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An exegesis to accompany works in the exhibition *It's for You*

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Colab, AUT

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Abstract

In her introduction to *Artificial Hells*, Claire Bishop defines participation in art as that, "… in which people constitute the central artistic medium and material, in the manner of theatre and performance". It is interesting then to consider whether artworks are things in and of themselves, or if they only actually exist as art in terms of the relationships they have with their audience; perhaps only in terms of *the roles performed* by the audience as they enter into discourse with the presented situations. The set of work presented here seeks to research these notions along with the idea of where things sit on the spectrum of "closed" or "open" works as suggested by Umberto Eco, and the idea of art as inherent autobiographical trace.

Author's Note

Please listen to the audio version of this document first; ideally via the installed work (*Recursive Diffusion*) or the computer application designed for that purpose, or on SoundCloud (at https://soundcloud.com/colin-james-woods/sets/exegesis). This written document is produced for the purpose of compliance with university regulations, and as a support to the audio rendering to provide easier access to references and footnotes, and to aid those who find my Ulster accent difficult. The real exegesis is non-hierarchical and non-linear. Each section is a standalone piece, but also part of the whole. Length or order in this document is not an indicator of precedence or logical weight. If you do not have access to audio, then you should read the main sections in random order but appreciate that this is not the preferred method.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly stated in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Colin James Woods

Acknowledgements

Read this in your own voice

This document/record is composed of non-sequential sections. I wish to escape from the hierarchy imposed by giving prevalence to a particular part. So, this exegesis is like a cloud with multiple overlapping volumes or lobes. Consider the lobes to represent a kind of probability map (rather like an electron cloud) of the relevance of the writing, an attempt to give a multidimensional presentation to the ideas. Perhaps this is an attempt to deal with the rhizomic nature of the ideas in my head. Could this be related to how/why Deleuze and Guattari chose to create their plateaux (1987)? That's not to say I stole the idea, the structure just demands it, or rather flows like a liquid to fill that shape.

The lobes are part of a whole but inherently incomplete without your listening. They spread out from no particular origin and form an untidy mesh. The reader adds their own perspective and so another voice is added to the cloud, becoming, in a mereological sense, *part of* rather than *a part of.*[1] It adds and interacts with already existing ideas and biases within your mind. This is intrinsic to the way in which my/our artworks function - I say my/our because I argue that an aesthetic experience does not belong to the creator of an artefact or art-kind display (as defined by Lopes, 2010), but rather exists in the discourse space created by the relationship between an observer and the presented thing. Hence "belongingness" is not a useful concept for this - it cannot be a question of ownership but rather the location in time and space (whatever that means) of the assemblage of art-kind-display/observer/context. It is, in fact, a thing which emerges from such a relationship, and its nature means that unlike the art-kind-display artefact, it resists commodification by virtue of its non-materiality. That doesn't mean I don't want to be paid.

I started this project with the idea that I wanted to explore the consequences of interactive sound art (it could have been any art really, but my main practice has been in the sound realm so I use that as an initial tool) in terms of aesthetic discourse: what would happen if the separate roles of artist/composer, performer, and observer/participant were collapsed into a single person? Of course, I was not then fully aware that this happens anyhow in any and every single art experience. It happens when an artist creates an artefact; it happens when a score or a play is performed, and it happens in a gallery. Depending on your mind-set, it happens as you sit in a cafe or ride the bus or walk the street in the twilight hours. It happens when you read or listen to a text.

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[1] See http://ontology.buffalo.edu/smith/courses03/tb/mereology.pdf for a summary of mereology.

Ngā pātai (Questions)

I first met musician Hinewehi Mohi in 2010, when I had the opportunity to attend a workshop on taonga pūoro[2] on Ōrākei Marae. It was from her I first heard the beautiful story of Hine-raukatauri, the Atua[3] of music, from whose earthly form as the case moth is derived the origin of the instrument known as the pūtōrino[4] and whose mana is the source of its spiritual power. Embedded in this kaupapa[5] is the notion of music as primarily a voice, that is a means of externalising some internal thought or feeling of a person or group of people, or, as a cathartic outpouring. In te ao Māori, as with many indigenous cultures, music is no mere entertainment (although it is that too). In various ways, it forms part of rituals, both generic and individualised. No organised communal event is complete without karakia[6] and waiata,[7] and these are, by their very nature, participatory. Although the current sound of waiata (in particular waiata ngahau)[8] is heavily impacted by the imposed colonial culture, there still remains most of the embedded kaupapa. McLean's *Māori Music* (2012) gives a thorough description of the difference between the pre- and post-colonial situation in this regard. Rather than a commodity, this sound experience is deeply held as a taonga by Māori, and so an inalienable part of their cultural identity. My observation (as a pākehā[9] man) is that there is little sense of inhibition when performing - it is natural and unforced. No one is ever told "your waiata is out of tune". It is accepted for what it is and so the idea of music as something belonging to some restricted class of person is eroded (that is not to ignore the fact that certain music is only performed by certain people in particular roles defined by the tikanga of the event or place). One of the (Māori) participants at the workshop commented that I seemed relaxed and comfortable in a Māori environment. And it was true. I enjoyed the idea that musical instruments and their sounds were not in

some exclusive commodified realm - but could be effectively crafted from materials in the environment.

