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‘You Should Try Lying More’: The Nomadic Impermanence of Sound and Text in the  
Work of Bill Drummond

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Imagine waking up tomorrow, all music has disappeared. All musical instruments, all forms of recorded music, gone.

A world without music.

What is more, you cannot even remember what music sounded like or how it was made. You can only remember that it had existed, that it had been important to you and your civilisation. And you long to hear it once more.

Then imagine people coming together to make music with nothing but their voices, and with no knowledge of what music should sound like.<sup>1</sup>

Bill Drummond’s work straddles the worlds of popular music, literature and art. Drummond is perhaps best known as one half of the massively successful dance act The KLF, who scored a number of single and album chart hits across Europe in the late eighties and early nineties. The KLF, inspired by US dance music, pioneered the use of the sampler in mainstream British popular music, and were key instigators of the Ambient House sound of the early 1990s. The band reached the apex of their commercial success in 1992 when they won the Best Band category at the BRIT Awards (jointly with Simply Red), whereupon they renounced the music industry and promptly disbanded, deleting their UK back catalogue in the process. Since then

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Drummond, *17* (London: Beautiful Books, 2008), p. 1.

Drummond has remained in the public eye largely as a writer and artist, albeit one for whom music still seems to play a significant role. Through his books, music and artistic interventions Drummond has engaged with the (im)permanence of culture while manifesting a network of creative associations that give shape to a nebulous series of artistic efforts in a variety of media. His latest project, *The 17* and its associated book of the same name, explores the impermanence of musical expression, a theme manifested by his deletion of the KLF back catalogue and his burning of £1 million pounds of the band's earnings in 1994.

Yet the concentration on impermanence in Drummond's musical work is balanced by the possible permanence of language, manifest both in his books and self-published leaflets, as well as in his artworks which are highly logocentric, whether they be graffiti or the painted scores for the *17* project. This article explores Drummond's work through the Deleuzian filter of nomadism to interrogate the tensions between that which is now and that which has the possibility to always be. Drummond stands in many ways as an anti-theorist, engaging with music, literature and art in nomadic ways that are not always intended by him, providing a network of connections that might seek to evade the very conception of the network itself.

In March of 2009 Bill Drummond visited the University of Northampton to orchestrate a performance of his ad hoc choir project, *The 17*, with my students on the BA Popular Music course. Bill had attended the University in its previous incarnation as an art college in the 1970s and was already due to orchestrate another *17* performance in conjunction with the town's Fishmarket Gallery the following day, so he seemed happy enough to appear at the university and talk to the students about the *17* project, music, the arts and his work more widely.

The 17 is a project that Drummond has been working on since 2006. Broadly speaking it is an improvised vocal choir consisting of whoever happens to be in attendance at any particular venue, the numbers involved are not limited to seventeen at a time:

By the late 1990s I had started to have a fantasy choir that would perform choral music that I might one day compose. Right from its inception the choir in my head had a name: The 17. I didn't question why it was called The 17. It wasn't until I started going public about this and people asked me what significance the name The 17 had that I felt the need to come up with a reason ... 16 is skitty and frivolous. All 'sweet little sixteen' – sexy but not downright dirty. Can stay out late but not all night. Has no hidden depth. 18 is dull, heavy with the dawning of adult responsibilities ... But 17 is this dark and mysterious age in-between. Well it was for me ... But there may be another reason. There is a choir from Oxford, England, that specialises in singing what is now called early music ... They are called The Sixteen. So maybe I was just subconsciously wanting to be like The Sixteen and trying to go one better.<sup>2</sup>

The 17 is an attempt to both circumvent the habituations and clichés of recorded music making, as well as acting as a means for communities, or groups of people to reconnect with music making practices outside of the entertainment industry, formal music training, or indeed conventional notions of what constitutes music at all. Drummond uses poster-sized painted scores to provide stimulæ for the performers, and those

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<sup>2</sup> Drummond, *17*, pp. 26-7.

