Studio/Stage: Questioning the division of 'private' and 'public' creative spaces through interdisciplinary compositional practice

'Private' and 'public', 'hidden' and 'shown' - these are the apparent dualities which this research questions. Focusing on the creative spaces of composition, and working through practice-led research in interdisciplinary composition, the oppositional relationship between 'private' and 'public' implied by these terms' dictionary definitions ('private, adj.1, adv., and n.', 2018; 'public, adj. and n.', 2018) is instead considered as a dialectic. This has led to work which engages with topics including the public (in)visibility of compositional process, the relationship of the audience to 'private' and 'public' space, the significance of composer and performer presence and how creative spaces such as the studio, notebooks/sketchbooks,[1] rehearsal and performance spaces are shaped by their users, the work which occurs in them and their relationship with their environments.

Gavin Bryars has stated that "music's problem is that it begins with perfection" (Villars, 2006: 68) - that we usually only experience the performance of the completed, rehearsed, 'perfect' work. This suggests that along the continuum of composition and performance (leading from studio to stage) there exists a line of demarcation, positioned by convention, which separates "things that should be hidden" (conventionally pre-composition, composition, rehearsal) from "things that should be shown" (performance) (Arendt, 1998: 72).

Bryars' identification of music's limited public visibility as a "problem" suggests a redefinition of this line as mobile, not fixed. From here, approaching this line not as a hard division but permeable opens up the possibility of work which simultaneously occupies private and public space.

'Hidden' and 'shown' are terms which imply a relationship with other people. Considering the intended audience for my work and how and where pieces may be experienced has identified a more complex relationship between the audience and 'private' and 'public' spaces than suggested by dictionary definitions. At this point in my research, I have identified two types of audience for performed work - present and absent, indicating an audience experiencing the performance in real time (in the venue, or perhaps as a livestream over the internet) or separated temporally from it (viewing documentation after the event). These audiences then divide further into potential and actual - those who *could* experience the performance and those who *did*.

Potential audiences became apparent to me when performing *Whitespace* on public footpaths on the Sussex Downs. I anticipated walkers would see my performance, but nobody passed by, so the present audience remained potential, not actual. Video documentation allows for an absent audience for this performance. Similarly, performances of *trainlines* on intercity trains were occasionally noticed by other travellers, but not recognised (or at least acknowledged) as a performance.

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[1] I usually use the term 'notebook' but given the nature of how I work, through drawing, photography, writing, etc. I consider these terms to be interchangeable.

Participatory work such as *Whitespace* and *trainlines* automatically has an audience (its performer(s)), regardless of external observers. This demonstrates the inadequacy of a dichotomous view of 'private' and 'public' based on the presence of others in relation to creative work. Video reinforces this: an external observer, but non-human, it is also a conduit to convey the performance to others - who may be just the performer seeking an external perspective on their own work.

Performing for oneself is transplanted into the public realm in *Community of Objects*. My own experience of performing in public is that it is an intensely private, inward-focused activity, and I sought to heighten this in this piece. However, while performances have mostly conveyed the desired effect of a naturalistic, unacted, informal group activity, working with the performers revealed that my own experience may be unusual, and that others' performance may be outward-focused, invigorated by the audience's presence, so that they have difficulty feeling a sense of privacy onstage. I am broadening my reading to investigate performance consciousness to understand these differing mindsets. However, *Community of Objects* was a useful experiment in making private experience visible to others, and in considering how performer and audience presence affects a piece.

Human presence is implied in Michel de Certeau's defining of 'space' according to actions (as opposed to 'place' defined by objects) (de Certeau, 1984: 117). The inhabiting and use of creative spaces by the composer, performers and audience gives them shape and meaning; without the artist, the studio is just a room.

For me, performer presence connects to the conventional public/private relationship between performance and composition, rendered as a contrast of 'here'/'now' with 'elsewhere'/'past'. In *Paper* for cello and video, the relationship between composition and performance is explicit, using video of a formalised representation of my everyday studio work. Digital editing creates sudden, unnatural repetitions, which contrast with the performer's need to move between positions, emphasising her physical presence. *Aides Memoire/POV*'s live photography similarly sets up a contradiction between an aural landscape (created by field recordings, narration and the sounds of the cameras) and physical presence of the photographers, emphasising that the photos being taken are of the live performance situation.