At the end of the event we gave an improvised concert, using the instruments we had made, for the children from the Raukatauri Music Therapy Centre[10] - a facility established by Mohi in 2004 to enrich the lives of children and adults with varying levels of disability.

Reflecting on this experience recently has influenced my ideas around the separation (or not) of roles in the context of sound as an art form - and by extension art in general. My research sought to contrive a situation that allowed people to experience what I had posited as a "singularity" where the roles of composer, performer, and audience are collapsed into the mind and body of one individual. I wanted to free them from the constraints of being just an observer, to regain in some way the naive disinhibition of childhood, to be back in that innocent state of just being happy to make stuff up without fear of judgement. I wanted to see what effect this had on aesthetic discourse. Essentially, I wanted them to improvise, regain ownership of creativity and, I wanted to reveal to them that they are a key factor in co-creating an aesthetic experience.

So-called non-idiomatic free improvisation (NIFI) as a genre (or perhaps anti-genre) has its modern roots in the 1960s, with the London group *AMM*. Derek Bailey (one of the practice's most widely acknowledged originators) makes a convincing argument that it is actually the most ancient form of music making (Bailey 1992). Demers (2010) asserts that the aesthetic theories of Adorno are directly relevant to experimental electronic music, "through its premise that musical material engages in a dialectic with surrounding society, never completely reflective while never completely autonomous, either". Demers also speaks of how sonic art may be more connected to 'the real world' than previously encountered forms:

When the framing devices of Western art music—tools such as tonality, dance rhythms, predictable forms, standard orchestration, and concert venues—began to disappear or undergo critique, so, too, vanished many reasons for regarding music as separate from the outside world. (ibid)

So, might sonic art be a more powerful story-telling tool, less 'other' in respect of people's experience, than traditional art music forms? Might an interactive sound installation allow people to experience what it's like to participate in a form of improvisation?

And, just like the participatory theatre described by Claire Bishop, this might be seen to have a political dimension embedded in its philosophy. Bishop (2012) talks of how participatory art movements occur at times of social/political crisis. She cites the aftermath of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, the run-up to the rise of fascism (especially in Italy) and the collapse of "really existing communism".[11] (See Pirani (2008) for a robust rebuttal.)

In their prelude to their review of (mainly American) improvisatory music, *The Fierce Urgency of Now*, Fischlin, Heble and Lipsitz explain, "We have come to conceive of musical improvisation as a generative yet largely unexamined model for political, cultural, and ethical dialogue and action" (2013).

There is a local link here too: internationally regarded artist Phillip Dadson (another key person in the New Zealand NIFI scene over many years who also has a deep interest in traditional Māori music forms) was a member of *Scratch Orchestra* in London, and was heavily influenced by the left leaning politics and philosophy around that scene, in particular the ideas and work of Cornelius Cardew. In the recent documentary film on Dadson's life and work Geoff Chapple talks about the philosophy around *From Scratch* (set up by Dadson on his return to New Zealand from the UK). He relates how the organisation of the performances was designed to appear highly

collaborative and cooperative and talks of how this was seen as organisational model that could radiate out and influence society (Ogston and Stewart, 2015). Dadson's critique of society and the commodification of art practice was apparent when I interviewed him for some previous research at his home in Auckland in April 2013:[12]

> I read a lot of theoretical background stuff, but the most influential things were the Dada and Futurist influences on Fluxus and then the Conceptual Art movement. I've also been influenced strongly by Cardew's politics: Socialist ethics…I find the whole art/music world is so driven essentially by the same capitalist motives, actually. It's greed and hunger for the new, and the next best thing, the next shock. I don't know if that's really where I want my work to be situated. (Dadson in Woods 2013)

Composer and theorist Jean-Jaques Nattiez points out,

> …human productions and actions leave 'material traces' which are accessible to the five senses. These productions can be a linguistic enunciation, an artwork, an aesthetic gesture or a social action, and have a material reality -- a form, constituting in itself a trace. These traces are *symbolic* forms that carry meanings to whoever produces them and, also, to whoever perceives them.