‘scores’ tend to vary from performance to performance. Most are written by Bill but many have been created by 17 performers themselves. The printed collection *Scores 18 – 76*<sup>3</sup> gathers together scores created by school pupils from the North East of England, while Drummond’s website dedicated to the project reprints scores composed by a wide variety of 17 participants.<sup>4</sup>

In our particular case we performed Score #5 entitled ‘Perform’ as a group of approximately thirty, singing five different pitches separately for five minutes each, before listening back to the recorded overlaid effect of what amounted to around 150 voices ‘bringing forth noise’.<sup>5</sup> What the few of us heard that day was utterly astonishing, beautiful and flawed. None of us held a perfect note for anywhere near five minutes, providing rich layers of texture that included much giggling. When Drummond’s sound engineer John Hirst, after playing our efforts back to us, deleted the recording in front of us, an audible groan of disappointment rippled through the group, as this powerful musical experience was lost to us, which of course made it all the more precious. I have since replicated Drummond’s experiment with subsequent students and the same mixture of awe at what such a simple process produces, and the same groan of disappointment as the recording evaporates before them, occurs every time.

Drummond’s 17 project, and its attendant book of the same name published in 2008, was instigated by his increasing dissatisfaction with his experience of recorded music. Drummond outlines this dissatisfaction in *17* by first describing his sense of wonder at hearing The Beatles’ ‘Strawberry Fields Forever’ for the first time as a young

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<sup>3</sup> Bill Drummond, *Scores 18 – 76* (London: Penkith Burn, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.the17.org>, accessed 19 Jan 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Bill Drummond, *Score 5 Perform*, <http://www.the17.org/scores/5>, accessed 19 Jan 2012.

boy and comparing that sense of excitement with his jaded reactions to what seems to be most recorded music in his later life. Graffiti put up by Drummond around the world alongside his performances asks passers-by to ‘imagine waking up tomorrow and all music has disappeared’. One such instance of Drummond’s graffiti appeared in the Far Cotton area of Northampton some months after the performance at the university, large *sans serif* characters painted on a plywood wall around a building site welcomed drivers as they headed into the town centre from the A45. During his stay in Northampton Drummond also stencilled ‘17’ tags around the town, marking the positions of one hundred Seventeenists (my term) in a 1km circle around the town centre for the Fishmarket performance, itself a dry run for a larger scale performance later the same year in Beijing. These performances, never to be repeated and as temporary and immaterial as dew on grass, (the graffiti itself assumes a level of temporary immanence through its erosion or removal) can be seen as the latest manifestation of a fascination of Drummond’s with ideas of permanence and impermanence that stretch back through his career.

Perhaps the most notorious example of such disappearances relates to the burning of £1 million by Drummond and his collaborator Jimmy Cauty on the Scottish island of Jura in 1994. The money had been earned through Cauty and Drummond’s highly successful but brief pop career, first as The Justified Ancients of Mu Mu and later The KLF (the complete deletion of their back catalogue in the UK and their retirement from the music industry are themselves disappearances of sorts in the days prior to widespread file-sharing). Having filmed the burning of the million pounds Drummond and Cauty screened the event at a number of locations around the UK, inviting responses to their actions, which ranged from the delighted, through the

bemused and on to the openly hostile. This film tour itself provoked the publication of the book *K Foundation Burn a Million Quid* in 1997,<sup>6</sup> collecting the responses to the film and outlining the ambivalence felt by Drummond and Cauty themselves to their own actions. In this way the materiality of Drummond's musical output was negated both by its formal disappearance as records and CDs (at least in Britain), and later by the monetary elimination of its rewards, although it is doubtful that all of the proceeds from The KLF were incinerated.

Further actions stress the potentiality of impermanence. In 1993 the K Foundation (Drummond and Cauty's post-KLF incarnation) awarded Rachel Whiteread the Worst Artist of the Year award in the same year that she won the prestigious Turner Prize, potentially negating the power of the award and problematizing the relationship between art and money. Drummond has also exercised issues of impermanence through his dissection of Richard Long's photograph *A Smell of Sulphur in the Wind* into 20,000 pieces to be sold at \$1 each. Although not all pieces have been sold at the time of writing, Drummond intends to bury the \$20,000 collected at the site of the original photograph in Iceland. A more recent project involved the sale of forty t-shirts printed in such a way that the 17 logos would disappear after approximately one wash. The t-shirts were sold on 8 March 2011 in Birmingham with the proviso that they be worn collectively on 24 April, constituting a human sculpture that could extend absolutely anywhere, as Drummond would have no control over where the wearers might be that day.