Performing my own work in my studio, my presence as performer blurs into that of composer. My evolving understanding of the significance of the composer's presence in the studio and notebooks is demonstrated by my increasing visibility in creative work across the project. Early pieces minimise, avoid or disguise my presence - in *Paper* only my hands are seen, *Studio: Composer's Own* limits my presence to distorted and unclear sounds, the video showing an empty room, and the photographs of *Studio/Sideboard* use an object as a synecdoche for the entire (unpopulated) studio. In contrast, *Whitespace* and the regular video blog ('vlog') episodes show me performing in the studio, and work in the altered book requires me to acknowledge my own presence in confrontation with that of the original author.

Awareness of my presence in the studio, and recognising the defining role of my actions in manifesting this space demands that I query my day-to-day activity to the most mundane level. Exposing, challenging and aestheticising the private, "infra-ordinary" (Perec, 1999: 210) aspects of my practice has confirmed that the

interdisciplinarity of my performed work is embedded in my process and creative spaces. This work, in conjunction with research into contemporary composers' and artists' studios and studio/post-studio practice, has also led to a noticeably tighter integration of visual, practical and sonic approaches in my own practice. This research and my resulting awareness of how I use my studio for performing and broadcasting, the nature of performances that occur there (e.g. graphic performances for *Black Book* and *dot drip line line*, the filming of vlog episodes), and my materials (more often art papers, inks, knives, video editing tools than musical instruments or manuscript paper) have led me to question how my studio can be compared to that of other composers, as was suggested in the Research Plan.

This understanding of the studio based in activity shows the development of my thinking away from 'places' (studio as room, notebooks as books) and towards 'spaces'. Through acknowledging the actions that define these spaces, I have come to view the studio as an extension of the notebook, a space to extend my thinking into three dimensions or the digital realm. Physical and digital studio work is equivalent to the drawn and written work found in the books, and so I consider the term 'notebook' to indicate physical and digital content in written, made and performed forms, not just the physical notebooks themselves.

The literature is littered with terms inferring that studios and notebooks/sketchbooks are havens from the outside world - for example, 'sanctuary' (Eisler and Amirsadeghi, 2012), 'nest' (Mohr-Pietsch, 2014a), 'den' (Mohr-Pietsch, 2014b) and 'incubator' (Brereton, 2009: 136). However, my work performing *Whitespace* has suggested that surrounding environments contribute to a space's definition. Moving *Whitespace* from the studio to other locations, experiencing it as a solo and multi-performer piece, then returning to the studio was vital for understanding how the studio can be private but not isolated.

My studio is located within my home, subject to the sonic and practical intrusions of daily domestic life. Single-glazed windows facing a busy road also contextualise the studio within my local neighbourhood. While it is a 'safe' and 'private' place in which to develop work unseen or heard by others, the outside world intrudes, becoming part of the space. For *Studio: Composer's Own*, I tried to record myself working in the studio without the traffic noise 'ruining' the recordings; but traffic noise is characteristic of this space and I now recognise that work which seeks to portray my studio has to accept this.

The altered book project confronts this intrusion of external forces in the space of the notebook. The pre-existing text and images of the base volume[2] serve as printed interventions, mirroring the effect of the studio's surrounding spaces, requiring that I shape my activity to accommodate or override them. Recent spreads respond to the challenge of writing in a space already populated by text. 'Overwriting' (a technique where I impose spatial limits so that I write back over the top of earlier writing) questions whether my habit of 'writing through' ideas is fundamentally a need to *write* or a need to be able to *read back*. It condenses process, obscuring (largely irrelevant) detail, but visually indicating the volume of activity, while brief notes may identify specific insights.

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[2] Kistner, A. C. (1998) *An Affair with Africa: Expeditions and Adventures Across a Continent.* Washington D.C.: Island Press

Every page of the altered book prompts thoughts about the reserving, hiding or obscuring of content as I assess the relationship between the pre-existing material and my own work. The deliberate illegibility of the overwriting, and exaggerated layering of written, drawn and collaged elements which obscure the book's original material connect with other work that engages with hidden content. For example, the open/closed states displayed in *Studio/Sideboard*, and the unseen/partially seen contents of the boxes and near-inaudible whispered conversations of *Community of Objects*.

