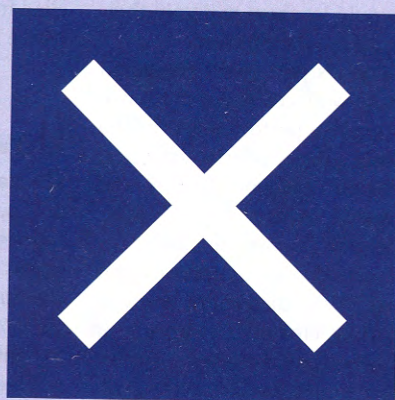




negotiating the world of online performance

# dis-LoK8Ted



how my inability to read the signals cost  
me a story and a collaboration

BY MATTHEW PIORO





## Matthew Pioro My entanglement with very themes had shut me out

November 12 at 7:39pm • [Comment](#) • [Like](#)

**T**HEY WEREN'T GOING TO SPEAK with me. Maybe it was just a he or a she, rather than a they. I didn't know. An e-mail exchange was possible, but I wanted to meet face to face. I tried cajoling the members of the online musical project with the idea that they could don Richard Nixon masks and meet me at a secret location. I thought it would be fun and would let them maintain their anonymity, which was key to their project.

The project is called LoK8Tr. It's part of the Canadian Music Centre's New Music in New Places series and it will be the first in the series to explore performance in the Web 2.0 space. It will include music, poetry, graphics, and video, which will appear on Facebook, Twitter, and Skype. The themes they hope to explore through it, as stated in a CMC press release, are "identity/self, location, loneliness/facelessness and virtual interconnections that can be amplified or obscured by the distortions and dissonances that mediated relations create." The person or persons behind LoK8Tr will remain anonymous until after the conclusion of the project sometime in March 2010. The plan is to archive the performance online for those who miss the March event. LoK8Tr takes anonymity so seriously that no more than six people at the CMC know who is behind the project.

My assignment was to research and write about LoK8Tr. I had one e-mail address to work with and I kept at it. Eventually, in late October 2009, I became Facebook friends with LoK8Tr persona Tristan Superhighway, then with Tristan Superego, and finally Isold LeMonde. They would give me snippets of information, often cryptic. But I was getting somewhere.

My biggest break came when I got the following message, on November 2, from Tristan Superhighway, "I'm sensing that by asking about the work, you are part of the work, the MP Heisenberg Principle of Observation. Perhaps you should record your questions, your queries, the frustrations of this that we share, also as audio, and email them also."

This was great. By reporting on the LoK8Tr project, I was, it seemed, being drawn into it. Then, twelve days later, and before I could get one audio query online, I was cut

off. With one grand Wagnerian gesture, my three LoK8Tr Facebook friends had been deleted. A Dear John collaborator note appeared in my inbox. The e-letter was based on what I thought were amplified distortions and dissonances created out of the medium by which we were communicating. My entanglement in LoK8Tr's very themes had shut me out and lost me a story. So, unsatisfied by this irony, I travelled from Toronto to the CFRU station in Guelph, Ontario, where I thought I could find some answers.

### November 14 at 3:00pm

The station is on the campus of the University of Guelph and at 3 p.m. on Saturdays, CFRU broadcasts the *Mannlicher Carcano Radio Hour*. This show is set to participate in the LoK8Tr project by providing a remixed radio component to the online performance. I figured the folks involved with the *Mannlicher Carcano Radio Hour* could give me some insight into LoK8Tr.

I met Porter Hall, the *Mannlicher Carcano Radio Hour*'s in-studio host, a few minutes after the scheduled start time of the show. As the automated public-service announcements, commercials, and eventually the show's intro were being broadcast, Hall hooked up a sound processor and unloaded his backpack in the studio. The bag held a bunch of cassettes, including a *Musicworks* compilation; a Buddy Greene record called *Praise Harmonica*—"sappy Christian tunes," Hall said; ukulele player Tiny Tim's *2nd Album*; CDs—some with spoken samples that Hall had compiled—and a collection of instruments, such as an electronic toy piano, a trumpet mouthpiece on a quarter-inch piece of PVC pipe, a McDonald's Happy-Meal prize that went "boing," and other hose-y bits.

