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Original Citation

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.haul / S
Phil Maguire

PRACTICE LED RESEARCH INTO STREAM-FORM COMPOSITION METHODS, FREE-ASSOCIATION, AND SYNAESTHESIA IN AUDIO/VISUAL COMPOSITION

PHILIP S. MAGUIRE

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts by Research

The University of Huddersfield
August 2014

Note: For ease of viewing the thesis and pieces together, the portfolio has been hosted online, at <http://maguire-hauls.tumblr.com>

Much of the music in the portfolio is quiet, so please listen with headphones or good quality speakers (many details are lost with laptop or tablet speakers). The following is the thesis text only.

For videos only: <https://vimeo.com/album/2929214>

Contents

Abstract, Acknowledgements, Disclaimer, Copyright Notice	5
Introduction and Supplementary Information	7
<u>Portfolio Commentaries:</u>	
14AB2	23
Piece No. 2, Otherwise Known as '()'	28
<i>dánbeag #3</i>	32
<i>nialas rud (nach é seo rud ar bith)</i>	36
Bibliography	39

Abstract

.haul / S is a portfolio of audio/visual works, all with a common start point, synaesthesia: a powerful and highly personal phenomenon. In this portfolio I examine my own synaesthetic perceptions of sound and image, and how they direct my compositional decisions and aesthetic tastes. These perceptions, and the resulting compositions, are compared to the experiences of synaesthete composers, and their goals in composing from such an abstract source material, as well as synaesthetes not engaged in musical endeavours. In doing so, I speculate how the act of making from such personal, abstract, and ultimately indescribable and unsharable experiences affects an audience's reception of the pieces produced. As such, I produce works that are as close to being about nothing as I could posit: pieces that feature no defined subject, theme, or narrative, outside of their constituent parts. This nothingness, or lack of concrete reference is speculative, aiming to open discussion on perception and synaesthesia (which I do not consider a special condition only experienced by few), and strives to inform further work actively influenced by this composer/audience feedback loop.

The compositions in this portfolio are also the result of practice-led research into stream form composition methods, and examinations of free-association in audio/visual composition. The aim of this research is to open discussion on intuitive composition practices, and composers' aesthetic judgments and decisions when producing a work. It also examines synaesthesia as a compositional tool, as a means of suggesting further research in a field which is still poorly understood.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Julio d'Escriván, for his support and enthusiasm for my project. Without that, this project would not have become what it is (I probably still won't take up running, though).

I would also like to thank my second supervisor, Liz Dobson, for additional help, and being a wall for me to throw my ideas at.

Thanks to Pierre-Alexandre Tremblay for providing the opportunity to present one of the pieces in this portfolio at Electric Spring 2014. The experience and feedback was invaluable. Thanks also to Monty Adkins for the diffusion workshop during the festival, and thanks to Julio d'Escriván and Monty Adkins for their enthusiasm in my expansion of their stream form method.

Also, thanks to my wonderful friends who have helped with composition ideas, listening and viewing drafts, being patient whilst I've vented my frustrations, and generally being top folk: Ross Jennings, Emily Webb, Hali Santamas, Elías Merino (¡Vamos!), Paul McGuire, Eleanor Cully, Tom Adams, and Ryoko Akama.

Finally, thanks to my parents. Their unwavering support, advice, proofreading services, and general excellence has been essential to the success of this project. And my sister, Lindsay, for letting me stay often and at short notice.

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Word count: 10,337

Portfolio length: 50 minutes

Introduction and Supplementary Information

Out of nowhere, massive holes. Pulsating and shivering around the room. It's sudden, dark gold, black and blinding. They're everywhere, bursting into the room and absorbing everyone in it. The drones have made these... things closer to being real than any other music has. Where did they come from? Has anyone else noticed? I look up, and Bob gives me that nod.

The sound is enveloping, drenching; I sit there watching it pour into the room, wondering how everyone else is hearing, seeing, feeling, tasting it. Whatever that shift was, we all made it together, probably by accident; I don't remember the rehearsal or the first concert feeling like this. The first concert was great, and I could have sworn I heard a harmonica solo in the rehearsal, but nothing with as much impact as this.

From fast, thin beatings, the room suddenly explodes with these holes. It's joyous, and this exact moment in the performance - I barely remember which piece it was, or how far through we were - is this only important thing.

I can't describe what I'm feeling. I turn my head and the holes morph, the colours shift towards blue, they're pulsating faster. This sounds different to everyone, doesn't it? Never mind evoking emotion with complex harmonies or narratives, Phill Niblock's abstract, dense drones have almost certainly made me feel and experience more in these few seconds than the sum total of my previous musical experiences. I realise that I want to make music like this. Maybe not loud, compacted walls of sound, but music that triggers as vivid an experience as I felt on that gorgeous cold night.



Phill Niblock concert, London, 2011

The story above occurred during a performance in a Phill Niblock concert at Café Oto in 2011, and became the main trigger for my work that has culminated in this project. I have

worked mostly intuitively, in an attempt to trigger comparable experiences in my own music. For this project, I have utilised photography to create four audio/visual works. I have examined synaesthesia, how my synaesthetic responses guide my work, and how the subsequent compositional decisions translate to an audience's experience of these pieces. I have utilised a stream form method of composition for the project.

Adkins and d'Escriván (2013) have proposed a stream form framework for their composition and performance methods; I propose an extension of their model from an isolated series of pieces, as in Adkins' *Four Shibusa*, or individual performances, as with d'Escriván's work with FUSIL duo, to the compositional practice as a whole, and an audience's experience of that composer's work. They describe stream form as 'the result of musical layers that overlap or are concurrent' (Adkins & d'Escriván, 2013, p. 6). I see a composer's pieces and methods of working as similar layers, and I propose a model of stream form composition that is formed of three tiers:

Micro: Concerning individual pieces, suites etc.

Meso: Concerning pieces, suites etc. in comparison with previous works

Macro: Concerning compositional practice as a whole, with regard to collection of materials, and audience experience.

I will discuss this model of stream form composition in relation to my own compositional practice in this project. Specifically, I will examine my perception of sound and image with regards to synaesthesia, my abstraction of materials, and free-association.

Synaesthesia

Synaesthesia, described most simply as the cross-activation of two or more senses, is the most powerful influence on how I work with sound and image. There are many forms of the phenomenon, and whilst I experience several, I will discuss chromesthesia, or sound-colour synaesthesia, as it is the form I experience most vividly, and the main influence on my work.

I perceive sounds as colours, shapes, textures and movements. The opening narrative of this thesis is a good example: a dense mash of tones and timbres, the resulting beatings triggering large, shivering holes that pulsate around a space. Conversely, I also experience silent moving images sonically; flickering images project soft rumbles of noise, for example.

I find myself drawn to the textural details in objects that I photograph, because they often mirror or emulate the kinds of phenomena I experience when hearing sounds, and viewing images. For this reason I photograph intuitively, capturing images of details of objects that trigger some kind of synaesthetic response, or reference responses experienced elsewhere. This seems fairly common in synaesthetes (those who experience synaesthesia). In *The Hidden Sense* (2008), Cretien van Campen outlines the experiences of several synaesthetes. Marcia Smilack, a fine art photographer, hears colours and

shapes, and vice versa. For example, hearing bagpipes when looking at the reflection of trees on water (van Campen, 2008, p. 15). Smilack uses the latter to dictate her work, taking a photograph only when she has such a response from an object or landscape. Van Campen also illustrates the highly personal nature of synaesthetic perception. Two synaesthetes, Peter and Floor, describe what they see when they are played the same piece of electronic music. Peter sees dark red horizontal bars, stretching out of his periphery, whereas Floor sees,

a white sound that looks somewhat like a half parabola. In the middle, the form continues into a straight line and then fades away...After a few seconds, a purple parallel form that is much smaller appears...It corresponds with the particular sound that increases in loudness. That *wah-wah-wah* kind of sound is a shining orange oval for each *wah*...The moment it disappears, it has briefly a silver silhouette...

van Campen, 2008, p. 14

This simple example demonstrates the highly personal experiences that synaesthetes can have with the same stimulus. This extreme subjectivity is typical with all synaesthetes, and so I would not attempt to project my perception of the sounds in my pieces onto an audience, nor would I inform them of it beforehand. I would argue that, since many synaesthetes that are aware of their condition also understand that their perceptions are wildly different to another synaesthete's (from my own conversations), my attempting to project my perceptions on to an audience would be detrimental to their experience of the piece, and the integrity of the piece in general.