This last example illustrates some competing tensions within Drummond's work. While the t-shirts might disintegrate, or at least their logos, each person who

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<sup>6</sup> Chris Brook and Alan Goodrick, *K Foundation Burn a Million Quid* (London: Ellipsis, 1997).

bought one received a copy of the 'Notice' poster, itself another form of Drummond's painted scores.<sup>7</sup> If the music of the KLF is made immaterial and the music of the 17 is originated to be immaterial in the first place, and if Drummond's graffiti actions themselves become immaterial whether through flyposting, council clean-ups or merely the ravages of time, then the posters and the books associated with Drummond's works achieve a more concrete solidity. What seems to be the case is that the printed or painted word achieves a more material status in some cases than Drummond's musical or artistic happenings.

Clearly at one level Drummond has consistently sought to undermine the processes of repetition, to borrow the context of a phrase from Jacques Attali, that constitute the global music industry.<sup>8</sup> While Drummond might seek to make art, even if it is art that looks quite like popular music, his quest to reinstate its value necessarily leads him to the knowledge that recording and reproduction undermines the very value of that art. Attali, in *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, characterizes the era of repetition, broadly instigated by the invention of recording and playback technologies at the end of the nineteenth century, as marked by the commodification of music in such a way as listeners become almost entirely passive, silenced by their lack of active participation in the musical experience. Further, the very music that is being listened to constitutes silence through its repetitive composition, distribution and consumption. The 17 project then is clearly a way to make music mean something again and for it to bypass the hierarchies of capitalist dissemination, at least as far as Drummond

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<sup>7</sup> Bill Drummond, 'NOTICE', <http://penkilnburn.com/poster.php?poster=290.gif&painting=26>, accessed 19 Jan 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).



understands them. However, the temporary nature and open potentiality of what the 17 might do is concretized through the painted scores produced by Drummond and his current collaborator and manager Cally Callomon. During the Fishmarket event in Northampton, the scores were hung as works of art, a far more solid form of manifestation than the sounds that would make up the 17 performance happening around them.

This tension between the immateriality of sound as it escapes codification and concretization through recording stands in stark contrast to the centrality of text in Drummond's work. The scores themselves constitute text-based painted artworks, available for sale and gallery exhibition. While his graffiti explorations straddle the line between permanence and impermanence, the text makes links to his other more survivable painted works through the use of a consistent font, Trade Gothic Bold Condensed (a font that also appears in many of his books). In this sense a shared aesthetic is displayed that centres around the relationship between sound and text and their varying levels of temporal manifestation. Given the consistent dematerialization of Drummond's musical and sonic output, the fixing of the potentiality of the 17 performances through the exhibition and sale of the scores might seem to undermine the process. Similarly, it might be possible to understand the role of text in Drummond's work as acting in ways that deviate from the role of sound in the same context. However, there may be more prosaic considerations at play. Cally Callomon provides some clues to the relationship between text and sound in the work that he creates in collaboration with Drummond:

I consider Bill Drummond's art to be neither a search for any 'truth' nor for it ever to be finished. However, I also know that if one is to make art, and if that art has a broad appeal, it may mean that others are willing to pay money to own a part of that art. To that end we devise and construct a series of items that could be of use to people in exchange for their money.

Chiefly these items rely on text. This is always Bill Drummond's text. The text results from a series of activities or thoughts by Bill Drummond. Structurally they come in the form of large printed text-pieces, books, text paintings and the odd fragment of re-appropriated artworks.

Aesthetically I have always admired both Trade Gothic Bold Condensed (I started to use it in 1990) and Walbaum. I started to use Walbaum in 1994 after I experienced too many drawbacks with the typeface 'Modern'. I enjoy using the same typefaces much as a musician may enjoy playing the same violin. To the violinist the performance of the music is all, the instrument, though considered and looked after, is secondary.

