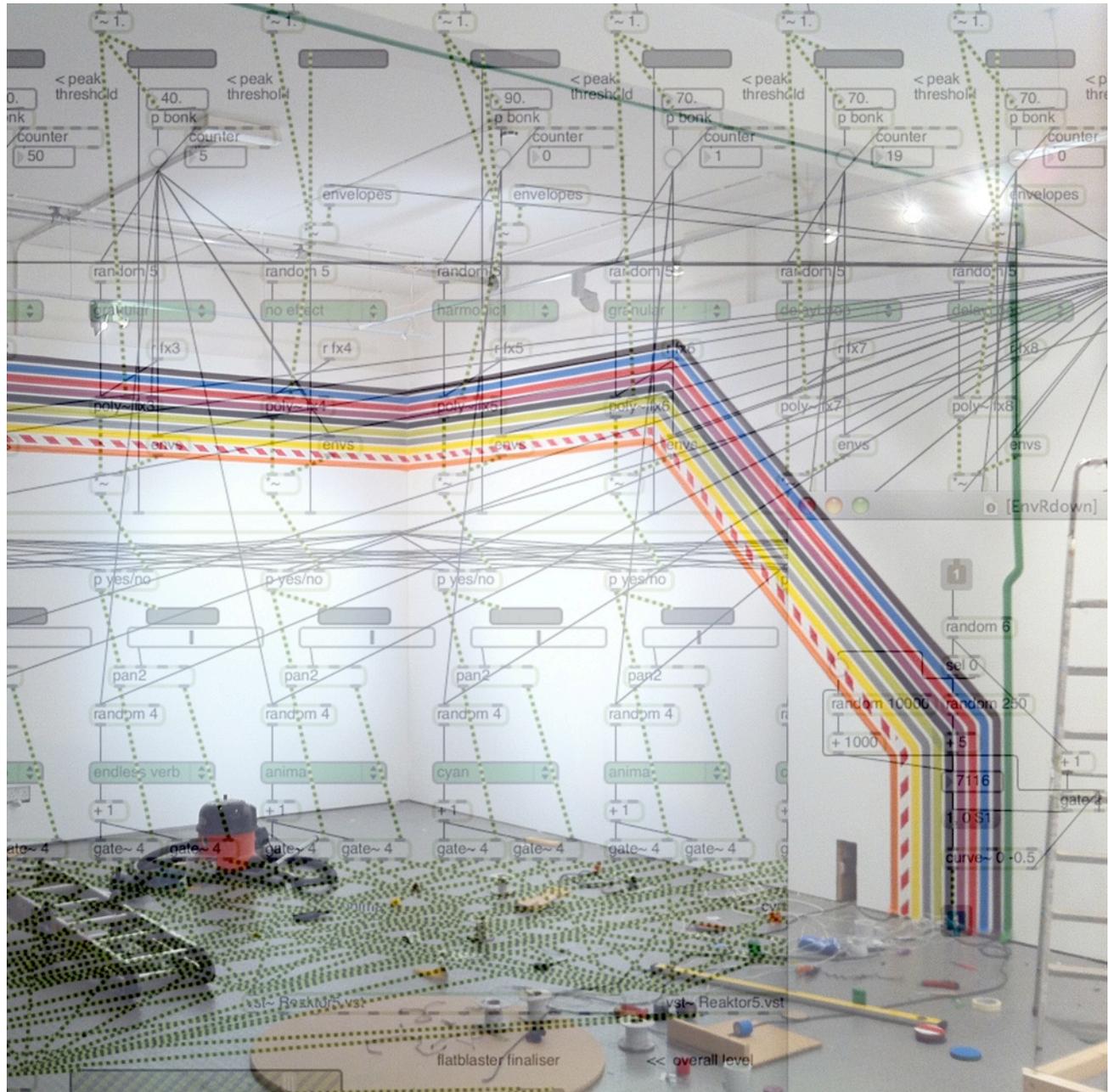
Technical

Technically the work has at its core a fast Mac desktop computer. This is receiving sound from contact microphones spread throughout the building via a multi channel audio interface. These record sound from within the materials in the building rather than the sounds in a space so there is no risk of ethical issues such as eavesdropping.

The computer also receives data from various sensors and triggers throughout the building, the outputs of which are run through a Phidgets system to package the data for the computer. The audio and sensor data goes into a program written by me in Max/Msp to generate the composition which is output to an amplifier and speakers.

Technical requirements:

- Fast Mac Pro computer
- Audio interface with 8 analog inputs
- Amplifier
- Good quality speakers/monitors



Short Bio

Owen Lloyd is a composer and sound artist whose practice and professional work focus on sound and interaction. Owen has had a long career as a freelance composer and sound designer for a wide variety of media including installations, websites, film, television and games consoles. In the process he has worked on a number of award winning projects and had work shown at film festivals and exhibitions, in the cinema and on television both nationally and internationally. His clients include Adidas, The BBC, BMW, IBM, Leica, Motorola, The NHS, Red Bull, The Science Museum and Sony.

He is currently completing a PhD which explores the use of extra-musical data inputs to drive work, investigating the possibilities for narrative inherent in its links to sonification. He is a visiting lecturer at RWCMD and Bath Spa University, and has presented his research at the Royal College of Art, Goldsmiths College and Oxford Brookes University among others. As well as his focussed research, Owen actively seeks out collaborative opportunities and has a keen interest in interdisciplinary practice.

You can see his work and contact him through his portfolio site www.repeat-to-fade.net.