Solomon Shereshevsky's (the famous S. in Mind of a Mnemonist) perceptions of sound are also worth noting, as he demonstrates that chromesthesia is not exclusive to conventionally musical sounds. "I heard the bell ringing. A small round object rolled right before my eyes...my fingers sensed something rough like a rope...Then I experienced a taste of salt water...and something white..." (Luria, 1968, p. 25 & 81).

Franz Liszt and Olivier Messiaen are two well known examples of composers who attempted to project their perceptions onto ensembles. Liszt famously directed musicians at Weimar to play "a bit more blue!" or "Not so pink!" (Mahling, 1926, p. 230), whereas Messiaen added his synaesthetic responses to performance directions. These are also further examples of the subjectivity involved; both experience different keys and harmonies in colour, rather than individual sound objects or events, as I do. In *Analysing Musical Multimedia* (1998), Nicholas Cook examines Olivier Messiaen's synaesthesia, and its influence on his compositions. Cook refers to an article by Jonathan Bernard on Messiaen's Synaesthesia when questioning the composer's performance directions,

'For me certain complexes of sound and certain sonorities are linked to complexes of colour, and I use them in full knowledge of this.' ...[Messiaen] suggests that colour represents an essential, and not merely a peripheral, component of the music; this is a disquieting thought, given that Messiaen's colour hearing is entirely idiosyncratic... And what is a pianist meant to do when confronted by the footnote in 'Catalogue des oiseaux' which reads: 'The chords ought to have a sonority akin to a stained-glass

window with orange dominating and complemented by specks of blue'? ...where does that leave us, the listeners?

Cook, 1998, p. 30-32

In Bernard's article, Messiaen explains the colours he sees in his mind's eye, so it follows that he is aware of the subjectivity of his experience. We could perhaps forgive Liszt for this, since he was living in a time where synaesthesia was not regarded to exist, let alone be understood, but Messiaen's instructions come across as arrogant, and I would argue dictatorial. If he really was aware of the idiosyncrasies of his synaesthesia, what is an ensemble, and later, and audience, supposed to do with this information? Messiaen's intent in composing from his synaesthetic perceptions seems antithetical to mine. My synaesthesia is a source of inspiration and influence like any other, and happens to be the main one I work from. My hope with this portfolio is that an audience will experience the pieces viscerally, in whatever capacity as I experience their constituent parts. If I wish for an audience to experience my pieces as personally as possible, then I feel that I should not mention my synaesthesia at any point.

The header images for each text in this thesis are sketches of my synaesthetic responses to their respective topics (some are overviews, others are specific sound events and objects). However, whilst they depict roughly what I experience, the *holes* in the Niblock piece, say, they are far from accurate. When I experience sound, the colours, shapes, movements, and textures are vivid, and often occupy specific locations within the space I am in, so in drawing them, I am removing the third dimension, movement, and colour. Also, as I have only a vague understanding of what sound qualities can trigger which responses, attempting to explain my synaesthesia verbally or graphically is much like attempting to translate a language that I barely understand, whilst it is constantly changing. Despite this lack of accuracy, however, I have included the sketches in the hope that they will highlight my rationale for this project, and the varying tactics I have employed in each piece.

Basing my compositional practice so heavily on my synaesthesia is a statement or gesture of a *lack of* intent, at least in terms of dictating audience experience, and the subjectivity of my responses (as with perception in general) leads me to work from them as a means of celebrating the hopefully wide variety of responses from an audience. I mention them in this thesis to contextualise my work, but I also hope that it acts to open discussion on my, and the audience's, experiences of the portfolio. As stated above, I do not state to an audience that I base my work on synaesthesia, but I discuss it openly when asked, as a means of triggering discussion and dialogue.

Outline of Compositional Practice

My compositional practice can be described as a consolidation of free association and a slow motion, expanded stream form. I primarily internalise shapes, colours and textures (synaesthetic responses) that I perceive in other music, then use those as a means for choosing sound sources in my own work. The sounds can be vastly different from the

materials I am referencing, as my perception of shapes etc. follows little logic, beyond rough pitch areas generating certain colours, and timbres generating textures and shapes. Thus, when composing, an extra step to the process outlined by Martinez (2010) is present, in that I am rarely free-associating with a bank of samples, chords or musical notes, but rather my perceptions of them.

I employ a stream form method of composition both before and during this free-association. I collect field recordings of sounds I happen upon in my day to day life that interest me, and choose subsequent sounds based on what I feel could interact or layer with the original sound in a way that will trigger synaesthetic phenomena; below is a typical example of a source recording, with a preliminary manipulation (online only):

I bring the recordings together in a DAW (Digital Audio Workstation), and perform an improvisation of sorts; layering, filtering and mixing the sounds, later removing any that I feel are unnecessary. This method of capturing the sounds, essentially by accident, sparks a free-association: my relating the field recordings I have made with synaesthetic reactions to other sounds and music, and editing the sounds in such a way as to approximate elements of these, is much the same as how “a language student reaches a point where they are able to create original phrases by free associating with the phrases they have internalised” (Martinez 2010). This summarises the micro stream, and the next step utilises the meso stream.

I create original pieces by free-associating with my perceptions, as described above. For example, in *dánbeag #3*, there is a high-pass filtered crackle or fizzing texture. I created the sound by loading a sample, pieces of card being dropped onto a desk, into a Max/MSP granulator patch, recording the output of the patch, and applying a high-pass filter. The resulting sound is a creative response to a texture in Francisco López’s *Untitled #218* (2009). It, similarly, is a crackling, fizzing texture, likely high-pass filtered, but I have referenced my synaesthetic perception of the sound (white hot/tinted yellow spots flickering on a grey background) when creating the texture in *dánbeag #3*, rather than the sound itself. I also do not know what López used as source material in *Untitled #218*.

López’s description of his composition process in *In the Field* parallels my own methods, and could be called a stream form method of working,

My ideas come from the sounds themselves not from a pre-determined compositional plan or to represent a specific narrative. When I start I don’t have an idea of what I’m going to do structurally. So any transformation comes from the sounds themselves, it’s a thrilling process because I never know what’s going to happen. I always get something that I didn’t imagine from the process of transforming and moulding the sounds, and that transformation suggests something else. I listen to the sounds and follow what they tell me.

López (Lane ed.), 2013, p. 104

My practice follows this intuitive method of composition, with the added step of my synaesthetic responses to sounds; the stream form method during the free association manifests itself in how I edit the sounds. I have no real plan when composing, but arrange and edit new layers of sound relative to others (usually an original field recording that serves as a background or canvas), similar to Pip Dickens' method of painting; "...each layer of the painting process being balanced against earlier layers resulting in an overall finalised and finished visual mix." (Adkins & d'Escriván, 2013, p. 7).