Scores are defined by their hidden content as private communicative spaces for composer and performer. In performance, if a score is used at all, its presence is often minimised through planned page turns and quiet movements to avoid disrupting the music. It is a tool, not part of the piece, and the performer's careful actions (reading, handling) define and limit this space's role. Changing the role of the score in performance, however, converts it to an object which can actively shape the piece. For example, *Whitespace*'s performance score provides a visible and sometimes audible structural element in performance, and the boxes of *Community of Objects* not only provide instructions but form a critical sonic and visual element of the piece.

Drawing all the spaces along the continuum into the public realm, the vlog has proved a useful tool for examining my infra-ordinary working spaces and practices. Episodes show me talking about work in progress, identifying doubts, insights and false trails, showing recent work through video excerpts of experiments and performances, audio recordings, drawings and photographs produced as I work through raw and developing ideas. The format allows creative work to be contextualised within daily life and allows the true timescales of composition to be conveyed. For example, *Community of Objects* - begun in April 2017 (Episode 1) - was 'completed' in about a month but was still being discussed nearly a year later (Episode 19). Development, workshop and six additional performances prompted ongoing reconsideration of the composition's parameters and score which (along with the significant time commitment to recreate the performance score) ensured regular mentions across this period.

The Research Plan proposed a narrowing of the project's scope to one or two of the creative spaces initially examined, and it has become apparent that the space of the notebook/studio is at the core of this research. However, considering 'private' and 'public' as a dialectic rather than simply as opposites has broadened the possibilities of the project from simply making 'private' work 'public' to investigating how creative work might challenge this duality. A focus on the infra-ordinary and the connections of compositional activity with other aspects of everyday life is already embedded in most of the creative work completed and will continue to be a significant thread in this work.

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Appendix: Research Schedule

This appendix contains a schedule for my research, working towards my planned completion date of 2022 which I established in the Research Plan. The schedule contains milestones, plans, and relevant events (confirmed and probable) over this period.

Year	Activities
Current year (1b, 2017-2018)	• Ongoing Open Space residency at Snape Maltings with Bastard Assignments composer-performer collective • Research livestreaming technologies in preparation for Year 2a's livestreamed performance • Micro-exhibition of artwork at Block 336 gallery, London, for Bastard Assignments event (13-15 June) • Attending Darmstadt Summer Course (July)
2a (2018-19)	• Ongoing Open Space residency at Snape Maltings with Bastard Assignments (until September 2019), including at least two performances of new pieces at Snape Maltings. • Continue to identify and submit proposals for appropriate conferences and publication opportunities • Develop relationships with appropriate galleries with a view to exhibiting artwork in Year 2(b) or Year 3. I have started to build relationships with 44AD Artspace in Bath (who exhibited *trainlines* in their Art + Text exhibition in 2017) and Block 336 in London (who will be the venue for June's micro-exhibition). I also plan to approach the LV21 Lightship, which is currently moored in Gravesend, Kent. This ship regularly hosts exhibitions and installations of experimental work and is suitable for video, sound and intimate performance work. • Plan, rehearse and broadcast a performance to be livestreamed from my studio. I plan to perform both my own work and that of others in this performance • New work for Bastard Assignments to be created for Snape Maltings' Festival of the New (September) • CD recording with Bastard Assignments/Snape Maltings - I will write a new work for this
2b (2019-20)	• Conference presentation • Develop conference presentation to submit for publication to an appropriate journal • Performance with Bastard Assignments at Darmstadt (yet to be confirmed, but in discussion with Darmstadt and Snape Maltings). This performance will include one recent or new piece by me.
3a (2020-21)	• Submit work presented at conference in Year 2b for publication to appropriate journal(s) identified over the course of Year 2(a and b) • Exhibit artwork/installation at gallery
3b (2021-22)	• Write up thesis (40,000 words) • Complete portfolio • Submit thesis and portfolio • Viva voce