



You'll Be Happier With Lower Standards

Ivan Lisyak

You'll Be Happier With Lower Standards is the second from a series of work that utilises simple geometric shapes, primary colours and waveforms. These elements are used to decontextualise the viscosity of current video art trends; these trends tend to utilise an overblown 'more is more' approach, a lethargic onslaught ensues as the audience is battered into the ground without any time to reflect. *You'll Be Happier With Lower Standards* has the objective of returning video art to a plateau for the viewer to comfortably think and critique, without the work doing it for you.

Ivan Lisyak is an AV artist from the Blue Mountains. Ivan is involved in many projects including being a member of psychedelic rock band Belles Will Ring and sludge rock duo Machine Death. His AV work engages in the deconstruction of time and space within a moving image utilising digital and analogue processes in an attempt to elevate tired post-production techniques of video art to their origins: the still image.

Untitled. Two Channel Generative Digital Audio System

Ivar Lehtsalu

Two Channel Generative Digital Audio System is an installation of two isolated digital systems that generate audio. An individual process of sampling and playback is used by each system. Both systems use a technique of sampling the sonic output of their counterpart to create their own audio. The audio produced in the installation is indeterminate with regards to structure, sonic content and individual sound durations. The entire audible content of the work is created without external input and is produced in real time.

Ivar is a Sydney based artist who works with digital sound. Using various methods of sample manipulation and generative processes of feedback Ivar creates dense textures. The audio can become overwhelming in both an audible and physical experience. Ivar's main focus is sound but digital video has also captured his attention. Ivar has performed at the 2006 Liquid Architecture festival, the 2006 NowNow festival, Impermanent Audio, the 2005 and 2006 Electrofringe Festivals and live on FBI and 2SER Sydney radio. As one half for improvising duo Ventricle, with Luke Callaghan, he has performed at Disorientation, If You Like Improvised Music We Like You and other gallery openings. Currently finishing a B. Electronic Arts (Honours) at the University of Western Sydney.

Partially Manifested Cube

Samuel Bruce

Consider the cube, the standardized unit of perceived space/time. Outwardly it appears ordered, quantized and quantified, precisely rectilinear. Cubes are easily understood. Step closer. Break through the cube and dive towards the depths of the real. Below the surface something boils, something bleeds and writhes. Chaos is also here. And each contained within the other. The cube is only one part of the story.

Samuel Bruce is an artist who likes to code, but not all the time. He has very nearly completed Electronic Arts at UWS. He is a part of Dysfunctional Feed, has exhibited in group shows at Rocketart, Newcastle and Blacktown Arts Centre, and had his first solo exhibition at Pelt in May of this year.

Plywood Box 2006

Sumugan Sivanesan & Sam Smith

Sam Smith + Sumugan Sivanesan combine electronic, acoustic and digital devices to explore the spatial, physical and resonant qualities of a room. Their most recent project, *Plywood Box 2006*, is a multi-channel audio/visual, DVD/ installation documenting a series of performances.

Sumugan Sivanesan employs experimental and occult means to make practical sense of current events.

Sam Smith is a video, sound and installation artist based in Sydney.

Resonator

Jasper Streit

What makes sound? Auditory events often make us unwittingly seek their sources, be it whether we look in the direction they have come from or imagine what has caused their occurrence. Our obsession requiring a source for sound to emanate from has been a common theme through my work. This notion has been typified by using abnormal sound sources, making usually inanimate objects such as paper, perspex and glass resonate—in turn creating audio.

Jasper Streit is a Swiss born, Sydney-based artist with a penchant for sound and new technologies. With this combination Streit has created a series of interactive installations primarily concerned with sound exhibited locally and internationally. His audio practice also extends into laptop-based live performance of soundscapes and abstract music. When not practising his art making, Streit fulfils his nerdish desires by working with new media and streaming technologies in both the arts and corporate worlds.

Potent: Sound, Technology and Potential

Ben Byrne

In a contemporary context sound exists as a cultural artifact; something to be recorded, manipulated, analyzed, interpreted and archived which, as such, can no longer be considered as merely a natural phenomenon of vibrating particles or a specific range of the electromagnetic spectrum. While this shift would appear to have rendered sound far more tangible than in its previous existence, the development of the numerous technologies of sound reproduction and manipulation which have 'enframed' sound as a mediated form, a cultural 'standing reserve' as Heidegger would have termed it, have nonetheless also served to emphasize sound's existence as inherently that of a non-stuff, of continual process and change, of becoming, and, therefore, also of potential and possibility.