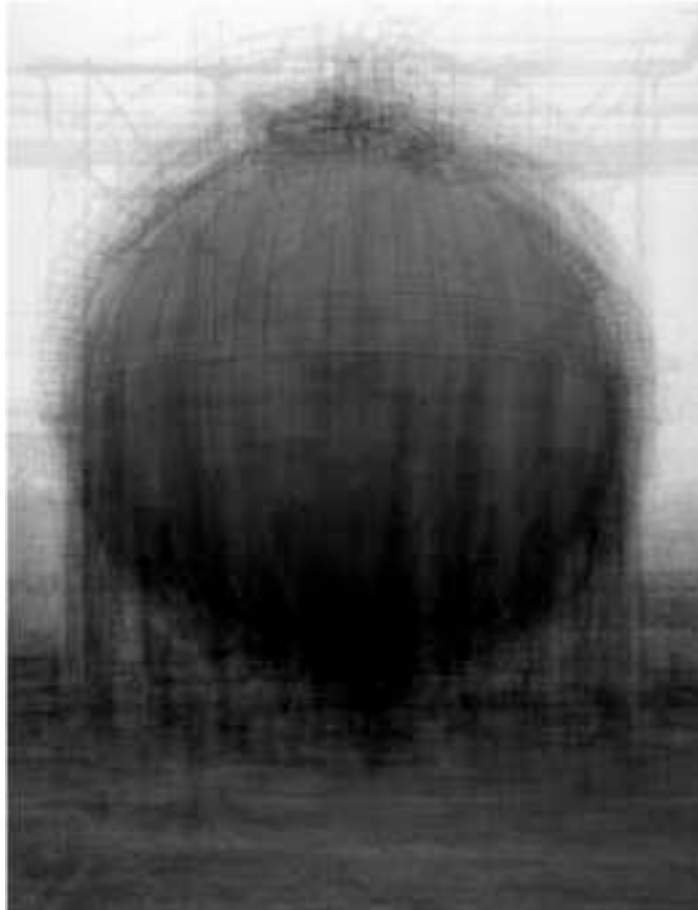
My photographic practice, when composing these pieces, differs slightly. Similar to my gathering of sounds, I photograph objects and locations I happen upon that I consider to be interesting: the interest can lie in anything from a cracked brick to lighting, or general shapes and outlines of objects. I then attempt to create abstract images in-camera as much as possible; a photographic improvisation, of sorts. I experiment with exposure times, shutter speeds, ISO settings, crude tilt shifting (removing the lens and moving it around in front of the mirror, morphing the image), and camera movements. Often, I use images where the subject is abstracted almost to the point of being unrecognisable. Here, there is a parallel with my perception of sounds; I find myself drawn to abstractions that feature colours, shapes or textures that are either similar to my synaesthesia, or that are free from any concrete representation, although this does not necessarily mean that I match images with my synaesthetic response to sound, as I will discuss in the commentary for *14AB2*. Below is an example photograph:



Associations with other photographers also come into play. In *dánbeag #3*, the central image is a false multiple exposure of an industrial storage tank, akin to Idris Khan's *Every... Bernd and Hilla Becher Spherical Type Gasholders* (2004). Likewise, the photographs in *.haul / S'* second piece, an open-titled work to which I refer as a pair of brackets - () - can be compared with Wolfgang Tillmans' monochrome photographs, such as *quiet mind* and *Time, Action and Fear* (both 2005). Tillmans' photographs are part of a larger series of monochrome works that intend to evoke a number of differing emotions in the viewer, and encourage closer, or perhaps, reduced, viewing of the images;

Tillmans'... near-monochrome, photographs (all 2005) can be seen to evoke mystery ('quiet mind')...a sense of place ('Berlin Woods')...to display all sorts of surface incident (the color-field atmospherics of 'Time, Action and Fear')...to create a feeling of dislocation that can be either foreboding ('Zuversicht')...or euphoric ('they are this way')...and to seemingly perform before us (the fluid dance of lines which animate 'it's only love give it away')

Nickas 2006: xii



Idris Khan: *Every...Bernd and Hilla Becher Spherical Type Gasholders* (2004)



Above: Wolfgang Tillmans: *Freischwimmer* 83 (2005)

The intended effect of () is all and none of these; the audience is encouraged only to reflect on the piece's components in a similar way to how photographer Uta Barth intends her work to "make you aware of your own activity of looking, instead of losing your attention to thoughts about what it is that you are looking at" (Lee, 2004, p. 36). In anecdotal feedback of a screening of the piece, audience members said that the images seemed monolithic, intimidating, or even moving, even though the photographs do not move.

In terms of technique and method, my photographic practice more closely resembles that of street photographer Daido Moriyama. In a Tate video, Moriyama explains that he undertakes little to no planning when photographing, instead wandering the streets. "As I walk through it [the world], my senses are reaching out, and I am drawn to all sorts of things." (Tate, 2012). Moriyama also appears to employ a stream form method of editing his photobooks, as well as a general lack of intention in his work,

There is no definite rule on where you should start and finish...I am not even sure if these pages should have been like this, but it just happened this way... I think that the most important thing that photography can do is to relate both the photographer and the viewer's memories.

Tate, 2012

A further association with Moriyama occurs in the groups of monochrome images in (), and *nialas rud* (*nach é seo rud ar bith*), the final piece in the portfolio. In *nialas rud*, the images are photographs of telephone lines taken at dusk, converted to monochrome. Moriyama says of monochrome (specifically, black and white), that,

Monochrome has stronger elements of abstraction... There is perhaps an element of taking you to another place. Black and white has that physical effect on me... Colour is something more vulgar; because the colour is making the decisions, it feels vulgar, and that seems to me to be the difference.

Tate, 2012

Once taken, my images are sorted and organised into sets that might be used in a draft of the piece. I also browse through my existing catalogue of photographs; occasionally including old photographs often taken with no specific purpose in mind (e.g., the images in *14AB2*). Sound and image are brought together, continuing the stream form method. I make revisions on either or both components if I feel they are necessary, produce a second draft, and continue the process until I am satisfied. Again this refers back to Dickens' method of painting. The original images may not appear at all in the finished

piece, as in (), but their influence is present in my subsequent compositional decisions. Two draft photographs are below:



Top: () draft image
Bottom: *dánbeag #3* draft image

Use of Photographs; Studium and Punctum

In her seminal work *On Photography*, Susan Sontag describes the photograph as,

...a neat slice of time, not a flow...Each still photograph is a privileged moment, turned into a slim object that one can keep and look at again...to see something in the form of a photograph is to encounter a potential object of fascination. The ultimate wisdom of the photographic image is to say: 'There is the surface. Now think - or rather feel, intuit - what is beyond it...' ...Photographs, which cannot themselves explain anything, are inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation, and fantasy.

Sontag, 1977, p. 17-18, 23

As discussed, my aim is for an audience to experience my pieces for their individual components, forming their own meaning, if they choose. I use photographs rather than film to emphasise this point: a static image can remain indefinitely for the viewer to experience, whereas film is defined by Sontag as, "...a stream of under selected images, each of which cancels its predecessor." (Sontag, 1977, p. 17-18).

However, as music is a temporal medium, and it is impossible to create music that freezes time as photography does, I have collected sets of photographs for each piece, and experimented with various transitions and transformations, the resulting pieces produced and presented as video files. My work is not strictly photography (a viewer cannot take the photograph away with them once the piece is over, neither are the pieces physical objects, and they do not last indefinitely, but rather a time set during composition), but it is photographic, and my use of photographs in video format is an attempt at reconciling the conflict between photography's privileged moment and music's temporal nature.

I have been developing my photographic practice whilst meditating on Roland Barthes' notion of Studium and Punctum. As my photographs rarely feature a concrete subject, and any subjects that are present are heavily distorted, I suggest that my photographs, as a general rule, do not contain a Studium (cultural or linguistic interpretation). "It is by Studium that I am interested in so many photographs...for it is culturally (this connotation is present in Studium) that I participate in the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions." (Barthes, 1980, p. 26). The matter of Punctum, any element that breaks the Studium, causing a personal, emotional reaction in the viewer in my photographs is more ambiguous,

A Latin word exists to designate this wound, this prick, this mark made by a pointed instrument...This second element which will disturb the Studium I shall therefore call Punctum; for Punctum is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole - and also a cast of the dice. A photograph's Punctum is that accident which pricks me...