"My bag of tricks changes over time," Porter Hall said. The host, whose pseudonym is taken from Russ Meyer's *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls*, then added: "Sometimes it's quite random."

All these "tricks" were for the radio show, which features an improvised sound-collage set. The collages can be jarring at times, but they often enter the realms of trippy or hypnotic, especially when elements are looped and





Photos 1 - 4 out of 11

1 2 3 next

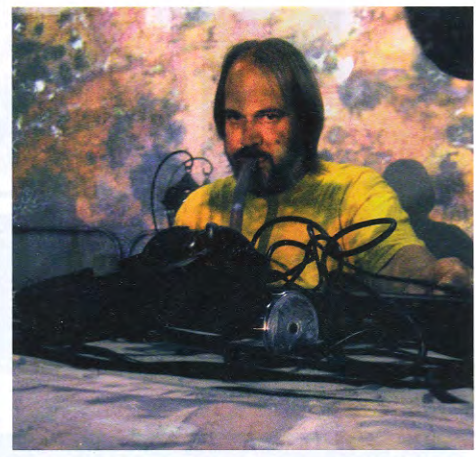
# ment in LoK8Tr's and lost me a story.

layered. Once the gear was ready, Hall threw on a record, processed some spoken component from one of his CDs, and had whatever was on BBC World Service thrown in for good measure.

The in-studio gizmos and media are only a part of the show. Porter Hall and his two long-time collaborators Really Happening and Gogo Godot form the core of Mannlicher Carcano. Happening in L.A. and Godot in Winnipeg call in most weeks, over the phone or Skype, and add their musical gestures to the mix. Hall looked on Skype for Rock Hill from Montreal. Some weeks there can be eight people in eight different cities. Pilot K9 in Peterborough, Ont., broadcasts the CHRU Web stream over Trent Radio, and jams along with it too.

While my visit gave me a great, and interactive, look at Mannlicher Carcano, my mission to find out more about LoK8Tr wasn't much furthered. The person(s) behind LoK8Tr are as much of a mystery to Hall as he-she-they are to me. Around three months before my visit, Hall had received an e-mail from LoK8Tr asking if Mannlicher Carcano would be interested in participating in a project. Hall was receptive to the proposal even though, at the time, he had few details. "I basically said that as long as we are allowed do anything with the sounds or samples we are given, then we'd be quite happy to use them," Hall said.

Although Hall didn't have any new information for me, my discussion with him brought out an interesting set of similarities and differences between LoK8Tr and Mannlicher Carcano. The first connection was the use of pseudonyms among the two groups. With LoK8Tr, the noms de plume seem merely to hide identity. In the case of Mannlicher Carcano, the names aren't used for anonymity. Although Porter Hall doesn't try to hide his real name, or those of his collaborators, he asked that his pseudonym be used when writing about all matters Mannlicher Carcano. "The use of pseudonyms is about generating a kind of mythology," Hall said. "The myth-building creates Mannlicher as an entity separate from other activities. For one hour each week, I step outside of the rest of my life and live this other role, so having this other name is part of that."



Mannlicher Carcano Radio Hour's in-studio host Porter Hall. The show, broadcast live from CFRU Guelph, Ont., includes improvised sound collage.

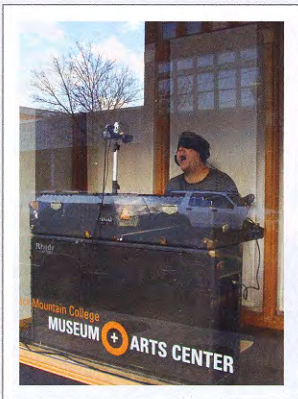


Collaborators Really Happening (left), of Mannlicher Carcano, and Minister Altair-Five (right) in Happening's basement studio (middle, bottom), improvising telematically with Porter Hall.