Once again, we're back to art as signs. Of course, the nature of the 'meaning' is a result of the poietic and aesthetic processes implicit in the creation and appreciation of the work as well as the referential and cultural constraints implied by semiotic theory. Nattiez conceived of these relationships in his 'tripartite analysis' model as seen below (1990).
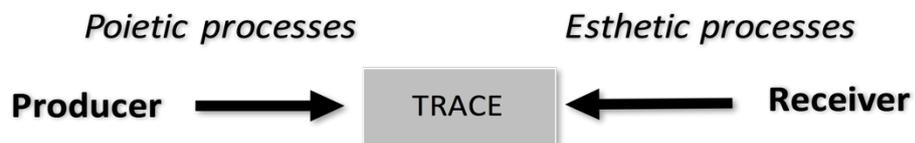
Figure 1 Nattiez's model. (Adapted from Nattiez 1990)

Nattiez's model positioned the trace in the centre of the model with the producer and receiver to the left and right of the trace respectively, with arrows connecting these toward the trace labelled "poietic processes" and "esthetic processes" on the left and right.

This model is fine in so far as it goes but implies a separation of the processes and a finished work (trace). The situation where a trace is being *simultaneously* created and perceived in real-time requires a modified model, which I have illustrated here.
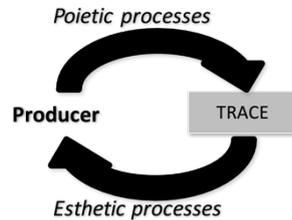

Figure 2 My modification of Nattiez's model as applied to the process of artistic creation

In this case the producer *is also* the receiver and the model is an iterating circle rather than linear. This is similar to models of the composition process (especially in respect of experimental electroacoustic art), a model which bears comparison to those described by Simon Emmerson (1989) and refined further by John Coulter (2008). This model can perhaps be applied to free improvisation, but less obviously to any artistic creative flow, perhaps even by anyone who is in the process of completing a work by interaction, even if that is merely the act of observing or listening. In earlier research, I refined the model as I felt it applies to me and created the following diagram.
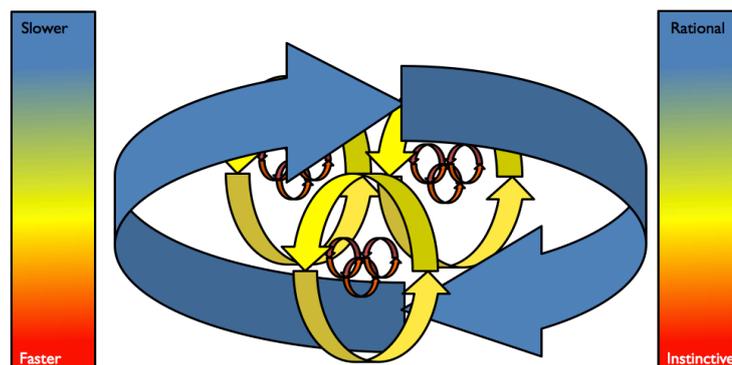

Figure 3 Nested creative cycles as described by Woods (unpub.)

Starting at the centre, it represents nested creative cycles (where each corresponds to an instance of the process outlined in Fig.2 above) and their relationship to the relative

speed, and the rational/instinctive axes. This diagram is a result of my unpublished research (at the University of Auckland) into improvised fragments and my experiences developing these as source material in the composition of longer electroacoustic (usually multi-channel) works, for example *Steam* (2015) and *Sax Machine* (2015).

At the outset of the current project I saw intriguing questions posed by the collection and interaction of things that constitutes an interactive installation:

- How does the implicit collapse of discrete roles impact on the aesthetic discourse?

- Does the above lead to real engagement and the capture of artistically significant autobiographical trace?

- How might this influence the creation of future works?

There were practical technological issues to be solved, not least the effective capture of gestural movement data that makes the output trace encoded with the essential agency of the participants. I had no doubt that the form-factor of my previous work, Gazebophone, required fundamental reassessment. Some of these problems required the production of prototype works in an attempt to address these matters, including fixed media audio-visual works which form part of the final creative portfolio together with the realised installation ad part of the audit trail of research.

A flow-on aim, if it could be shown to be technically feasible, was to store the data generated by the participants' interactions so that it could be replayed and remediated by means of another layer of digital abstraction (possibly via a web-based interface) to a virtual representation of the trace that can be (a) shared with others, and (b) used as source material for further development by algorithmic transformation and combination so that hybrid traces can be created. I have set this aside as an idea for

future realisation as I no longer think it's core to the research questions here, and I had

to limit mission creep.

[2] Māori traditional musical instrument(s). Formed from taonga (treasured possession) and pūoro (singing voice/instrument) Like all languages individual words cannot always be accurately translated without attention to the context. For this and subsequent translation please refer to http://maoridictionary.co.nz.

[3] Deity/essential spirit

[4] A wooden (usually) instrument that may be played by blowing across an aperture like a flute, or by vibrating the lips like playing a brass instrument. Often beautifully carved.

[5] A difficult word to translate precisely but includes concept, theme, notion, topic of discussion, encompassing thing.