Barthes, 1980, p. 26-27

To meet the aims of this project, there is little cultural information codified in the images (with the exception of 14AB2, discussed later). I am hesitant to say that there is no cultural

information, for a number of reasons: blurred cityscapes in *14AB2*, industrial storage tanks in *dánbeag #3*, telephone lines in *nialas rud*, and lensless images reminiscent of Tillmans' monochrome works and Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* in (). These images, not to mention the fact that they are photographs at all, imply a broad range of cultural connotations. This is both beneficial and detrimental to my argument: there is no fixed cultural information suggested within the images, leaving the audience hypothetically able to free-associate when they view the works, but nevertheless, cultural connotations, however vague and unformed, are still, and always will be, present; "it is always something that is represented" (Barthes, 1980, p. 28). The lack of intention in my work steers the pieces towards no representation. I would not say that the pieces are completely devoid of intention or representation, because a total lack of representation or intention is most likely impossible. I would argue instead that my pieces lack specificity, as a result of the level of abstraction of materials, as well as presentation: non-descriptive programme notes, obscure titles, and lack of supplementary information.

Through conducting this project, I am yet to find a solution to this contradiction regarding *Studium*, and indeed am yet to conclude whether a solution is required. I would suggest that whereas Barthes is assuming that all photographs intentionally represent, and thus lead to the viewer seeking a *Punctum*, mine are seeking a method of capturing or creating an image that is as free from representation as possible. Sontag's suggestion that "what seeing through photographs really invites is an acquisitive relation to the world that nourishes aesthetic awareness and promotes emotional detachment." (Sontag, 1977, p. 111) is applicable, and parallels Uta Barth's aim of making the viewer conscious of the act of seeing, rather than the object they are viewing.

The issue of *Punctum* is less problematic. On the surface, my photographs appear to lack *Punctum*; I doubt that many viewers of my work would find blurred photographs of telephone lines particularly wounding or effecting, for example. I would, however, argue that the absence of specificity in my photographs allows the viewer/spectator to construct or uncover their own *Punctum* more readily than Barthes proposes. The examples given in *Camera Lucida* seem to be responses based on possible cultural connotations within the photographs, such as the boy with the crossed arms in Nadar's *Savorgnan de Brazza* (1882) (Barthes, 1980, p. 52), below.



My hope with the works in this portfolio is that any element of the sound or image could trigger a personal memory or meaning for the spectator/listener, the abstract textures (etc.) in the sound and/or image a mediatory and enabling step between the piece and any potential meaning. This is also similar to how I free-associate my synaesthetic responses to previously heard music, rather than the music itself, during the composition of each piece. As a side-note, the sequential arrangement of the images in all pieces except *14AB2* can also suggest a stream form viewing for the audience, and by extension, a stream form formation of Punctum, or puncta, meaning(s) in the photographs.

Despite this argument seeming to contradict Barthes' description of Punctum, I would nevertheless argue that it is in line with his overall analysis of photography. In the early pages of *Camera Lucida*, he states that the photograph is what it is, rather than what it represents (Houlihan, 2004),

...the photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially. In the photograph, the event is never transcended for the sake of something else: the Photograph always leads the corpus I need back to the body I see; it is the absolute Particular, the sovereign Contingency, matte and somehow stupid, the This...the Photograph is never anything but an antiphon of "Look," "See," "Here it is"...A specific photograph... is never distinguished from its referent...

Barthes, 1980, p. 4-5

Thus, when I present highly abstract photographs (and sounds) with no external information: no programme note, list of source material, or discernible subject, then the

viewer has no choice but to either reject the photograph, finding no meaning, or decode a meaning that is personal to them, via a free-association triggered by the aesthetic details of the piece(s). Douglas Harper's (Harper, 2002, p. 22) findings from his research into photo elicitation summarise the result I hope to achieve from using these photographs,

...the photographs become something like a Rorschach ink blot in which people of different cultures spin out their respective worlds of meaning. The procedure is fuelled by the radical but simple idea that two people standing side by side, looking at identical objects, see different things.

Harper, 2002, p. 22

It is worth noting that my aesthetic choices are guided almost entirely by my experiences with synaesthesia, which I will explain further.

Micro, Meso and Macro Streams as Compositional Tactics

The second half of the portfolio, (*dánbeag #3* and *nialas rud*), embraces sonic artefacts, imperfections, and accidents. The foundation sounds in both pieces are field recordings crudely captured on smartphones and low cost digital recorders. They are not recorded with high quality equipment due to my extension of the stream form method into the recording process (the meso stream); I capture sounds I happen upon, and smartphones and handheld recorders are a practical and convenient method of recording.

After capture, the recordings are slowed down by anything from four to twenty-five times. Here, I am fascinated by the sound objects that are emphasised, or that were otherwise inaudible before treatment. From this point the sounds are usually left intact, perhaps with some light electronic treatment: equalisation, reverb and light distortion. Many of the recordings I have used feature a large amount of background hiss and noise, and I choose, on occasion, to draw attention to this. Or I will choose a portion of the recording to which I find myself drawn. This process continues with further layers of sound, until I happen on a version of the piece that satisfies me, producing significantly vivid synaesthetic phenomena. This process is similar for each piece, and forms the micro stream(s).

My leaving the sounds intact, or with restrained editing following speed alteration (in *dánbeag #3* I have cut up one recording, and spread it across the piece, for reasons explained in that piece's commentary), is a deliberate compositional choice that I find liberating. It removes a considerable amount of decision making, forcing me to accept the sounds that are present (and any resulting accidents in the piece), relinquish control, reflect more deeply on the sounds I have chosen, and ultimately reconcile the pieces with my recording methods. I refer to this quote from John Cage on how I wish to experience sound,

I love the activity of sound. What it does, is it gets louder and quieter, and it gets higher and lower, and it gets longer and shorter. I'm completely satisfied with that. I don't need sound to talk to me...People expect listening to be more than listening...sometimes they speak of...the meaning of sound. When I talk about music, it finally comes to peoples' minds that I'm talking about sound that doesn't mean anything. That is not inner...and they say...'you mean it's just sounds?' Meaning that for something to just be a sound is to be useless. Whereas I love sounds just as they are, and I have no need for them to be anything more.

Cage, 1991, "Listen" (Écoute)

Cage's idea that sounds don't need to mean anything, and that they are intrinsically meaningless, is what I aim to emphasise with this project. I wish to pass this aspect of the composition process on to the audience in the Macro stream, constructing their own meanings and/or significances, if any, by treating the pieces not as objects, but as "triggers for experiences", as Roy Ascott suggests (Eno, 1996). If I am composing and presenting my work with no explicit references or information, then it follows that the audience is left to form their own significance(s), and my hope in using abstract materials is that they will free-associate with their previous experiences to achieve this. Thus, it could be said that my pieces continue to be composed and codified by an audience, adhering to Ascott's idea, and continuing the stream form composition method beyond my role in the pieces.

This macro stream results from reflection on my work prior to this portfolio; the opposite end of the stream to audience experience. My early works, pieces for electric guitar and electronics, were often unfocussed and cluttered with dozens of samples/field recordings and effects (see online for an example recording).

My intention with these pieces was to encourage reduced listening, and whilst it was a frustrating period, I find the pieces directionless and over-saturated, I now consider these guitar pieces to be valuable experiments, in that they mark the beginning of the macro stream; reflecting on what sounds truly fascinated me, and removing all extraneous layers.

This summary of the three tiers I am proposing has its limits, however. The meso stream currently represents my referencing of previous pieces in a given project when composing, as well as my gathering of sounds. Could these be considered individual meso streams in their own right? How many previous works does one refer to before encroaching on the macro stream? My recording method also reaches into the macro stream, muddying the water further.