Photos 4 - 8 out of 11

prev 1 2 3 next



In *Double Blind (Love)*, two blindfolded performers—Curt Cloninger (top left) in Asheville, North Carolina and Annie Abrahams (top right) in Montpellier, France—sang to each other for four and a half hours via live Webcast. The three lower pictures are video stills from the Webcast.

From Hall's comment, it would seem LoK8Tr's use of pseudonyms has a practical component: to build and possibly strengthen the online performance space. The new names (Superhighway, Superego and LeMonde) could help him-her-them inhabit this space more fully.

Hall described the sounds made during the *Mannlicher Carcano Radio Hour* as a new folk music. "We're processing the sonic environment that we live in in a non-hierarchical way," he said, "in a way that anyone can participate in, which is what folk music was—something that anybody could perform. It wasn't rarefied or specialized. We've rejected the cult of virtuosity. We are doing what anybody can do."

LoK8Tr, on the other hand, is trying to do something many people can't do: compose a fugue. Through Jason van Eyk, the Ontario regional director at the CMC, I learned that the LoK8tr project is planning—or at least, had planned—to have four audio-visual components. The components are supposed to operate like a fugue: polyphonic, with four different lines of subject and response and overlapping episodes. The method of delivery is unknown, but some sort of streaming or Skype component would be necessary to link into the *Mannlicher Carcano Radio Hour*.

Since *Mannlicher Carcano* was my last and only link to LoK8Tr, I had to look elsewhere to learn more about the nuances and mechanics of working together online. I also needed something less fail-proof; the *Mannlicher Carcano Radio Hour* is so flexible that even when no one shows up to collaborate, Hall can still pull together a performance. I needed to find a project with something at stake. I found *Double Blind (Love)*.

## November 29 at 12:01pm

*Double Blind (Love)* involved two blindfolded people singing "love, love, love," a fragment from U2's "Until the End of the World," for as long as they were able to. One singer was Annie Abrahams, a performance artist based in France, and the other was Curt Cloninger, an assistant professor of multimedia arts and sciences at the University of North Carolina Asheville. Their performance ran simultaneously in three spaces: Living Room Espace de création contemporaine, in Montpellier, France; the Black Mountain College Museum and Arts Centre, in Asheville, N.C., U.S.A.; and Selfworld, online at <selfworld.net>. In their respective locations, the singers performed offstage, away from the main spaces, where video projected the couple's blindfolded faces and audio broadcast their singing. Online, their blindfolded faces appeared in separately streamed video squares, and their audio was mixed together. Before the show, the two collaborators agreed that they would perform without any signals that would allow them to conclude the event. Each would sing for as long as he or she wanted, even in the absence of the other's voice.

Another challenge, which both singers knew about before going into the event, was the technology. The main server for the project was in France, so whatever Cloninger sang on his side of the Atlantic would have to travel over the ocean to be broadcast in the Montpellier gallery, then travel back again to be broadcast within his space in





**LoK8Tr** It is unsafe to assume anything about this work, even on the part of the author(s)."

October 21 at 2:59pm · Comment · Like

Asheville. Because they would be out of sync, Cloninger e-mailed the following strategy to Abrahams before the performance: "So much traditional composition is based on the assumption that the performers have the luxury of being in synchronized time. Our compositional variability will have to be based on blunt phases (loud-soft, complex-simple, monotonous-erratic)."

When it came to performing, the pair explored the limits of their constraints. They didn't simply sing "love, love, love," as Bono did; the two sometimes resorted to mumble singing, and at other times just drew out phonemes from the word *love*. They wailed and caterwauled. Sometimes it was a dirge, other times it was a fight. Cloninger sang while playing a Rhodes suitcase piano the whole time—roughly four and a half hours—and Abrahams, who only sang, took a few breaks to refocus.