Mediated sound can be traced back to the development of the phonograph and the emergence of phonography as the science or practice of transcribing audible sound. Phonography was from its emergence posited as a materialist art of mimetic sound and has largely remained such since. Though contemporary visual art exists freed from the expectation of mimesis—abstract painting developing after artists were given greater creative license through painting's replacement as a mimetic agent as a result of the development of photography—this has not been the case with respect to sound. Instead, it is only through mimetic technologies that sound has become a mutable cultural object and so, largely, that mimetic expectation remains.

Despite such expectation, at no point does sound exist as a stable being of any sort. Instead, sound exists only as a continual process of becoming; as the passage of the ephemeral phenomenon of sound, as the capture, manipulation and interpretation of sound as an object of cultural capital and as the process of sound continually moving through the system of Technology. Martin Heidegger argued, in his text *The Question Concerning Technology*, that Technology exists as a system though which all is rendered potential by a process of 'Gestell' or 'enframing' and it is through understanding sound technologies as examples of this greater system of Technology that we are able to better understand the existence of sound as potential and come to terms with sound as a Heideggerian 'standing reserve' of available cultural capital (Heidegger 1977, p.17–20). Though there are many possible readings of sound, sound itself has little essential to do with anything experiential or aesthetic and instead should be understood as something far more intangible, a potentiality encountered through sensory affect and perception rather than construed meaning or representation. Approached in this way, sound is what Deleuze and Guattari describe as a haecceity. As they assert in the plateau "1730: Becoming Intense, Becoming Animal..." from their book *A Thousand Plateaus*:

There is a mode of individuation very different from that of a person, subject, thing or substance. We reserve the name haecceity for it. A season, a winter, a summer, an hour, a date have a perfect individuality lacking nothing, even though this individuality is different from that of a thing or subject. They are haecceities in the sense that they consist entirely of relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles, capacities to affect and be affected (Deleuze & Guattari 1987b, p.261).

Accepting this understanding of sound as a haecceity, sound as an agent of cultural capital is put aside in favour of an understanding of sound itself. It is at this point that we enter with *Potent*, an exhibition conceived to engage the potentiality of sound in a gallery context, avoiding compositions and listening loops in favour of installations, generative systems and audio-visuals, all of which emphasise the transmutative energy of sound and the mutability of form.

Exploring the issue of potentiality in his book *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, Giorgio Agamben draws on the thought of Aristotle, who believed that "there is no sensation of the senses themselves" as "sensitivity is not actual but only potential," to argue that "what is essential is that potentiality is not simply non-Being, simple privation, but rather the existence of non-Being, the presence of an absence" (Agamben 1999, p.179). Like Aristotle, Agamben is interested in a dialectical construction of potentiality in which possibility is defined in its opposite not by impossibility, but by the possible nonfulfillment of potentiality.

Comparable to Agamben and Aristotle's examination of the potentiality of a sense is the potentiality of technologies of sound reproduction and manipulation. Like the human senses, technologies interpret and manipulate the sensation, or phenomena, of sound; sound is not actual when recorded on tape or stored digitally but potential, and in this way Technology exists as a sort of independent sense, operating as a filter through which the phenomena of sound passes. Agamben refers to Aristotle's claim that "the mind [nous] is like a writing tablet on which nothing is actually written", arguing that "the nature of the intellect is such that it is pure potentiality" and so "nous is thus a potentiality that exists as such, and the metaphor of the writing tablet on which nothing is written expresses the way in which a pure potentiality exists" (Agamben 1999, p.215).

All of the artists involved with *Potent* have produced works which act as windows to this pure potentiality, using the lens of Technology to expose the potential nature of sound and its mutability as a form. Although the works included in the exhibition use quite divergent processes and technologies, they nonetheless share a concern with sound as a potential, and its relation as such to other forms.