Similarly, the micro stream may or may not have more than one layer: compositional decisions in software with already collected sounds is the basis of the micro stream, but would further collection of sounds based on these decisions be considered a meso-micro stream, since I am stepping away from the confines of the piece, back into the wider environment?

These are issues on which, at present, I am undecided. Three tiers seems apt at describing different stages or levels of intuitive composition, and I am hesitant to develop a kind of gestalt model of streams. I fear that if sub-streams were added, then the process of cataloguing the stages of composing intuitively would become self-defeating; intuitive composition by its nature is not logical or methodical, and at present I have proposed these streams primarily as a means of reflecting upon my own practice, with a view of opening dialogue with other composers who work intuitively, rather than compartmentalising each thought process and developing a compositional genre.

Fixed Media

My wish to relinquish control and accept sonic accidents steered me to producing fixed media pieces for this project. The guitar works were composed to be performed, and as such, I wrote Max/MSP patches in which I attempted to control all aspects of them. The resulting performance environment this created was stressful, and as such I chose fixed media as the presentation format for this project. I use this term flexibly: to date I have performed () via live diffusion, with fixed image and looped sound files.

Presenting in fixed media also encouraged critical listening during the composition process. Knowing that the sounds I chose for the final version of each piece would not change, unlike in the early guitar works, in which I would frequently swap out field recordings for live performance, I found myself taking more care over placement of sounds, general production, and ultimately using fewer layers of sounds. This strategy also applies for the photographs in these pieces. I meditated on colours, textures and other details, choosing photographs that I felt formed coherent sets.

Even so, composition of the portfolio did not always require a huge amount of time or labour. An advantage of my synaesthesia is, since my response to sound and image is so immediate, I can compare sounds with sounds, images with images, and sounds with images, quickly, meaning that I can potentially sort through hundreds of photographs and dozens of recordings in short spaces of time. The only decisions I now make before beginning a composition are which sound(s) or image(s) I determine to be interesting enough to begin a piece, and whether I want the sound and image of a particular piece to compliment each other in terms of my synaesthetic responses, or simply occur simultaneously.

However, there is a contradiction here. The phenomenology of synaesthesia prevents me from experiencing sounds and images as isolated objects. A slowed down recording of a library interior is never just the sound of pages being turned, rain falling on the roof, and keyboards being typed on, but also an ever-rotating pool of dark blue; brown, white and grey particles and entities breaking through the surface. Neither is one blurred

photograph transitioning to another via flash frame just two photographs, but a low rumble and scratching texture, transitioning with trilling pulses, ascending in implied pitch.

That is the main provocation for this project. As outlined previously, my perception of sounds and images is complex and illogical, and is visceral enough that it often renders any attempt at narrative or intended meaning fruitless. I have attempted to embrace this by utilising stream form composition practices, undertaking reduced listening and viewing of my materials, and removing as much external reference from the pieces as possible, in the hope that an audience is able to experience them for the objects that they are, and as a secondary concern, perhaps construct or stumble upon a meaning for themselves.

14AB2

15728-15728
00011-00011
21793-21793
53535-53535
65866-65866

14AB2 is an audio-photographic installation. The piece is built on three simultaneous drones, spectrally processed guitar samples. The source materials are between five and fifteen seconds, extended to around 60 seconds each, and low-pass filtered. In removing high frequencies, I am resisting any reference to other spectrally processed electronic sounds, and blurring the harmonic content of the samples. The resulting texture is three drones that clash harmonically. The harmonic content and relationships of the individual samples is unimportant. The resulting cluster of chords form what is, in effect, a blank canvas on which an audience member can project their experience of the piece. The blurred, fuzzy timbre of this compound drone forms the foundation of the soundscape, and aesthetically is akin to Monty Adkins' *Five Panels* suite, particularly *Panel No. 2, To Ethan*.

These guitar samples are found sounds from my computer's hard drive; some are unused materials from old projects, others' intended purposes have been forgotten. This stumbling upon old source materials draws a convenient parallel with the other audio in the piece: numbers stations, and demonstrates the macro stream; I have used numbers station recordings in works prior to this project, and continue to be fascinated by them.



Duga-3 or 'Russian Woodpecker' shortwave transmitter, nr. Chernobyl, Ukraine.

Numbers stations are globally transmitted shortwave radio stations, broadcasting bursts of numbers, morse code, or synthesised melodies. Whilst their geographical origins can

usually be estimated, their purpose and content is unknown. Analysis is speculative, but the general consensus is that their purpose is, or was, for espionage. In a 2000 NPR feature on numbers stations, they are described as,

Any of several hundred shortwave radio broadcasters, all of which are using high powered, big transmitters, large antennas, macro coverage...which do nothing except broadcast meaningless streams of numbers. They never say why they're doing it; they never say who they are.

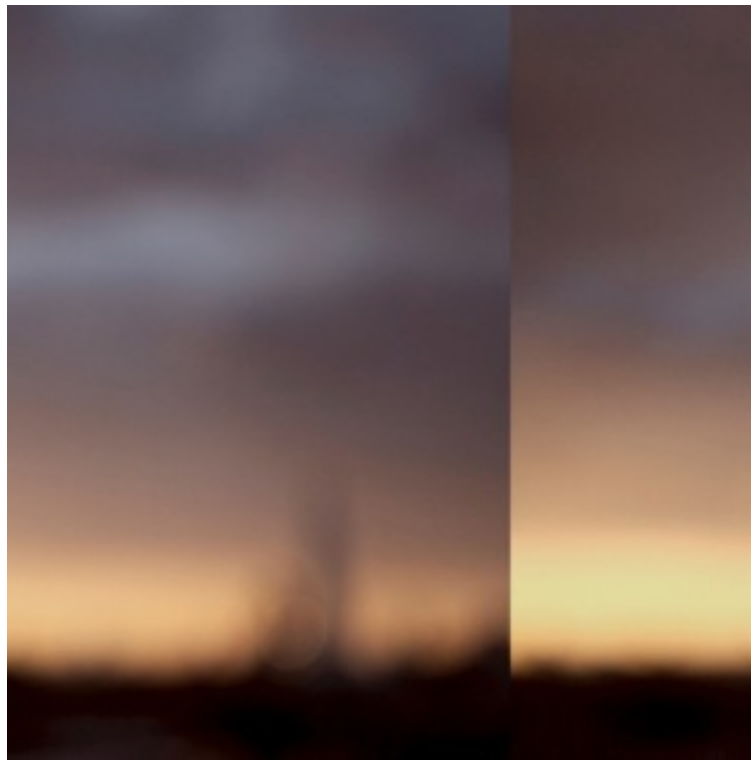
NPR, 2000

And by Hugh Stegman in the same program, as, "messages to somebody. We think it's spies."

The macro method of broadcasting these messages renders the recipient impossible to determine. Combine this with the unknown content of the broadcasts, and numbers station broadcasts essentially become abstracted messages. I find myself drawn to this high level of ambiguity, and giving the illusion that there is a message hidden within 14AB2. The audio clips, taken from numbers station compilation *The Conet Project* (1997), are parts of longer recordings, but have not been decoded, and I have not coded any message within the broadcasts that I have used. The title, however, does contain a message, but neither the content, nor the fact that there is a message encoded, is revealed to the audience. Creator of *The Conet Project* Akin Fernandez states in a BBC interview (Fanshawe, 2005) that, to his knowledge, no numbers station has ever been decoded. He is generally regarded as an expert on the subject, and no government has confirmed or denied use of numbers stations.

The photographs have been processed with a Hex editor (software that exposes the code of the image). After some experimentation, I settled on a form of editing in which I selected a large piece of code, and arbitrarily moved it to another point. I previously experimented with adding more characters to the code, and copy/pasting small parts of the code dozens or hundreds of times. As Hex editing is a destructive process, often the resulting images were either completely destroyed, or were glitched beyond my personal tastes. This process (micro stream) continued until I was satisfied by the resulting image.

