MOMENTUM

HARMONY. AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATORY ARTS PRACTICE

Nat Grant

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ABSTRACT

Momentum is an ongoing, cumulative music composition project first conducted throughout 2012. For 366 consecutive days I recorded and collected sounds and musical material, sculpting and layering them utilizing digital and electronic manipulation and processing. I invited contributions to the project, and more than 60 people from around the world collaborated on *Momentum*, providing sounds to be included in the project.

Each day a small audio snapshot of the work appeared online alongside a blog, sharing information on sound sources and compositional approaches. *Momentum* is presented in 12 movements (one for each month of the year 2012), and has since gone on to encompass a 30 minute album, created cumulatively over one month in Istanbul, a 4 day and night live performance version for the Melbourne Fringe Festival, and an ongoing, online community sound art collective. The work-in-progress was (and remains) accessible via several online sources, and the audio is free to listen to, download and re-purpose within the confines of a non commercial Creative Commons License.[1] I continue to invite feedback, comments, audience participation and derivative works via the music site SoundCloud[2], bandcamp[3], my blog[4], email, Facebook[5] and Twitter[6].

This presentation will focus on one specific area of my research, that of harmony with audience, encompassing the participatory nature of *Momentum*, and the open and transparent way in which each of the projects was created. The joining together of sounds, sonic environments, experiences, skills, artists and audience throughout each of the *Momentum* projects promoted dialogue, feedback and collaboration.

[1] . "Creative Commons - Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International - CC BY-NC-SA 4.0." 2014, from http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/.

[2] . "SoundCloud." 2012 - 2014, from http://soundcloud.com

[3] . "Nat Grant Music - bandcamp." 2014, from http://natgrantmusic.bandcamp.com/.

[4] Grant, N. "Momentum." 2012-2014, from http://momentumproject.blogspot.com.

[5] . "Facebook." 2012-2014, from http://facebook.com.

[6] . "Twitter." 2012-2014, from http://twitter.com.

Audience: Showing Process: Collaboration

Audience played a crucial role in all the stages of *Momentum*. By delivering each of the projects online I was able to instantly share my compositional processes and ongoing outcomes with an increasingly large audience. The online format of *Momentum* also made it very straightforward for audience members to contribute to the project, and to provide feedback on individual tracks as well as on the process as a whole. Throughout 2012 and 2013 I collaborated with dozens of audience members, existing and new friends and artist colleagues, and was also able to facilitate collaborations between these people.

One motivation for presenting *Momentum* daily via a blog and sound hosting site was to share the process of creating a sound work with an audience, *as* it was happening – not only after the fact, in the form of a complete work, cd etc. A deliberate transparency of process combined with free and easy access to the work itself promoted regular conversation, feedback and collaboration with my audience throughout the entire process. Creating *Momentum* involved taking the audience along for the journey, and inviting feedback and engagement with my creative process.

Much of my work draws attention to process as a part of the experience of performing or recording. Like a real time 'making of', my art draws attention to a "selected aspect of experience,"[7] that of using sound as a sculptural medium, and of listening to the world always with the next stage of my project in mind. Similarly in his PhD thesis *Blogging as Art*, performance artist Lucas Ihlein conducted two particular durational art project in Sydney and Western Australia in 2005 and 2006, which were blogged about and also presented in physical hard copy on the day of creation, "so that the moment of publication (the moment, that is, of engaging with the public) was not deferred to some future moment when the artwork was deemed to be complete."[8]

There are countless examples, also, of artists and artisans conducting '365' projects, and blogging or making public each days creation/s. US artist Noah Scalin's *Make Something 365* blog hosts hundreds of these types of projects - *Momentum* was featured on his site in November, 2013.[9]

In the initial stage of *Momentum*, for each day in 2012, I posted on my own blog, describing the kind of sound/s I had recorded that day, how they fit into the overall mix at that time, what kind of digital manipulation had been applied to the recording, and why those sound/s and tools had been chosen on that particular day.

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[7] Ihlein, L. (2009). Framing Everyday Experience: Blogging as Art, Deakin University.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Scalin, N. "Make Something 365." Retrieved November 30, 2013, from http://makesomething365.blogspot.com.au/.

The daily blog posts were promoted on Facebook and twitter, and gave people the option to subscribe to receive an email with each new blog post. This resulted in audience members 'following' my progress each day, and coming to a greater understanding of the kinds of

processes involved in creating my music than from merely hearing finished tracks. I received comments throughout the year describing the personal experiences of different followers, and new ways in which they were appreciating many of the sounds in their own environments.