[6] A ritual chant, often translated as "prayer" although this does not really capture the full meaning. Refer to full translation here: http://maoridictionary.co.nz

[7] Song, chant or psalm.

[8] A song performed purely for the purpose of entertainment.

[9] Person of European (usually white) descent living in New Zealand.

[10] Their website describes their vision for music therapy: "In music therapy sessions, each person experiences music improvised uniquely with and for them. They interact and communicate musically, expressing themselves in whatever way they can - using their body, voice or musical instruments. Music therapy focuses on the client's strengths, which can make it a particularly engaging and motivating experience." See www.rmtc.org.nz

[11] My view (and that of many others, including the likes of Trotsky and many revolutionary movements not under the control of the Stalinist and minimally improved post-Stalinist, Soviet machine) is that this "really existing communism" was in fact a degenerated form of social and political organisation no longer worthy of the title "communist" (it has to be said that it seemed to take Trotsky a while to realise this, and even then, only after he'd been ousted from the ruling elite). This is not mere pedantry, but an attempt to expose a serious and misleading misconception. I would argue that the collapse of the former Soviet Union and its client states did not represent a fall of a "really existing communism", but rather the end of a vicious totalitarianism that, whilst it had started (abortively) in St Petersburg in 1905 with the intention of delivering a catalyst for worldwide revolutionary change, by the mid 1920s, had dialectically transformed into its opposite: a social and political structure which served to prevent any real possibility of that vital societal transformation. Simon Pirani in his critically acclaimed *The Russian Revolution in Retreat*, describes the Bolshevik government in the post 1920 period thus, "They became the most fervent statists. They found themselves gutting their socialism of the means of social change that had been inherent in Marx's: the movement of collective democracy to supercede the state. Marx's phrase, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', stripped of its context, was misused to justify the drastic expansion of state power." (2008)

We all cheered when the wall came down and millions were freed from the iron grip of central control of everything from the economy to art and culture. But, like the citizens of Orwell's Airstrip 1, we were soon to be presented by our neoliberal overlords with a new enemy, whom it turns out was the real enemy all the time, and that Russia had always really been a Christian country. I refuse to buy into any of it.

[12] I interviewed Phil Dadson, John Cousins and Ivan Mrsic for a piece entitled *Three Speakers: Autobiographical Content in NZ Sound Art* (unpub).

Commodity and excretion

Commodification results in the alienation of things from both their creators and those excluded from their appreciation by cost or restricted access. This is an idea most famously articulated by Marx, who was influenced by the earlier work of Hegel and Feuerbach (Marx 1847, Mandel and Novack 1973). In the context of this work, it relies on the illusion of a separation of roles between creator/producer and performer and audience. So, what then is commodified when 'art' is sold?

I resist commodification of the earth, the water and the air. I resist the commodification of bodies, and labour. Why not, then, resist the commodification of experience? Should I care about whether my work is a commercial or critical success? I think not. For me, my work is an externalisation of an internal (sometimes conscious) idea, it is in essence a form of excretion. My work is shit. My head is full of shit, and the creative process is a way of relieving myself. However, 30 years spent working as scientist in a medical laboratory taught me that you can know a lot about a person from their shit. It's a bonus if someone else likes it, or at least gets it, but a research outcome doesn't have to be pretty. It's part of the reporting my autoethnographic journey. My personal experience over the whole of my life has been that the bottling up of this decomposing material causes a build-up of mental toxins. This constipation leads to distress and disease. All my life I have struggled with depression and anxiety because (I thought) I was prevented from expressing this urge. Finally, I gave myself the necessary permission to have healthier mental bowels. I communicated something of this in my sound/video work, *53*[1] (2015).

No one tells a child that their painting is utter crap just because it is not technically accomplished. We value it for what it represents as human expression. We do not

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[1] This work was awarded joint first prize in the University of Auckland Lilburn Composition awards in October 2015.

attempt to commodify it, rather we love it for its naivety, lack of inhibition, and the sheer joy embodied in the process of its creation. The child embraces its technical constraints and nevertheless proceeds to create works with some inherent meaning to the child. Who will dare attempt to suck the joy out of that situation? And yet we are quick to label adults with the mythological attributes of being more or less "artistic".

The Voyeurs' Manifesto

"All art is autobiographical; the pearl is the oyster's autobiography."