As I do not possess knowledge of coding, the results of this method of processing images were not predictable, but often, moving one large section of code elsewhere would result in several large tiles in the image; I settled on this as it satisfied my preferences, and also tips a nod towards the disruptive solid colour panels in Uta Barth's *white blind (bright red)* (Lee, 2004, p.37), the sharp lines echoing the disruption of the drones by the numbers stations.



Top: 14AB2 centre image

Bottom: *white blind (bright red)* - Uta Barth (2002)

My aim with this processing was to further abstract the already blurred photographs, so that it is clear that the subject of them is not specific or necessarily identifiable, and can be interpreted as anything, -one, place, time, and so on.

The images in the piece roughly correlate with my synaesthetic response to the drone track; the colours contained within each image are an approximate representation of the colours I perceive their respective drones to be. In terms of seeing sounds in the images, the flicker effects project a soft rumble of noise, similar to the background noise in some of the numbers stations audio clips.

This synaesthetic matching was an unintended aspect of the process of producing *14AB2*, realised only when presenting the work. I have used this matching as a starting point for a close examination of my experiences of synaesthesia, and I am now concerned with producing works that attempt to trigger synaesthetic responses in myself, and free-associations (including synaesthetic responses) in an audience. Upon reflection, this meso stream feeds into the subsequent pieces in the portfolio, but also becomes a macro

thread: I realise that my previous work subconsciously attempted this to some degree (I often described my process as simply making music that was beautiful, or made me feel something), and I have become so fascinated with the unpredictability and wide range of experiences of my pieces that it will likely influence future works for some time to come.

Despite the fact that I produced *14AB2* as an abstract piece, numbers stations and *The Conet Project* are reasonably well known, so in using them, Cold War connotations are unavoidable. Whilst I avoided using morse or musical numbers stations, assuming that they would be more recognisable or associative to an audience (particularly musical broadcasts; of which many are folk tunes), vocal numbers stations are perhaps the most well known form of these broadcasts, which would further hinder the lack of intention within the piece.

Thus, *14AB2* has become a test piece for the ideas I am exploring in this project. The numbers stations audio is, in parts, synchronous with text that appears superimposed on two of the images, whereas the images are processed with various lighting effects in video editing software, that give the illusion that the sound and image are connected, a clear example of Chion's audio-visual contract,

Certain...videos and films demonstrate that synchresis can even work out of thin air - that is, with images and sounds that strictly speaking have nothing to do with each other, forming monstrous yet inevitable and irresistible agglomerations in our perception... Synchresis is Pavlovian.

Chion, 1994, p. 63

I have endeavoured to work with asynchronous sound and image since producing *14AB2*, precisely because of this. Chion's assertion that synchronous sound and image is Pavlovian feeds into what I feel the finished product of *14AB2* is. Even though it was not intended, the audience will most likely view the image and sound as being related. Whilst this is true of the numbers stations audio and text, I was not intending it to be true of the drones and photographs. When gaining informal feedback from audience members, the drones' apparent complimenting of the visual effect, along with the voices, is mentioned above all else.

I also wish to remove audio-visual hierarchy from my work; producing pieces in which the sound and image are equally important (or unimportant). The flicker effects on the images in *14AB2* can give the illusion of either the image affecting the sound, or the sound affecting the image; however it is likely that most audience members would experience the sound as diegetic, and an effect or by-product of the image. I feel that asynchronous (non-diegetic) sound and image works around this. If the two do not appear to influence each other in any obvious way, I speculate that an audience would experience them both as equal, the sound not simply "satisfying simple curiosity" (Eisenstein et al: 1928/1985). If this aim of producing works where sound and image are unrelated is achieved, perhaps my work would better suit the label of audio and visual rather than audio/visual.

Whilst this apparent discontinuity creates what could be called a semantic gap for the viewer/listener to fill (Tagg 2012), my hope is that neither aspect of the piece will be interpreted as more important than the other. An audience member may decide on, or perceive a hierarchy when experiencing my work, but I do not wish to force any such hierarchy, and none is implicit in successive works. This meso stream thread extends through the remainder of the portfolio, and will be discussed further in subsequent commentaries.

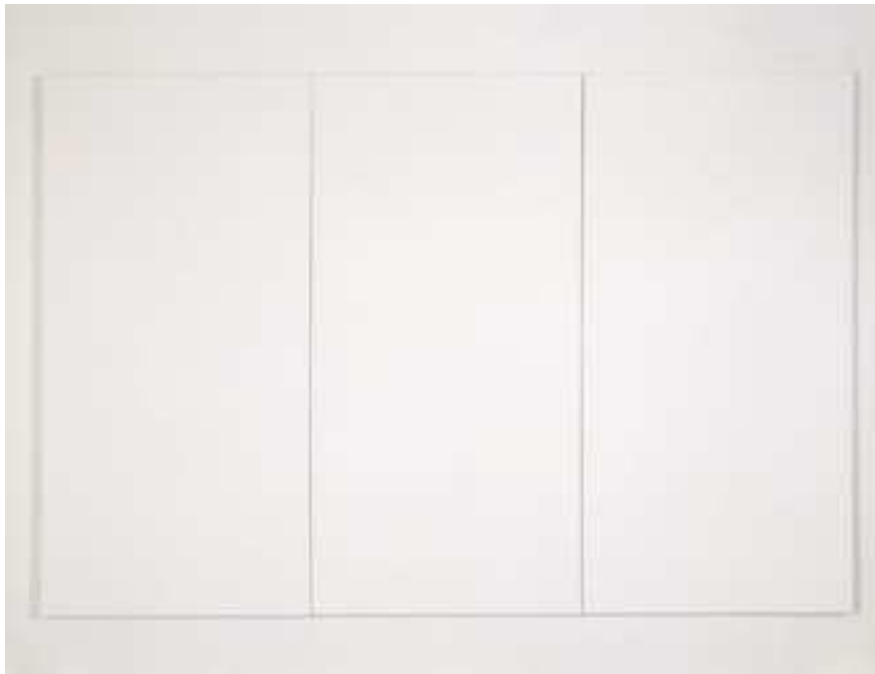
Piece No. 2, Otherwise Known as '()'

No subject/
No Image/
No taste/
No object/
No beauty/
No message/
No talent/
No technique.../
No idea... (Cage, 1951)

Blank, tuneless, without message, and with no fixed title, () utilises erased photographs and pre-recorded noises to encourage reduced listening and viewing on sounds and images that, at a glance, may seem without interest. Loosely based on Robert Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* (1951) (Gann, 2010, p. 156), () employs a Cagean approach to sound and image: the materials of the piece are sourced from a broad range of instruments, objects and locations, without discrimination or hierarchy (Cage, 1978, p. 14).

() is not the title of the piece. Instead, it is an invitation for the audience to devise a title in line with their experience. This can take any form: a string of utterances, text, one of the piece's photographs, or any other method that they choose; the piece can even remain title-less.

The images in the piece are photographs captured with a lensless camera. The absence of a lens resulting in the subject being obscured to the point of essentially being erased; a smear of colour the only remnant. This extreme distortion of the subject renders it unimportant. Instead, images are arranged by their hues: four trios of images are displayed, becoming progressively lighter throughout the piece. The colours themselves are free of representation; the increasing brightness only magnifying the increasing volume of the sounds.



Top: Robert Rauschenberg: *White Painting [three panel]* (1951)

Bottom: () screenshot, fourth trio of photographs

The sounds in the piece have been similarly chosen from a range of sources. Junk shop records, paper, bubble wrap and a cheap violin have all been repurposed; their subtle noises extracted and layered to create a compound sound source or pseudo-instrument (Chion, 1983, p. 56) (as with the images, the sources themselves are unimportant; only reflection on the sounds is important). The amplitude increases over the duration of the piece, amplifying the increasing brightness of the images, as the increasing brightness of the images amplifies the increasing amplitude of the sounds.