With Bill Drummond; the actions thoughts and texts is all, the posters are mere postmen, albethey (sic) nice smelling ones if we screen print them.<sup>9</sup>

As such the relationship between the scores and the performances they create might be understood as one of necessity. It is the commodification of certain aspects of Drummond's work that allows him to pursue the line of immateriality in others. However, to dismiss the painted scores merely as an economic necessity designed to

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<sup>9</sup> Cally Callomon, personal communication, 2011.

subsidize Drummond's more esoteric works misses the significance of the function of text in relation to image and sound.

Through Drummond's concentration on the immateriality of culture, whether it be music, literature or the visual arts, we might start to understand what he is attempting to do as a form of nomadic engagement. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, in 'Treatise on Nomadology: - The War Machine' in *A Thousand Plateaus* posit the nomad as an agent operating within the smooth space of immanence, in contrast to the striated spaces of hierarchical capitalism.<sup>10</sup> The artist, in navigating across and between the habitations of differing mediums, potentially assumes a nomadic aspect in the smooth space of immanence, assuming the mantle of the war machine. For Deleuze the nomadic war machine smooths out the space that for the state dweller remains striated and hierarchical. For Drummond this means a series of on-going engagements with the 'rules' of literature, music and art that have consistently been understood by much of the mainstream press, at least in the UK, as art pranks. The success of Drummond's attempts to reconfigure what we might mean by 'art', 'music' or 'literature' is only of concern in that he continues in his nomadic interventions, never restructuring these concepts into wholly new striated forms, but rather providing a series of on-going guerrilla offensives around these forms.

Eugene Holland, in his essay on the nomadology of free jazz, differentiates the Greek term *nomos*, suggesting a rule of thumb, from *logos*, or the law of the state.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, 'Treatise on Nomadology', *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: The Athelone Press, 1988), pp. 351-423.

<sup>11</sup> Eugene Holland, 'Studies in Applied Nomadology: Jazz Improvisation and Post-Capitalist Markets', in Ian Buchanan and Marcel Swiboda (eds.), *Deleuze and Music* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), pp. 20-35.

Thus the nomad offers at best guiding principles rather than dictat or prescriptive direction. In Drummond's case we might see similar distinctions between musical theory or literary authority and his own artistic interventions. Drummond is clear that he never aims to be prescriptive, particularly in his engagement with others, as shown through his 17 work. Rather, in the lineage of other forms of experimental music such as that conceived of by John Cage, Cornelius Cardew or Steve Reich, Drummond provides an open-ended series of processes by which sound or music might occur.<sup>12</sup> While Drummond may be the orchestrator of 17 events, and even be the author of the scores produced to guide the participants, the 'art' created by any 17 choir is highly contingent and fluid, not to say ultimately immaterial. In this sense it is not difficult to see Drummond's work with The 17 as a form of nomad art that is articulated through an engagement with the 'royal' art of music composition and recording. Holland provides a rather beautiful model of the artist as nomad scientist, a form of approach that seems relevant to Drummond's practice:

Let's take, as an illustration, a piece of wood. Royal science will want it milled to established specifications – as a 2 by 4, for instance – so it can be used in building construction whose designs are based on the availability of lumber conforming to certain predictable 'constants' (size, regularity of grain, strength, surface appearance, and so on). Any knots that occur are considered mere imperfections, and may indeed lower the quality rating of the piece of wood as construction lumber, or preclude its use altogether. A sculptor, serving here as

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<sup>12</sup> Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

nomad scientist, will assess the piece of wood very differently. For the sculptor, knots, grain and irregularities appear as singularities, features that inhere in the wood-matter as its unique form of content. And in the sculptor's hands, each singularity can become a substance of expression: a knot may become the eye of a fish; a grain pattern may become the waves of the sea. Or something else entirely: the content/expression relation here is one of contingency, not necessity.<sup>13</sup>

If Drummond is seen to be seeking to subvert the commercial machinations of the music industry, or to be reconnecting music to a plane of immanence and contingency, then these seem very much like nomadic operations. However, the concentration on text based forms as more materially concrete suggests that Bill Drummond as nomad war machine still has to operate within codified structures, or a *logos*, that makes him make art that has some form of permanency and commodity value. In this sense one might question the success of Drummond's strategies, if indeed such nomadic operations are his intent.