Federico Fellini,
Film director (1965, quoted in Popova 2012)

I am, by nature, a curious person. That's a nice way of saying nosy. I watch people at every opportunity - on the street, in cafes, on public transport. I don't think I'm unusual in this respect but perhaps I am too honest about it. I particularly like the onset of twilight when I can enjoy the slightly guilty pleasure of seeing into windows when the occupants have switched on the lights but not yet drawn the blinds or curtains. I smile at the unintentional theatre of a person dancing in the kitchen while they cook, convinced that they are safe and hidden in their personal space. I absorb the details of their environment - the poster on the wall, the retro lamp in the corner, the glow from their television screen. They are quite unaware that aspects of their agency are seeping out and leaving this trace. My act of viewing transforms it from domestic mundanity to ephemeral performance art, a variant on the 'invisible theatre' described by Bishop. I am slightly ashamed of my unknown intrusion but that actually adds to the thrill. I have turned these ordinary people into unwitting unpaid actors, on a stage that they pay for, framed in the proscenium arch of their own window. Whether or not Fellini's oyster makes a conscious choice, the pearl remains, its laminated structure building until separated from its creator.

Immersion, space and involvement

"Space is an ambiguous field where positions change, where viewpoint becomes scene, seer becomes object, and where depth is the very reversibility of dimensions that unfold with the movements of the body."

Allen Weiss
- *Mirrors of infinity: The French Formal Garden and 17ᵗʰ Century Metaphysics.*

Joseph Nechvatal quotes Weiss in the introduction to his treatise *Immersive Ideals/Critical distances* (2009). Nechvatal describes total immersion as, "that state of virtual being… characterised by a total lack of psychic distance between the immersant's body-image and the immersive environment". He regards this as the desired endpoint of refining the digital VR experience. That research is framed in terms of Delueze's and Guattari's rhizome theory, but his reference to VR here explicitly refers to what he later clarifies in the term VE^o -*Art*, an environment that is dependent on digital technology to deliver its experience. He also critiques the idea of the rhizome and expands it to include aspects that Delueze and Guattari apparently exclude, saying, "I will challenge the intellectual point that for Deleuze /Guattari phenomenology, ontology and idealism are fundamentally opposed to the rhizome." He positions VR within the space of the *Gesamtkunstwerk,*[2] and this implies to me the premise that VR brings us closer to some artistic ideal.

I here recall my experience in the VR/Ambisonic room at Marshall Day Acoustics in Auckland earlier this year.[3] This was not presented as an aesthetic experience but rather a tool for demonstrating the effects of various sound treatments, such as baffles and insulation, on the sonic qualities of a modelled space for their

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[2](German)Tr: total art work; an artistic creation, as the music dramas of Richard Wagner, that synthesizes the elements of music, drama, spectacle, dance, etc. (from dictionary.com)

[3] Thanks to Malcolm Dunn at Marshall Day acoustics. http://nz.marshallday.com

customers; typically architects and their clients. Entering the room, one sits in a recycled vintage cinema chair in the sweet-spot of a multi speaker array and dons the VR goggles. Now, instantly transported to the displayed space, we aim to have a kind of disembodied experience. We are in the room but simultaneously our senses of sight and hearing are flooded with the data from elsewhere. I did not however experience Nechvatal's "complete lack of psychic distance". For me (and I am by no means a technophobe), the experience was slightly uncanny, creepy even, but still highly contrived and obviously a non-world. As a tool, it no doubt achieves enough effect to demonstrate the client's options. I suppose I disliked it for the same reason I dislike 3D movies. They provide the illusion of being immersive but it's just unconvincing enough to detract from the overall aesthetic, and is a barrier for my engagement with the narrative. I don't really want to feel as if I'm there - I just want to be told the narrative in a beautiful way. I have the same sense of dissatisfaction about 3D TV. I find it interesting but unsurprising that CNET reported on 3D television earlier this year, with the headline, "The bespectacled zombie lies face down in the dirt, thanks to LG and Sony dropping [3D] support from their 2017 TVs." (Katzmaier, 2017) Perhaps immersivity is, after all, a state of mind rather than a technologically mediated prerogative. A good book is extremely immersive to the fully engaged reader. We create the world of the book in our minds without having to work hard to decode a host of external stimuli and synthesise a virtual space.

It seems to me that we already exist in a kind of virtual space wherein we have no way of proving that our subjective reading of the world is the same as another's. Our concept and internally mapped relationships of the outside are based upon our perceived sensations which in and of themselves are an indirect detection of the outside (and even the biological inside). So, a technological attempt to hack our sensations can do no more

than replace one artefact with another. I've decided that I don't want to go there, as I'm quite happy to be immersed in my current "reality".

Therefore, my work does not seek to remove people from their real world into some artificial digital space. Rather, my intent is to create an interactive environment that exists *within* the everyday material world and creates its trace by acting in concert with the participant/observer. The space in which my work unfolds is around and within the observer and is thus brought to a higher degree of completion in a real partnership with the observer. I seek involvement that lives within a person's current world rather than in a fictitious techno-immersion. And it's easier - a small tweak that relies upon manipulation of a 'real thing' leaves the real-world context intact. There is no need to expend unnecessary energy re-creating an entire enveloping context that (I contend) with existing technologies cannot be satisfactorily delivered.