As with *14AB2*, it is my intention that () has no implicit meaning or frame of reference. This intent, or lack thereof, can be summarised by examining Susan Sontag's comparison of photography with Paul Valery's ideas on writing,

Although a photograph may be said to record or show or present, it does not ever, properly speaking, 'describe'... Valery suggests '...the writer who depicts a landscape

or a face, no matter how skillful he may be at his craft, will suggest as many different versions as he has readers.' The same is true of a photograph.

Sontag, 1977, p. 145

Sontag's analysis suggests that a viewer (or reader) of a photograph is able to, and will, extract their own understanding and experience from the information a photograph shows, as such a photograph does not require the ability to describe. I would further this argument by suggesting that it is not only unnecessary for the author of a photograph to describe or explain its meaning, but that any description they do attempt is detrimental to the viewer's experience of the image. As Roland Barthes writes in *The Death of the Author* (1977), "It is language which speaks, not the author; to write is... to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs', and not 'me'" (Barthes, 1977, p. 143).

This line of reasoning is somewhat contradictory, however. It could be argued that the act of composing the piece is an attempt at description, i.e., my refusal to attribute any meaning could, in itself, be considered a description of the piece as abstract. I have attempted nothing more than presenting the materials as they are, in a form and structure that leaves as much opportunity for the audience to form their own experience of () as possible.

A lack of hierarchy is central to (), and the aesthetic of the piece is a direct result of the issues that arose in *14AB2* (meso stream). The blank photographs and crackle/pop/fizz sound sources attempt to remove it from the convention of sound being an effect of an action, or image. Any link between the sound and image is tenuous, perhaps the record crackle is the background; the other three sounds the photographs, perhaps not, possible links between sound and image are neither suggested nor hidden from the audience, but there is no causal or diegetic relationship.

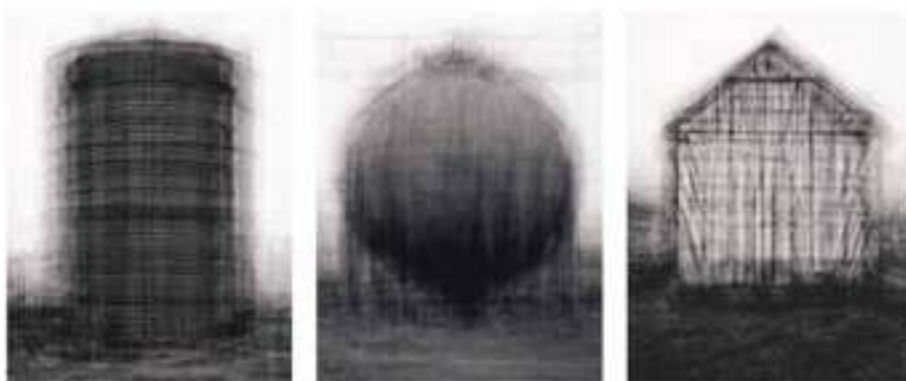
I have looked towards Phill Niblock's series of films, *The Movement of People Working* (2003), regarding the sound/image relationship. Niblock's films are comprised of long sequences of workers performing repetitive tasks; the tight framing of shots depersonalising the subject, and removing the performed task from context. The films form a vague relationship with Niblock's dense drone music, but their exact purpose, if any, is unknown; the films remain asynchronous, and free of narrative (at a performance at Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival 2013, the films ran for several minutes either side of the music entering and fading out). In () sound and image are asynchronous, besides the end of the piece, sound and image cutting in sync. I have used flash frames to transition sets of photographs, contrasting the slow fades of sound, in an attempt to emphasise the lack of relationship between sound and image.

dánbeag #3

Whereas () featured erased photographs onto which an audience could project their own meaning, *dánbeag #3* features as its central image an industrial storage tank. The use of these photographs, two blurred images and one false multiple exposure, is a reflection on the issues that arose from both *14AB2* and ().

In the commentary for (), I discussed Sontag's suggestion that photographs cannot describe any explicit thing, rather, different viewers will read what the photograph shows (Sontag, 1977, p. 145), through their respective lenses. Regardless of my intent, a viewer will not necessarily experience my photographs in any specific way. Further, I would submit that it is impossible to compose or produce anything with zero intention; the act of making is itself a form of intent. Thus, in *dánbeag #3*, I have experimented using photographs in which the subject is much more visible than in the rest of the portfolio. The outermost images have been blurred in-camera, whereas the multiple exposure (emerging from an in-camera blurred storage tank) has been produced in software, overlaying two photographs of the tank several times. I have created this multiple exposure to dismantle signification from the object, comparable to how Idris Khan's *Every...Bernd and Hilla Becher composites* (2004) attempt to add a warmth to the clinical nature of the original Becher typologies (Lange, 2005, p. 46-51).

Khan's composite works also seem to imply a blurred or confused motion in static images, and the storage tank echoes this to a degree: the multiple layers shivering, much like my synaesthetic responses (Macro stream), and perhaps simulating the multiple readings and puncta possible with an audience.



Idris Khan - *Every...Bernd and Hilla Becher Composites (Spherical Type Gasholders/Prison Type Gasholders/Gable Sided Houses)* (2004)



dánbeag #3 centre image.

The photographs were converted to monochrome, and high contrasts applied to further obscure the subject. This use of monochrome and high contrast serves two purposes. First, it serves to maintain an ambiguity in the image. Daido Moriyama's states of black and white, and ambiguity in photography,

"Monochrome has stronger elements of abstraction or symbolism. There is perhaps an element of taking you to another place...Colour is something more vulgar; because the colour is making the decisions, it feels vulgar, and that seems to me to be the difference."

Tate, 2012

I would resist saying that the photograph of the storage tank is a signifier of anything deeper than my lack of specificity in my pieces (if we indulge in cliché, perhaps an empty vessel or tabula rasa), but I agree with Moriyama's statement in that, since monochrome removes a significant amount of information from the image, it shows less to the audience, and therefore allows freer associations. The surrounding images of the storage tank are tilt-shift photographs of sky; the large amount of negative space caused by light leak (due to the lens being removed and moved around in front of the sensor), which I hope amplifies the lack of representation in the centre image. These images are a further reference to Robert Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning Drawing* (1953) (Katz, 2006); the excessive light reaching the camera's sensor essentially erasing the subject in front of the lens, similar to () (meso stream).



Top: Robert Rauschenberg - *Erased de Kooning Drawing* (1953)
Bottom: *dánbeag #3* outer image

Second, my use of monochrome, high contrast, and multiple exposure techniques in the images is a further reflection on Sontag's notion that photographs lack the ability to describe, or evoke. If all a photograph is able to do is to show or record, then I feel I can take a certain degree of agency here. Even after editing, the photographs are quite clearly photographs of a storage tank, so I am free to edit the images in such a way. I am not interested in simply depicting an object in a typological style, and if there are going to be as many readings of the photograph as there are viewers (Sontag, 1977, p. 145) (and by extension, as many puncta), then my editing of the photographs is a comment on this ambiguity, and perhaps a more explicit invitation to the audience to view the images

as they wish. They can assume the tank is symbolic or representative of something, or not. The editing emphasises this agency I have passed on to the audience.

Sonically, *dánbeag #3* draws influence from a range of practitioners. As mentioned in the outline of my practice, Francisco López's *Untitled #218* (2009), or more specifically, my perception of specific sound objects within, has dictated many compositional decisions. A high-pass filtered crackle is present in *Untitled #218*, which I perceive as white hot/tinted yellow spots flickering on a grey background. I took this synaesthetic response, and added a high-pass filtered crackle into *dánbeag #3*. My perception of that sound is somewhat similar to López's, but the colours are more muted.