However, Drummond's writing offers a further insight into the nomad strategies affected by him. Drummond has been the co-author, with Mark Manning,<sup>14</sup> of two travel memoirs, *Bad Wisdom: The Lighthouse at the Top of the World*<sup>15</sup> and *The Wild Highway*.<sup>16</sup> Both books are based upon journeys made by Drummond, Manning and

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<sup>13</sup> Holland, 'Studies in Applied Nomadology: Jazz Improvisation and Post-Capitalist Markets', p. 22.

<sup>14</sup> Also known as the musician Zodiac Mindwarp.

<sup>15</sup> Bill Drummond and Mark Manning, *Bad Wisdom: The Lighthouse at the Top of the World* (London: Penguin, 1996).

<sup>16</sup> Bill Drummond and Mark Manning, *The Wild Highway* (London: Creation, 2005).

their companion Gimpo (Alan Goodrick), the first of which aimed to reach the North Pole to plant an icon of Elvis to bring about world peace while the second took them to the heart of the Democratic Republic of Congo to confront Satan in order to demand the return of their souls. It was intended that a third journey be conducted to complete the *Bad Wisdom* trilogy but it seems increasingly unlikely that the series will ever be completed,<sup>17</sup> itself a form of dematerialization. Both books share the formal characteristic of competing commentaries from Drummond and Manning. Drummond's sections of the books seem to present a reasonably faithful account of the events as they transpire, while Manning's refract that reality through a hyper-perverse lens inspired by Artaud, Bataille and De Sade. Even the tedium of waiting for baggage to clear customs assumes a schizophrenic perspective:

The bag arrives. It's a beat-up affair, veteran of many a scuzzy tour, held together by at least three rolls of Gaffa tape.

Helsinki customs: no electronics, no screens – no problem. The World War Two issue Wehrmacht Luger and twenty rounds of ammunition secreted in Gimpo's rectum went undetected, as did the kaleidoscope contents of Bill's black leather doctor's bag.

Gimpo takes control. We stumble through customs and out into the grey light of early November 1992, Helsinki, Finland. We're not too sure what time of day it is. The time difference is two hours, but whether it is forwards or backwards we

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<sup>17</sup> Not least because the third journey was intended to be a trip to the Moon.

do not know. Mind you, none of us are watch-carriers. ‘Time? Hey, that’s for straights,’ croaks a distant voice.<sup>18</sup>

While both men seem to be recounting the same events, Manning’s clearly fantastical take seems to foreground Drummond’s own words as inherently more trustworthy and real. In this sense the reader might choose to take Drummond’s narrative as travelogue while Manning’s, while seeming to relate to the ‘real’ events unfolding, is clearly a hyper-fantastical and absurdist take on those events. However, Drummond is far from a reliable narrator himself. In *17*, and its predecessor *45* Drummond continually fictionalizes events, often admitting later to their own fictionalization, and his writing often confuses the borders of reality and mythology.<sup>19</sup> Drummond’s role as the unreliable narrator casts doubt on the function of the *17* scores as a concretized version of the potentiality of the choir’s musical output. It also raises the question of the reliability of the word as it becomes commodity, confusing Drummond’s role as narrator and writer with that of Drummond as fictional character, a status that is more clear-cut in Manning’s case through the use of his alter ego Zodiac Mindwarp, or Z.

Similarly, Drummond seems keen to offer participants in his art the option of acting in nomadic ways that might subvert the very practices that he is engaging with. ‘Score 2. Instigate’ (2006) might be understood as an attempt to resist the potential striation of Drummond as Artist when he suggests:

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<sup>18</sup> Drummond and Manning, *Bad Wisdom*, p. 21.

<sup>19</sup> Bill Drummond, *45* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 2000).

Accept the contradictions inherent in SCORE 1, but act on it nevertheless.

Accept the contradictions in all that you imagine The 17 to be about and become a member of The 17 by taking part in a performance or instigating a performance of one of these SCORES.

Or

Instigate the creation of an entirely different form of music that the world is yet to hear.