Audio-images/soundscapes

A problem with most multichannel playback systems is the "sweet spot", a very limited zone where the full glory of the diffusion is rendered to the listener. I argue that this is not anything like our real-world[4] experience. Usually we attend to new "objects" by moving (at the very least) our eyes or head to track and pinpoint the source of a sound, and we fit these things into our current world-map via a process of feature extraction and mapping which is highly referential, being determined by our evolutionary baggage and personal history. Most ambisonic diffusion environments, for example 24 speaker arrays, do not adequately allow for head movement, never mind alteration in the actual listening location. The magic dissipates as soon as this is attempted. Therein is the absolute flaw in this approach. Even with stereo diffusion, the sound field is limited, being somewhat less convincing in the centre. Most real sound sources do not diffuse in the same pattern as a loudspeaker and therefore unintended artefacts are automatically introduced during playback. These are in addition to the artefacts introduced in recording of 'real' (as opposed to synthesised or manipulated) sounds by the particular characteristics of the equipment used. This includes microphone polar pattern, dynamic frequency response (which will vary across the polar pattern), and microphone placement in relation to the source. Everything in the chain adds some degree of colouration to the signal. Expensive tetrahedral microphones are designed to capture sound at a particular point from all directions. They are usually individually calibrated to eliminate phase differences at the individual capsules. Paired with appropriate software they claim to be able to accurately reproduce the sound at that point of recording (which is really a narrow zone). It's very clever and works well, in

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[4] For the avoidance of doubt, I mean the world experienced by us in our day-to-day lives.

that it is possible in software to place additional "virtual microphones" and extract a model of what the sound might be like at that position. It is a really useful recording tool.

However, no one can hold their head exactly still like a tetrahedral microphone while a soundscape unfolds around them. It seems to me that the more we strive for the accurate rendition of a particular sonic environment, the more constraints we must place on the observer/listener, and the more contrived and artificial the results become. R. Murray Shafer, writing in his seminal work *The Soundscape,* reminds us that in any case all sounds are inherently imperfect. "Distortion results the moment a sound is produced, for the sounding object has to first overcome its own inertia to be set in motion, and in doing this, little imperfections creep in to the transmitted sound" (1994). So, all sound (as perceived) is essentially an artefact, but usefully a reasonably consistent artefact. As Salome Voegelin puts it, "Every sensory interaction relates back to us not the object/phenomenon perceived but that object/phenomenon filtered, shaped, and produced by the sense employed in its perception" (2010).

I make a choice to embrace these phenomenological constraints and work with them. One of the first things that composers learn[5] is that constraints are useful in providing focus. A few years ago, I visited composer and artist John Cousins in his studio in Christchurch where I had the opportunity to hear some of his work via his custom 24-speaker array.[6] He has adopted the idea that his studio is in effect his instrument and to hear a true rendition of his recent work it should be played back via the environment in which it was created. He is very enthusiastic about this, but in a

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[5] Composer Samuel Holloway introduced me to this concept at when I was starting my formal music education at Unitec Institute of Technology, but I think I had some intuitive sense of it before then. In the late 1970s I composed punk songs with the limited palette of chords that I was then able to play.
[6] Visits to Cousins' studio can be arranged by appointment. He welcomes visitors. See: http://www.studio174-nz.com/index.html

recent SOUNZ documentary, is very critical of much of current teaching practice in regard to the multi-channel idiom where students typically only get to spend a few hours in a multichannel studio spatialising pre-prepared work, rather than working in that environment from scratch. (Cousins, 2017)

Cousins' work is undoubtedly impressive. My practice, however, departs somewhat from the approach of a such a specialised and exclusive listening environment. My work sits in contrast to his micro-management of the sound environment which from his perspective is completely justified. I am less concerned with the fidelity of recordings and their reproduction requiring constraint on the listener. Instead, I am focussed on the experience of sounds in a space. I embrace the idea that since all art is open/incomplete until experienced, I must accept that fact and be comfortable with my status as co-creator with the audience.

Open to closed: an axis

An interactive sound installation may be considered as an 'open work' or even a form of participatory theatre. In his recently republished 1962 essay, *The Poetics of the Open Work*, Umberto Eco discusses the concept. Eco begins the essay by discussing musical works where a degree of freedom is given to the performer, not only to interpret the notes in a score, but to actually participate in the ordering of sections or improvisation and, in effect, the creation of content (Eco 2006, orig. pub. 1965). He refers to four works in particular, by Stockhausen, Berio, Posseur and Boulez, and makes a distinction between what he regards as 'completed' and 'open' pieces. He considers that while all art works are essentially "… the end product of an author's effort to arrange a sequence of communicative effects", there is inevitably space for individual observers to experience its effect depending on their particular frame of reference. This framing is set by individual and collective experiences and the particular context in which the work is shown. It strikes me that this is a similar process to that suggested by the well-established theory of Piercian semiotics, usefully summarised by Thomas Turino (1999). Turino applies the theory to ethnomusicology but its relevance to other realms is clear.