The day after the November 29 performance, Cloninger reflected on the event. "The collaboration was like steering a car with two steering wheels," he said. "There were times when it got . . . I wouldn't say confrontational: I think we were concerned that we needed to keep our space safe and not freak the other person out. But once things became more aggressive, it was almost like Annie tried not to see how I would react and I was trying to say, 'I'm okay with this. Keep going with this.' If both people are bored, then sometimes it's courteous to be abrasive or make things a little scarier."

At times, Abrahams also found it a bit of a struggle to communicate with Cloninger. "I especially remember one moment," she wrote in an e-mail. "I did something strange, something that interrupted the flow abruptly. It even felt awkward to me and not right. I was sorry for what I had done and the only thing I could do was to try to repair it, to show my good will, to try to gain Curt's trust again. From my perspective, it took quite a while and it felt as if we had broken up. I guess if I had taken a break from the performance at that point, there would have been no return possible."

When LoK8Tr broke up with me, I had thought it might have been, to borrow Cloninger's phrase, a courteously abrasive move. Maybe it was part of the plan? After I realized all my LoK8Tr Facebook friends were gone, I sent an e-mail to my initial LoK8Tr contact. Was the breakup for real? Yes, it definitely was. The difference between Cloninger and Abrahams' online space and that between LoK8Tr and me, it seems, was safety. The transatlantic collaboration was rooted in some ground rules and mutual concerns. With my Facebook breakup, things were severed while we were negotiating the rules. Hearing about Cloninger and Abrahams' success did leave me with a little bit of collaboration envy.

## December 1 at 3:30pm

From *Double Blind (Love)*, whose participants could write an etiquette book on online collaborations, I struggled to find a project that relied heavily on the Web 2.0 space as the LoK8Tr project is purported to do. Sure, I found a piece made from samples taken from MySpace pages, but that just seemed like mixing digital vinyl dug up from a social-networking crate, not exploring the online space. Confronted with yet another dead end, I decided to go deeper into the technology of online collaboration.

My search lead me to Michael Trommer's house. The visual artist and experimental electronic producer lives in Toronto. We spoke in his kitchen, which is steps away from his home studio featuring a MacBook running various sound-processing applications such as Plogue Bidule, SoundHack, Reaktor, Ableton, Gleetchlab, and BIAS Peak—all controlled by TouchOSC through his iPhone. There's hardware such as an R-09HR recorder for capturing source sounds, which he often processes via three Kaoss-pad MIDI controllers and various analogue synths with external inputs. We discussed his last collaborative online project.

On February 27, 2009, Trommer and five other members of the electronic improv group I/O Media performed with Zen Lu, an experimental sound-and-video artist from China, in an event called Soundreach. I/O Media played live at the Art Lounge at the University of Toronto Art Centre, while Lu patched in his contributions from Shenzhen, China. Before the performance, Trommer was nervous. "We had tested our set-up so many times and just when you thought everything was working, something else would happen," Trommer said. "It was usually something new, too."

On top of troubleshooting the software and hardware—a tubePlug server application, Lu's Ableton software, some analogue machines, and an electric guitar—there were myriad logistical hurdles. The team had to figure out how to work with China's firewall and to manage bandwidth issues. As with the *Double Blind (Love)* project, I/O Media and Lu had to work with the time lag that resulted from some network connections.

On the day of the performance, the Toronto audience sat in a semicircle around the six members of I/O Media, who were clustered around a table full of laptops, knobs, cables, and speakers. Video submissions that were solicited via social networks were manipulated and displayed on a screen. The sounds were shifting digital rumbles and drones, sometimes lulling and sometimes menacing. At the end of the show, Trommer felt relief. There were a few glitches, but the event was a success both artistically and in terms of getting the technology to work. For a two-hour