This music may be diametrically opposed to everything you imagine The 17 to be about.<sup>20</sup>

In the same vein 'Score 3. Drive' (2006) simply ends with the words 'Use your initiative'.<sup>21</sup> Clearly Drummond is willing to evade the stratification of himself as the Artist to which an audience must surrender, a theme constant with other democratizing or deterritorializing texts authored or co-authored by him, such as *The Manual (How to Have a Number One the Easy Way)*<sup>22</sup> or *How to be an Artist*.<sup>23</sup> Even his text, whether it be the painted or printed scores, or his books, engages with a subversion of the certainty that what he is saying is true, or the way it will be. While *Bad Wisdom* and *The Wild Highway* seem to highlight Drummond's narrative as more trust-worthy in the face of Manning's pornographic and hyper-violent refractions, such an assurance is itself

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<sup>20</sup> Bill Drummond, *Score 2. Instigate*, <http://www.the17.org/scores/2> (2006), accessed 26 January 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Bill Drummond, *Score 3. Drive*, <http://www.the17.org/scores/3> (2006), accessed 26 January 2012.

<sup>22</sup> Jimmy Cauty and Bill Drummond, *The Manual (How to Have a Number One the Easy Way)* (London: KLF Publications, 1988).

<sup>23</sup> Bill Drummond, *How to be an Artist* (London: Penkilm Burn, 2002).



untrustworthy. Everything is up for grabs, no one, not even the authors, have prior claim to any form of authority.

Finally, there are attempts by Drummond to provide some form of centre to his work. *17* features a running commentary on Drummond's narrative from four artists who consistently note the theoretical foundations that Drummond is drawing on even if he claims to have little knowledge of those ideas. Similarly, a number of chapters revolve around an interview conducted with Drummond where the questioner talks about the potential influence of Cornelius Cardew, Fluxus and Karlheinz Stockhausen on Drummond's work. Drummond is willing to acknowledge, while not a direct debt, then an indirect one through encounters with figures such as Gavin Bryars, who worked with Cardew and whom Drummond met at art school. However, Drummond is keen not to place the strategies of music making of the *17* in any form of theoretical discourse or academic context. That what he is attempting to do with *The 17* might well be understood as just another part of a well-established field of experimental music practice is largely irrelevant to the project itself. The project's immanence is enough for him, even, as both he and the book's commentators point out, it has all been done before.

Following Drummond's *17* performance with my students in 2009, he engaged in a question and answer session that commenced with me asking him how he felt about something like popular music being taught in universities. My question had been prompted by comments Drummond had made over lunch about his experience of art college and his unease about the 'teaching' of artistic practice. As such I was not at all surprised that he replied with a sense of distrust that any form of artistic practice might be taught in a prescriptive form. For Drummond the institutions of artistic practice, be

they art schools, universities, the music industry, the art gallery, funding bodies or the literary community were understood not as facilitators of great art but rather as a series of constrictions and obstacles. In this light, whether someone has done or theorized what he is attempting to do with *The 17*, or his writing, or his music before is partially irrelevant, merely another possible rhizomatic connection that he may or may not be aware of (or that he may or may not be willing to admit to recognizing). The very connections to experimental music, for instance, are merely understood as articulations that have become stratified by the academy or the institutions of the music industry. If Drummond recognizes that he may be repeating what others have already achieved then he becomes part of the stratified terrain that he is seeking to evade.

In this way, Drummond is positing an anti-theory of art that has connections to his collaborators and associates, particularly the writer Stewart Home. In an interview with Home in 2004 Drummond addresses the stresses articulated in Home's writing between reality and fiction:

“Question eight: why do you lie?”

“One lies to gain.”

“But why do you, Stewart Home, lie?”

“‘We arrive at truth through error,’ to quote Kant, and I love the paradox and I hate all that reaching for authenticity thing.”

I asked him this question because so much of his work seems to be about trying to undermine supposed bourgeois culture by spreading lies. “That is my problem, Stewart. I'm always reaching for authenticity. One of the fundamental

differences between us is that you like to make the world a better place by spreading lies while I like to try to do it by spreading truths.”

