(arts)

DRUMS GO DIGITAL

SEEING THE SOUND OF 0S AND 1S

visual

DAYNA MCLEOD

"It's a lot easier to work for money when you've got your own thing going," says Paul Litherland, photographer to the stars by day, multimedia installation artist by days off.

Known around town for documenting artwork for commercial galleries, artist-run centres and individual artists through Studio Lux, Litherland is one busy bee. "I thought I'd work out of this studio for everything – make my artwork from here – but it turned out to be a little too difficult with the phone ringing,
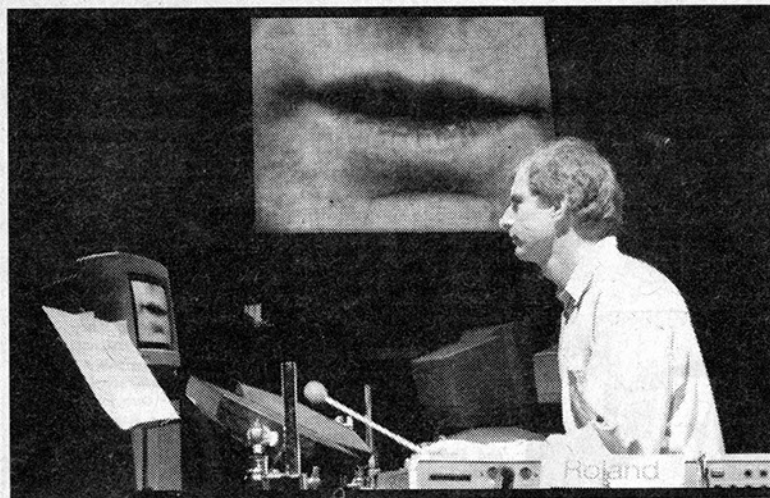
PAUL LITHERLAND STAGES COMMUNICATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

so I ended up getting another studio," Litherland says, indicating his hectic pace. "I don't have a phone in the other one, I can't relax with a phone," he says a bit frazzled. Able to concentrate on the rhythmic noises of his art practice, Litherland recently unveiled his latest work, *0 1,* a computerized extravaganza that looks at communication in the digital age – and at how hard it is to get through to one another.

Two drummers, Litherland and Alexander MacSween, and a production assistant, computer wiz Jean Phillippe Thibault, drive the multimedia performance work. Having met MacSween as a drum instructor, Litherland brought him

into the fold of the project once he'd assembled enough money to stage it. "Alex has a much more established background as a performer," says Litherland. "He works in at least two bands at any one time and plays five days a week playing dance accompaniment, so he was able to bring a really good discipline in terms of how a show functions." In *0 1,* Litherland and MacSween will "talk" to each other with images, numbers, words and letters splashing on video screens positioned behind them that will reflect their drum strikes.

Working with a team of computer programmers at Avatar in Quebec City, Litherland created three computer pro-

grams. "One program controls video, one controls text – it sends up words when I hit the drums – and another one allows me to write in ASKEY Code," Litherland explains. ASKEY Code is the eight-bit behind-the-scenes translator that sends a series of 0s and 1s to your computer when you hit the keyboard. "We did write the scores, but I am almost there in learning the whole alphabet in ASKEY code," says Litherland. "It's fairly structured. 'A' is 01000001 and small 'a' is 01100001. So the big and little letters are just one digit difference."

It's crazy to think how many numbers must be ordering themselves in rows in Litherland's brain, but his initial intent is even more amazing. "I originally imagined drawing out a picture using code. But imagine drawing out each pixel that has to be tapped out with eight numbers," he laughs at his own obsessiveness. "What I really wanted to do was to make the process of digital communication visible," Litherland explains. "By using drums, which is a really old form of long-distance communication, I had hoped that there would be some kind of poetry between that idea beyond the human voice and with present-day technologies of communicating," he says thoughtfully.

Seeing is communicating. (·)

0 1, BY PAUL LITHERLAND
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