**FIMAV**  
is back!

INTERNATIONAL  
**FESTIVAL**  
**MUSIQUE**  
**ACTUELLE**  
VICTORIAVILLE

26<sup>th</sup> edition  
from 20 to 23 May  
2010

BILL DIXON  
Tapestries for Small Orchestra

LYDIA LUNCH / PHILIPPE PETIT

CATHERINE JAUNIAUX  
MALCOLM GOLDSTEIN  
BARRE PHILLIPS

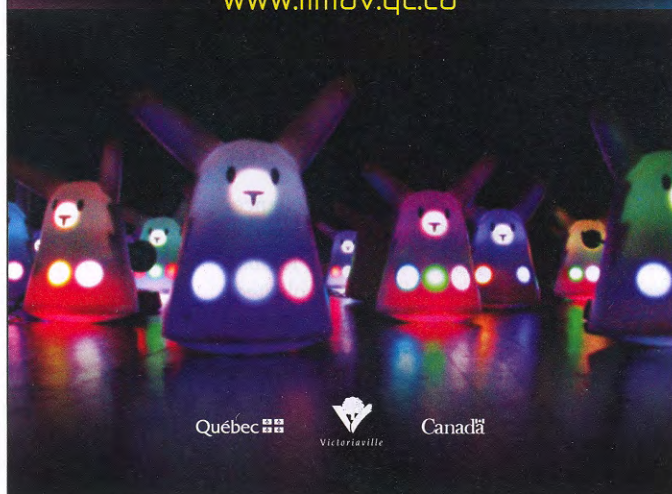
RENÉ LUSSIER  
7 Têtes

KIM MYHR &  
Trondheim Jazz Orkester

TANYA TAGAQ

PERLONEX &  
CHARLEMAGNE PALESTINE

more to be announced soon  
[www.fimav.qc.ca](http://www.fimav.qc.ca)



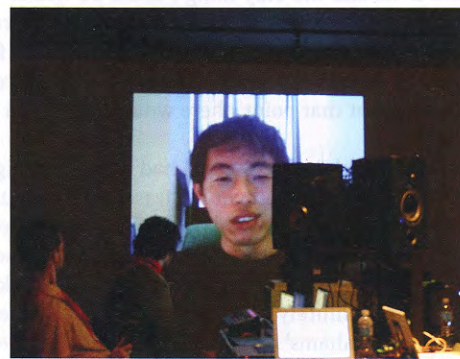
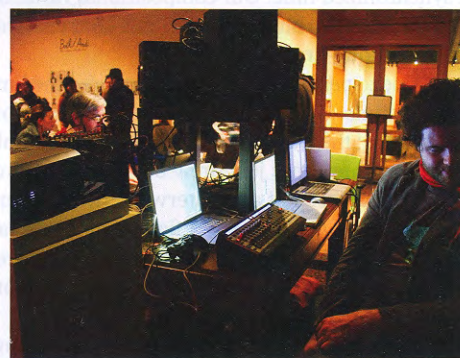
Québec  Victoriaville  Canada 

performance, the Soundreach team put in sixteen to eighteen hours of technical set-up, which didn't include meetings, rehearsals, or planning.

In spite of the success of the online endeavour, there were still some questions. When I asked Trommer what Lu thought of the performance, the Canadian producer said his Chinese counterpart seemed really happy about it. I pressed Trommer a bit on this point, and he admitted, with a bit of a laugh, that Lu could just have been being polite. Without the ability to go

Photos 9 - 11 out of 11

prev 1 2 3



I/O Media in Toronto (top and middle) and Zen Lu in China (bottom), collaborated on *Soundreach* (2009), a live audio-visual improvisation presented by Tanso, a non-profit organization arranging cultural exchanges between China and Canada.





## Matthew Pioro LoK8Tr messages seemed to have one part Zen koan, one part ransom note.

November 2 at 12:11am • Comment • Like

out for beers after an online performance—metaphorically or literally—a collective appraisal can be delayed days or weeks, as with *Double Blind (Love)*, or longer in Trommer's case. The two have had a little contact since the Soundreach performance. They've spoken about other collaborations, but nothing firm has been set.