“You should try lying more, Bill. It works better.”<sup>24</sup>

Drummond seems to feel that his work deviates from Home’s through his search for some form of authenticity at the heart of his music, his writing or his artistic interventions. This may well be the case, insofar as Drummond consistently champions the emotive power of art throughout his work. Yet it is the very lack of a foundational basis, whether that be the authority of the narrator, decades of avant garde musical practice and theory, or a similar lineage of art practice, that gives power to his artistic happenings, no matter what their level of materiality. Even the tensions manifest in The 17 project between the immateriality of sound and the concretization of text are flexible and engage with capital and flows of power in complex ways. Were Drummond to exist fully outside of the popular idiom it might well be that his practices might be understood as a particular form of avant gardism and thus be stratified in their own right. But it is his populist and democratic platform and approach to his artistic interventions, no matter what form they take, that marks his art out as nomadic.

Origins, truth and theory bear little relevance in this context. In this way Drummond is an anti-theorist, offering potentiality not even as a solution but as part of a larger process of becoming that is available to all. The 17 might be one way to create music again from scratch, his graffiti and faded t-shirts might stress the immediacy of

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<sup>24</sup> Bill Drummond ‘The Liar: Stewart Home – Theorist, Neoist, Anti-Novelist – Takes a Walk with Bill Drummond’, *The Guardian* (6 April 2004) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2004/apr/06/fiction> accessed 26 January 2012.

art in some temporal fashion, his books might play with levels of authenticity and truth in inscrutable ways. But whatever Drummond does, it is his nomadic approach to the institutions of the arts that is the meta-narrative that combines the widely differing events and practices that he has been involved in for over thirty years. Further, it is Drummond's very role to fail, to contradict himself, to lie to the reader that makes his work significant and ever-mutable, always dissolving, never fully touchable.

After Bill's appearance at the University of Northampton I talked briefly to a colleague of mine who taught music theory on my course. Despite the very positive reaction from the students and others who had attended Bill's 17 performance and his interview afterwards, my colleague was seething with fury at what she had witnessed. For her, Drummond was essentially unqualified to attempt what we had just experienced. She talked heatedly of how everything that he was attempting to do with The 17 had been done before, that he clearly had little grasp of over a century of avant garde or experimental music and that he was merely a showman publicizing himself while attempting to appear in some way revolutionary or conceptual. In the final instance she dismissed the entire event as 'complete bullshit.' She may be right. But my colleague's defence of the academy, of theory, of a lineage of practice marks out entirely the stratification of artistic practice that Drummond has consistently engaged with, sometimes successfully, sometimes not. His sorties on institutional practice will no doubt continue (at the time of writing Drummond continues to tour the world, instigating 17 performances and evolving the scores in an on-going open-ended process), and they will no doubt continue to manifest themselves in new and distinctive ways, some of them highly visible in the public realm, some of them not so. Levels of invisibility or disappearance will no doubt also play a part, potentiality and actuality

circling around each other in a never-ending duet, sound and the word slipping in and out of view. Perhaps the most tactile element of Drummond's work is his final exhortation to the reader in *I7*: 'Accept the contradictions.'<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Drummond, *I7*, p. 410.

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## Abstract

Bill Drummond's work straddles the worlds of popular music, literature and art. Through his books, music and artistic interventions Drummond has engaged with the (im)permanence of culture while manifesting a network of creative associations that give shape to a nebulous series of artistic efforts in a variety of media. His latest project, *The 17* and its associated book of the same name, explores the impermanence of musical expression, a theme manifested by his deletion of the KLF back catalogue in 1992 and his burning of £1 million pounds in 1994.

Yet the concentration on impermanence in Drummond's musical work is balanced by the possible permanence of language, manifest both in his books and leaflets, as well as in his artworks which are highly logocentric, whether they be graffiti or the painted scores for the *17* project. This article explores Drummond's work through the Deleuzian filter of nomadism to interrogate the tensions between that which is now and that which has the possibility to always be. Drummond stands in many ways as an anti-theorist, engaging with music, literature and art in nomadic ways that are not always intended by him, providing a network of connections that might seek to evade the very conception of the network itself.

## Biography

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