The background sounds are a recording of an indoor space; the library example given in the introductory essay,

A slowed down recording of a library interior is never just the sound of pages being turned, rain falling on the roof, and keyboards being typed on, but also an ever-rotating pool of dark blue; brown, white and grey particles and entities breaking through the surface. Neither is one blurred photograph transitioning to another via flash frame just two photographs, but a low rumble and scratching texture, transitioning with trilling pulses, ascending in implied pitch.

Maguire, 2014

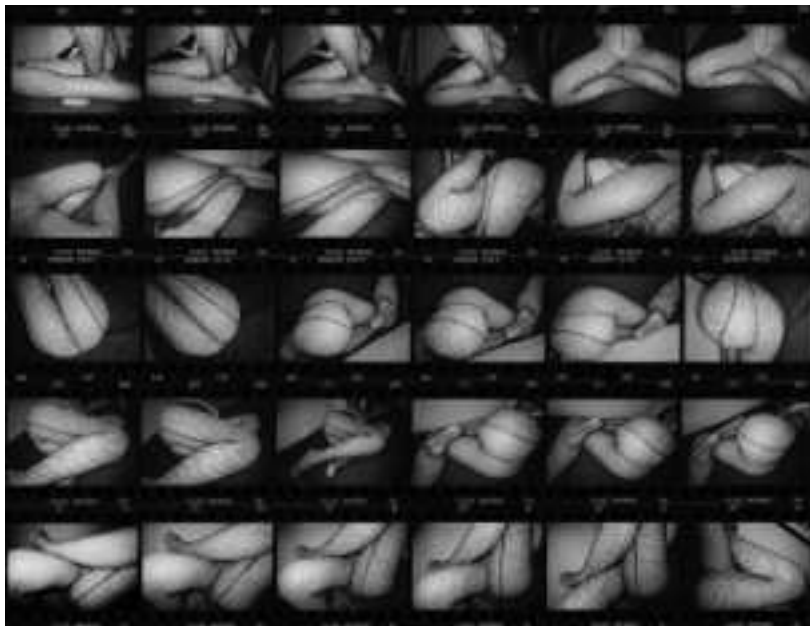
There are several layers of filtered noise in this background, also. High-pass, lo-pass, and resonant filtered noise picking up on a rough pitch in the library recording, serve to thicken this background, deepening the blue hues, adding purples, and boosting the intensity of the attack sounds.

These attack sounds were achieved by taking a short iPhone voice memo recording of an unknown sound source, slowed down approximately twenty-five times. It was then cut up into small chunks/groups of attacks, and spread across the piece. I originally intended to resist this kind of sound manipulation, but when these attacks were treated with stacked reverb effects, they triggered an intense synaesthetic reaction; large, shivering discs, very similar to the *holes* I explain in the introduction to this thesis. This example of the macro stream illustrates how my practice is continually adaptable and morphing, much like the holes themselves. On a micro level, these discs also served to amplify the main background sound; the entities mentioned in the introductory essay essentially smaller shivering discs.

nialas rud (nach é seo rud ar bith)

The final audio/photographic piece in this portfolio continues the stream form method of composition I have utilised in the project, referencing all previous pieces, sonically and visually.

As with the rest of the portfolio, I have arranged the photographs in triptych, a visual paraphrase of Daido Moriyama's *Labyrinth* (2012) photobook that became a common meso stream thread for all pieces. *Labyrinth* is comprised of contact sheets made from disparate rolls of film, offering "the viewer...a deep immersion...a chance to lose oneself in a labyrinth of images, continually moving forward, on an unknown path toward an uncertain destination." (Aperture, 2012).



Above: Pages from *Labyrinth*

The sounds in *nialas rud* are a desk clock, amplified electronic noise (both slowed down between four and ten times), ambient sound of a public space, and a vocal sample captured from a choral record. The images are monochrome photographs of telephone lines.

Bookending the portfolio with vocal works, I have returned to voice samples after reflecting on the issues that arose in *14AB2*. In presenting *14AB2*, it became evident that most listeners either knew the source of the sounds, numbers stations broadcasts from *The Conet Project*, or the resulting Cold War connotations took precedent over my intended lack of intention in using those sounds. With *nialas rud*, I have used a choral song from a found record (Der Bulgarische Chor Goussla, Year Unknown), and have treated the sample with reverbs, filtering, and light distortion to blur the already muddy sound. It is much lower in the mix than the voices in *14AB2*; emerging as part of the background, rather than placing itself in front of it. My hope here is that this more subtle use of vocal sound sources, and using a recording that is much less well known than *The Conet Project*, will open the possibility of experience for an audience; the sonic and cultural obscurity of the vocal sample perhaps carrying less baggage than numbers stations recordings.

Turntablist Philip Jeck's work with found records is a secondary motivation for the use of the choral sample. Jeck's work involves taking found records, and manipulating them with simple effects, to tease out details of sounds that he finds himself drawn to. Thus, Jeck chooses his source material in a comparable way to myself, although rather than referencing synaesthetic phenomena, he states that,

My intention...the way that I listen, the way that I improvise is through hearing...I have to be moved by those things. And then, once I get that moment, I'll go into it...to either isolate those things that really do push the triggers, or expand on it, or try to shift through phases...

Ars Electronica, 2011

Reflecting on Jeck's statement, I remain undecided on how much of my motivation is an emotional response to sound and image. My responses, as previously discussed, are visceral and immediate, but I am hesitant to suggest that they are *emotional* responses, at least regarding memory or previous life experience. I admit this is contradictory: I write at length about my referencing of internalised synaesthetic responses when composing, but my responses when listening and viewing are reflexive, bypassing any conscious thought. However, I have found that using voices in my work seems to produce an emotional response in the listener more immediately than with other sounds. In *nialas rud*, whilst I have obviously not intended any particular mood or theme, I find that when the voices enter, the piece becomes almost unbearably sad.

The images in the piece are monochrome photographs of telephone lines. I took the photographs at dusk, after reviewing existing images of telephone lines in my archive, taken during midday hours. I wanted the telephone lines to be almost indistinguishable

from the background, and to emphasise noise in the photographs. This thread of the macro stream is a visual facsimile of how I work with sounds: the noise present in the photographs mirroring the sonic details revealed when slowing down a field recording, and the general muddiness of the images and lack of distinguishability underlining the acousmatic, and my attempts to remove the importance of the sound source.

The sound in *nialas rud* follows the general trend of the portfolio in that it can be called non-diegetic. However, I feel that this is a problematic term: Chion uses the term to mean any sound outside of the story space of the film, “not only absent from the image but... external to the story world” (Chion, 1994, p. 73), and diegesis itself translates as narrative. There is no narrative, story, or action present in any of the pieces in this portfolio (this comes later, with the spectator/listener), so using terms which directly apply to these is not ideal. I do so to reinforce my point that the audio and visual components are unrelated, and merely occurring simultaneously, hence why in the commentary for *14AB2* I suggest describing my work as audio *and* visual rather than audio/visual.

The images in *nialas rud* are also a reference of the images in (), in that they are mostly featureless images, with an added point of interest becoming more prominent throughout the piece. I have also used similar flash frame transitions between image, emphasising the audience’s act of seeing and listening. One audience member said of () that they would shift their focus from the image to the sounds, and the flash frames would shift their focus back to the image. I have taken note of this, and applied these transitions to the images in *nialas rud* to see if a similar experience can be gained (though the piece has not yet been presented publicly), and to underline the fact that the sound and image are merely occurring simultaneously, rather than affecting each other or interacting.

I admit that this contradicts my aims with these pieces. However, I am beginning to utilise audience feedback from my pieces to influence future works, further expanding the Macro stream. I am also interested to see if the transitions in *nialas rud* actually do dictate audience experience in any way, so that I can better understand the consequences of my compositional decisions, and refine my practice to produce less specific works.

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Texts

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