This also meant that if someone wished to contribute a sound to the piece, or to use any part of *Momentum* in a new or derivative work, they could quickly and easily listen and gauge the general aesthetic of the work, understand the kinds of sounds that had been recorded and contributed already, and access the entire work to date, if they so wished.

From my own experience as an artist and audience member – people are interested in *how* creative work is made, and the outcome of each of the *Momentum* projects suggests that it was of interest to my audience how I went about creating *Momentum*, that it provides insight into the artwork itself and my creative process. I consciously made the decision to blog and post a track each day in each stage of *Momentum*. I was interested to share my compositional processes with my audience; "…a kind of artistic and intellectual intimacy that lets other see *how* (I) reached a specific point, not simply that (I) did reach it."[10]

One particular contributor - a first time field recorder - emailed me in May 2013, saying: "Your soundscapes are altering our ways of hearing." She thought it was a "Great idea to have lots of people out 'listening' more intentionally."[11] This woman was amongst others who kept contributing sounds after the initial, yearlong *Momentum* project had concluded, which inspired the creation of an ongoing, online sound collective. This has shown me that my audience is interested in my process, in contributing to the creation of new work and engaging in ongoing dialogue about the work and the process.

Having an audience who is engaged with my art and my process and has even contributed to the work adds value in terms of making a serious engagement with that audience, and was one of the motivations for conduction *Momentum* in plain sight. I am not interested in, as Bayles & Orland put it in their book *Art & Fear*, my art remaining "the province of genius… something to be pointed to and poked at from a safe analytical distance."[12]

Throughout each stage of *Momentum* I was keen for other people to be involved. If someone had mentioned an interesting sound somewhere in their lives I'd request a recording and an accompanying image. If other musicians expressed interest in the project I'd invite contribution. I was keen to have as many different people involved as possible.

From the beginning of the creation of *Momentum* I made it known on the blog, SoundCloud and social media that I was interested in others contributing sounds to the project. On the seventh day (January 7, 2012) I received my first contribution, and five more before the end

10 Bayles, D. a. O., Ted (1993). Art & Fear. USA, Image Continuum Press.

11 Rasmussen, C. (2013). Rain on tin. N. Grant.

12 Bayles, D. a. O., Ted (1993). Art & Fear. USA, Image Continuum Press.

of the first month. This snowballed throughout the year, and I received more and more external contributions to *Momentum* as the project progressed.

The online nature of the project and the ability to send media files via email and dropbox[13] made these collaborations straightforward and instantaneous. When someone sent me a sound I would usually incorporate it into the work straight away, meaning I could also send them the link to a daily mix with their sound included within days. This made for several repeat contributors, as it was a fairly quick and also fun way to contribute and collaborate and hear a finished product without waiting months for an album to be released. Contributions came from ongoing or previous musical collaborators, from friends with no musical knowledge or experience, from followers on social media sites, from people who had learned of the project by word of mouth, and from those who had found the project online or in other ways.

In addition to this there were inadvertent collaborations along the way between various contributors, as on occasion I would receive contributions to the project several days in a row. Sometimes these contributors knew each other, other times not, and at times I was able to introduce artists to each other in this way.

Conducting *Momentum* gave me the confidence to approach other artists and ask for a contribution. Given the small request, that there were no limits on the type or length sounds to be contributed (it could be as little as a few seconds), I felt able to ask, and most people obliged. New connections were made and new collaborations were borne out of this.

The snowball effect of people contributing to *Momentum* resulted in my decision to have each track in the month of December 2012 made up of others' contributions. For the last 31 days I acted as curator, digitally manipulating, blending, building, altering and sculpting with sounds sent in by other artists and members of my audience, while maintaining a style that was coherent and consistent with the rest of the work.

In 2013 I was still receiving contributions periodically, which prompted me to start an online sound art collective on the SoundCloud site where people can contribute source sounds but also where members can download each others' sounds, re-mix them and post back to the group.

Momentum has extended beyond and outside of itself. The initial, yearlong project inspired me to create the three subsequent projects, and the process of disciplined practice and cumulative composition has continued, flowing on to new projects and ideas. Involving my audience in the project was a big drive to continue to create and share my work. Showing where I was up to every day, getting feedback and encouragement to keep going, perhaps even inspiring others to do the same, and receiving so many contributions that turned my audience into collaborators and took the project in new and exciting directions – these were all vital elements in the success and, I believe, completion of the year long *Momentum* project.

Working in this way gave both me and my audience deeper insight into my art and my process, and provided inspiration to continue to work in this way in the future – in tandem with an audience who are both engaged and involved in the creation of my art.

13 . "dropbox." 2014, from http://dropbox.com.

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