In his audio-visual work *You'll Be Happier With Lower Standards* Ivan Lisyak has created a work in which sound exists only as an implied potential while we are presented instead with a single pulsating image. Developing from the concerns of his last exhibited work *Dying Everyday*, the piece is also vehemently unaesthetic, concentrating on physical and intellectual affect rather any sort of immersion through aesthetics, and consequently addressing directly notions of sound's essential existence as potential through its audible absence. Using the example of sight, Agamben argues, "the principle of sight 'in some way possesses color,' and its colors are light and darkness, actuality and potentiality, presence and privation" such that:

The following essential point should be noted: if potentiality were, for example, only the potentiality for vision and if it existed only as such in the actuality of light, we could never experience darkness (nor hear silence, in the case of the potentiality to hear) (Agamben 1999, p.181).

Strange as it may seem, it is in this way that the complex absence of sound in Lisyak's work makes it perhaps the single most focused example of the potentiality of sound in the entire exhibition. Agamben describes how:

In the dark, the eye does not see anything but is, as it were, affected by its own incapacity to see; in the same way, perception here is not the experience of something – a formless being – but rather perception of its own formlessness, the self-affection of potentiality (Agamben 1999, p.217).

Lisyak's work inflicts a perceptual awareness upon the listener through an imposition of a realization of sense potentiality. In many ways it is neither a sound nor a visual work but rather an expression of formlessness to be perceived rather than interpreted, exposing once again the mutability of form and the complexity of the perception of sound. While the absence of sound in the works demonstrates the potentiality of sound itself, it also means that the experience of the work for the listener is hearing its lack of sound.

Ivar Lehtsalu's work *Untitled. Two Channel Generative Digital Audio System*, meanwhile creates a feedback system between software processes on two iMac computers, clearly demonstrating the passage of sound in and out of the digital realm as what is sounded by one machine is quickly encoded by the next, evident in waveforms displayed on screen before again being processed and converted back to audible signal. In the work digital technologies serve as an almost self-reflexive sense, betraying their own agency through their repeated operation as a filter operating upon the audible sound in the work.

Developing his theory of potentiality, Agamben argues that "between the experience of something and nothing there lies the experience of one's own passivity", "the trace (typos, okhnos) is from the beginning the name of this self-affection, and what is experienced in this self-affection is the event of matter" (Agamben 1999). While digital technologies function as interpreters and manipulators of generic information, in the form of sound or otherwise, they are equally capable of the interpretation of their own 'trace', in the case of sound the noise floor of a computer's sound card or perhaps the compression algorithm of an analogue to digital converter. And it is this that is demonstrated in Lehtsalu's work, his concern with the digital as a system demonstrated through the sonic artifacts the process of the work impart upon its audible outcomes. While Lehtsalu's work displays a profound interest and involvement with digital technologies, it artfully balances an aesthetic interest in the sounds of the digital with a deeper interest in the inherently systematic nature of such technologies and the possibilities they present.

Samuel Bruce has created an installation in *Partially Manifest Cube* that, similar to Lehtsalu's construction, addresses the systemic nature of digital sound technologies, presenting sound as but one expression of a discrete system. Coding a digital biosphere of 'turmites' using the program Processing, Bruce has housed the various technologies involved in the installation in a cube that acts to contain the system, both literally and metaphorically. The only window we are given into the world he has constructed is through the sound and images the system outputs, existing as expressions of the same mysterious potential of the cube. Importantly, however, both the audible and visual output from the cube are merely aesthetic representations of the constant flux and activity within the system—the actuality of the sound and vision involved largely arbitrary in relation to the complexity of the system itself. As Achim Szepanski, founder of the Mille Plateaux label, pointed out in his paper *A Mille Plateaux Manifesto*, "the field of possibilities of the digital is to be discovered, because as such it is a medium which produces possibilities and not evidences" (Szepanski 2004). Szepanski suggests that digital technologies have created a situation in which "sounds become visible and images audible" (Szepanski 2004). While providing a poetic account of the possibilities, the potentialities, that digital technologies present, Szepanski does not account sufficiently for the role of the technologies in the phenomenon he describes. Digital technologies do not render sounds visible and images audible, rather they render both reducible to data that may then be actualized as sound or image (or indeed something else) regardless of its origin, as is the case in both Lehtsalu and Bruce's works in which the images and sound presented are intimately and irrevocably linked.