As Eco points out, truly 'open' works, though, go a step beyond this, in that each iteration (showing or performance) of the work generates a distinct and particular *trace* that is different to previous outcomes. Rather than lamenting the fact that inherent openness obscures communication, the artist uses this knowledge to extend openness as a key conceptual part of their practice.

He draws a link between openness in 'regular' works and traditional modes of reading of religious texts, whereby layers of meaning (some of which may be paradoxically contradictory) are embedded only to be revealed under certain

circumstances and with a particular mind-set on the part of the reader. This is a feature also of much religious and secular painting and iconography, even from ancient times. He points out, however, that this kind of reading had sets of meanings that were sometimes strictly proscribed and quite fixed, as opposed to the much wider interpretative possibilities offered by more recent open works.

He traces the expansion and development of 'openness' from Baroque music through to Romantic poetry and into the 20th century. He relates this to prevailing social and political evolution; and even scientific progress provoking works that are suggestive rather than directly implicit in their content. Eco says, "The search for *suggestiveness* is a deliberate move to open the work to the free response of the addressee." He refers to the works of Kafka, Joyce, and Brecht as examples of open literary works, particularly Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake.* Turning to the subject of performance (I contend that reading an open literary work is included here) Eco says perceptively, "Every performance *explains* the composition but does not *exhaust* it. Every performance makes the work an actuality, but is itself only complementary to all possible other performances of the work." (Eco 2006, 33)

Eco concedes that to a certain extent we can say this of all works. It is clear that works that explicitly mandate chance events or deliberate improvisations are open by Eco's definition. But what of strictly notated work? I can recall seeing a performance of a Beethoven symphony performed by The Ulster Orchestra in the Ulster Hall in Belfast (Ireland) in the mid 1980s. I enjoyed it very much. Several years later, I saw the same work performed by the Royal Dutch Concertgebouw Orchestra at the Usher Hall in Edinburgh as part of the annual festival. To me, it was sublime and uplifting, and my previous experience now seemed somehow deficient in comparison. Both were performances of the same work, but presented significantly different experiences for the

listener. It is a given that the dots and lines, and performance instructions on the page of a score, are only a map of the territory to be explored. The work is only realised when it is performed, and no two realisations can be exactly identical for a host of reasons. The acoustics of different performance venues vary, as do the exact tones of instruments, techniques and intonation of players, and not least the temperament and particular vision of the work communicated by the conductor, ensemble leader, or solo performer. So rather than discrete categories, we can perhaps usefully regard the attribute axis of closed through to open as a continuous spectrum of possibilities. I propose that an interactive works such as those in the current exhibition exist toward the open end of that spectrum.

Ngā whakahoki (Answers or replies)

Here were the initial questions:

- How does the implicit collapse of discrete roles impact on the aesthetic discourse?

- Does the above lead to real engagement and the capture of artistically significant autobiographical trace?

- How might this influence the creation of future works?

Basic communication theory tells us that a message is the thing perceived rather than the content sent. For various reasons these may be different. Semiotics teaches us that messages are composed of signs; and signs are by their nature highly context dependant (see Turino, 1999). We interpret signs through the modulating filter of our own biases which may be positive, neutral or negative. The message received also depends crucially on the degree to which we understand the conventions associated with the language used, in terms of the literal language, aesthetics, and cultural norms. This is a key point - my framing of the original questions holds within it a host of biases and assumptions.

Flawed assumption: there are discrete roles

During the process of this research I have come to the conclusion that just like the concept of open *versus* closed works, these roles are actually qualitative and *non-exclusive role attributes* each existing on a *continuous spectrum* and *non-static*. The first question, then, becomes an invalid assertion. The roles do not 'collapse' but rather are expressed (performed?) to different degrees depending on the particular work, its

context, and the mind-set of those involved. The two other questions also fall, since they depend on the first.

The finding that the question was inherently flawed is a valid and useful finding and leads me to both re-assess the nature of my practice, and also the art practice of others of whatever genre or art type. It has also caused me to reflect on the relationship between art and political economy, and the role that art plays in the general critique of human society and how that role is constrained by attempts to create marketable commodities whose value is often not related to the emotional and technical labour involved in the creation/co-creation of work. Historically much of art has been created under some system of patronage, from church, state or wealthy individuals. It's well established now that the CIA secretly funded the avant-garde scene in the 1960s and 70s as part of a propaganda exercise to make the West appear 'artistically free' in comparison to the Soviet bloc (Sooke, 2016). Artists have to eat and need somewhere to live - I wonder about the impact of ideas such as a universal basic income could have on that relationship.