While Trommer does embrace technology for the production of sound, he keeps careful tabs on its limits. "An online collaboration is not at all like playing with somebody right in the same physical space," he said. "It's cool but it's not a replacement. It's similar to early work with synthesizers: you could recreate the sound of a violin or a piano or a drum all on one thing, but the simulations are not what the synth is best used for. I'm not sure we've figured out the best uses for online collaboration."

### December 6 at 4:46pm

Early in my contact with the LoK8Tr crowd, Tristan Superhighway wrote, "It is unsafe to assume anything about this work, even on the part of the author(s)." This quote touches nicely on the two elements most LoK8Tr messages seemed to have: one part Zen koan, one part ransom note. When I got this message, I naively dismissed the danger of assumption. I thought, really, what could go wrong? But because the worst has happened—the subject of my article, my principle collaborator in this endeavour, has cut off all ties—I'm going to make some more assumptions, as I have done already. After all, I don't have anything to lose.

The new space in which LoK8Tr will be performing, among Web 2.0 social networks and applications, is a volatile one. Often, it's a space of delayed and out-of-sync data streams, dropped connections and glitches. The medium sabotages the message. The LoK8Tr folks are going to have a lot of preparation to do before their performance in March. They could limit the volatility of their space by staying away from real-time music production. However, social networks are about reacting to an ever-updating mass of information. The project would lack immediacy and would be using the space less than fully if it relied too heavily on pre-set elements for which the networks were just a delivery system. What's the difference between pushing play on an iPod versus playing in MySpace or blip.fm? Not much.

For the players in LoK8Tr, the experience will likely be fragmented. A more complete understanding will emerge after the performance via trickles of e-mails, Facebook postings, and maybe Skype conversations. Months after, when they can review how things sounded and, in some cases, appeared online and over cell phone and on the

*Mannlicher Carcano Radio Hour*, they will get a sense of how things went. Were the video or other images in sync with the sounds? Did everything play the same in Vancouver as it did in Halifax—or The Hague, for that matter?

I have had some time for reflection of my own, and I think I know where things went wrong between LoK8Tr and me. All the online collaborators I spoke with mentioned the importance of deep listening when working together. With the LoK8Tr folks and me, none of us listened closely enough, and I think we both misread each other's cues.

I read a certain amount of humour and play among the notes I received from the LoK8Tr people. The names of the Facebook personae were playful—Isold LeMonde or "I sold the world." Hell, even the project's name recalled Avril Lavigne's orthography. So, in one message, I referred to LoK8Tr as "Lokie," a diminutive form of the project name and a play on a certain Norse trickster god. Tristan Superhighway did call me MP Heisenberg Principle of Observation, so I signed one e-mail MPHPOO, for short. And, I did suggest playfully that the principle actors of the project should blindfold me and take me to an undisclosed location so I could interview them as they wore Richard Nixon masks. These were all wrong signals to send.

In a final Facebook letter to me, Tristan Superhighway wrote, "The LoK8Tr project is a serious art work. It is not a joke or a game. It is inappropriate to refer to the LoK8Tr name as Lokie, as it is [to refer to] the proposed character of MP Heisenberg as MPHPOO. Meeting with a Richard Nixon mask on is also not a reasonable way to proceed, as you proposed."

And that was the end of the collaboration. I wished Tristan/LoK8Tr/whomever the best of luck for the performance. But I did forget to mention that I still meant to catch the event, and that I'd be listening carefully.

---

*Matthew Pioro is a Toronto-based editor and freelance writer. Most of the time, he's very easy to get along with. This is his first article for Musicworks.*

---

**FYI:** *The Mannlicher Carcano Radio Hour is featured in Ellen Waterman's Musicworks 84 article.*

### LINKS:

---

<www.pioro.net>

<mannlichercarcano.blogspot.com>

<selfworld.net>

<io-media.org>

<turbulence.org> for information on networked performance