Shifting from such an overt focus on the digital, Jasper Streit's work *Resonator*, involves the use of resonators on large sheets of black paper, creating a makeshift speaker system in which prepared material is played through the paper as if it were a conventional amplification system. Part of his ongoing *Perceptual Screening* series the work plays with the notions of the origin of perceived sound, the paper serving as an intermediary medium through which audible vibrations emerge. However the resulting sound is neither completely of the paper itself nor wholly pre-composed in origin as the resulting sound betrays both the original composition and the role of the paper as medium through which the sound passes, emerging divergent from its initial iteration and bearing the audible 'trace' of the paper itself. In direct contrast to the Pythagorean ideas of acoustics at play in previous editions in the *Perceptual Screening* series (which involved the use of clear Perspex as a resonating surface), *Resonator* draws the listener to the paper as sound source, its stark black contrast against the white paint of the gallery wall

paired with visible resonators and audio cabling to render obvious the technical workings of the piece while also presenting a sort of oblivion from which the sound emerges into acoustic space.

Sumugan Sivanesan and Sam Smith's *Plywood Box 2006*, like Streit's work, operates through the resonance of acoustic form. Having constructed a large plywood box covered in resonators the two have been 'performing' the sounding of the box, as is documented in the included surround sound and visuals loop. In the gallery space, the box itself is presented alongside a DVD loop presenting footage and recordings of the pair performing with the box, emphasizing the entangled mesh of digital technologies and acoustic forms at play. Despite the presence of the box itself in the installation the sounding actuated in the gallery is mediated through the setup of the DVD loop and surround setup, presenting once again between the supposed 'actual' or 'original' source of the sound and the audible iteration within the space that cannot be explained as a simple mimetic representation of any sort of stable origin or truth.

Although unable to meet external demands of fidelity as mimetic faculties, and often constrained by a focus on constructed meaning and signification, sound technologies as are employed in all the works included in *Potent* generate, reproduce, manipulate and reconstitute sounds with great flexibility, enabling multiplicities of possibilities. In this way these technologies simultaneously deterritorialize and reterritorialize sound, allowing it to accept a Deleuzian rhizomatic construction, existing in multiplicity rather than a singular form. As Deleuze and Guattari postulate:

Rhythm is never on the same plane as that which has rhythm. Action occurs in a milieu, whereas rhythm is located between two milieus, or between two intermilieus, on the fence, between night and day, at dusk, twilight or Zwielight, Haecceity (Deleuze & Guattari 1987c, p. 313).

Sound exists within *Potent*, as elsewhere, as a 'rhythm' between milieus. As a haecceity rather than any kind of stable being, sound is essentially a continual becoming, a potential to be experienced and interpreted certainly but one which is not inherently concerned with anything aesthetic or meaningful. In his book *Mimesis and Alterity*, Michael Taussig wrote enthusiastically of the "resurgence of the mimetic faculty" he saw in technologies of reproduction such as the phonograph (Taussig 1993, p.21). Avoiding the more common understanding of mimesis which for so long relegated sound technologies to a position as technologies of documentation and 'truthful' reproduction, Taussig saw as particularly crucial the understanding of mimesis as not just a "copying or imitation" but also a more direct "palpable, sensuous, connection" between bodies, as "seeing something or hearing something is to be in contact with that something...vibrating like sound, gleaming like light, copy blurs with contact at the heart of matter's sympathetic magic" (Taussig 1993, p.21 & p.43). All the work's included in *Potent* fit within this more expansive and liberating view of the mimetic faculty of sound, in particular demonstrating the relationship of sound, as a potential, to more material forms.

Potent stands as a window to the potentiality of sound. Presented in a gallery context within which it traverses the boundaries of form through the interplay of the physical and the ephemeral, the actual and the potential, hopefully the exhibition will offer some insight into the complex identity of the non-stuff that is sound. While all the works included communicate each of the artists' ideas, concerns and interests, presenting exciting and stimulating fields of listening in their own right, it is our hope that you will also hear the exhibition as a whole, as a space of potential to be traversed and negotiated with an ear to the infinite.

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