My research initially asked about what happens when the roles of creator/performer/observer (C/P/O) are collapsed in to a 'singularity'. What I have learnt is that, like a geometric point, such a singularity cannot really exist outside the abstract realm. We cannot simultaneously measure (with any accuracy) the speed and position of a moving object and the concept of the C/P/O has perhaps only a similarly abstract value. Due to the inherent incompleteness of all art, this process happens anyway whenever art is experienced, but not to a *point* - residual role attributes always remain but in a cloud like state and difficult and to pin down. John Cage had it when he said, "The act of listening is in fact the act of composing."

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Appendix

Programme notes

It's for You
A portfolio of digitally mediated works by Colin Woods.

In her introduction to *Artificial Hells*, Claire Bishop defines participation in art as that, "… in which people constitute the central artistic medium and material, in the manner of theatre and performance." It is interesting then to consider whether artworks are things in and of themselves, or if they only actually exist as art in terms of the relationships they have with their audience; perhaps only in terms of *the roles performed* by the audience as they enter into discourse with the presented situations. The set of work presented here seeks to research these notions along with the idea of where things sit on the spectrum of "closed" or "open" works as suggested by Umberto Eco, and the idea of art as inherent autobiographical trace.

Some works in this exhibition form part of the submission for the degree of Master of Creative Technologies at AUT*.

Biography

Colin James Woods is a freelance Sonic Practitioner based in Auckland, Aotearoa/ New Zealand. His projects range from sonic art creations, live improvised electronic and acoustic works, through to compositions for conventional instruments and ensembles. He is currently a postgraduate researcher at AUT's Colab.

Colin was born in Belfast (Ireland) and came to Aotearoa/New Zealand in 2002. He was previously guitarist with Irish punk band **Music for the Deaf** (not the later US band of the same name) and participant in UK/Ireland based **Allotropes** experimental collective.
His current interests include experimental music (both composed and improvised), video, song writing and performance, and composition for conventional solo instruments and ensembles. He is a participant in the Auckland improv collective **Vitamin S** and one half of the duo **Toy Triptech** (with Rohan Evans).

Colin holds a Diploma in Contemporary Music from Unitec (Auckland) and B. Mus.(Hons) majoring in Composition at the University of Auckland. Recent releases include the album *Skyway to Carpark* (2012) and EP *Short Straw*, both are available to download from Bandcamp and as limited release physical CDs.

1. Room for you* [Mixed materials with electronics and audio]

Sound and movement constitute the display aspect of the work which becomes a joint project between the creator of the technical apparatus and the person interacting. It may or may not be experienced by watchers/listeners outside the space. When the interaction stops, the apparatus reverts to its waiting state, a collection of wood and electronics. This forms the artist's trace in the same way that a violin is its maker's trace as a beautiful object in itself. It is a device enabling performance, that when unused and unseen, remains as a potential artwork in the same way as a painting in a cupboard.

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2. I Just Called* [Mixed materials with electronics and audio]

I like to play with the dynamic between intimacy and voyeurism. In *I Just Called*, we hear people saying heartfelt and private things to one they love. We listen, but are we observing or intruding? Where does the artwork live? I argue that it exists mostly in the feelings experienced. It is not merely the telephone hand-sets or the sound files, rather it is the emotion engendered as we react to the words and how they are said. It is our relationship to the work. Our emotions happen with immediacy, and we have very little conscious control over them. Where is the critical distance here? How can we listen without considering the back-story to each snippet? Does each flow from joy or tragedy? What of the obviously synthetic voices deprived of the nuances of human agency? The words are there all the same.

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3. Recursive diffusion* [Mixed materials with electronics and audio]

This piece is a sound rendering (if you're listening to this, then this is it) of this series of writings through an object with eight listening ports, each of which projects a section of the text. There is no indication of the order in which they are addressed and no particular order is preferred. This audio is the definitive rendering of the exegesis. The written text is submitted to comply with University regulations and is merely a script for this performance.

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4. Records* [Vinyl records in locked box]

A selection of vinyl from the artist's personal collection (chosen at random by his wife) in a sealed box. The exact content is unknown to the artist and will not be revealed until the exhibition ends when the box is unsealed and the records are played.

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5. Grabble [Electronics, software and video projection]

A partner work to two of the pieces on the video reel (Junk mail poems). The projection randomly projects a grid of random text, designed to fool spam filters, from a junk email.

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6. Video Reel (on a loop)

Continental (2017)
All sounds transformed from a single repeated phrase it looks how it feels to consider those topics.

Junk Mail Poem (2016)
A response to the padding text receipt of many sexually suggestive emails. This work is deliberately devoid of agential intervention as the text is algorithmically rendered by a text to speech program. Various visual parameters are keyed to this machine generated output.

Junk Mail Poem #2 (2017)
The same text as above, but performed by the artist as a Dadaist found poem.

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53 (2015)
What's it like to be 53? This piece explores the physicality of a degenerating body and a mind now able to look back with critical distance.