# ADSR Zine
# 013

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Daniel Portelli

# Music in Impossible Spaces

## IMAGINARY CONCERT / DEFINING THE IMPOSSIBLE

I had a dream of an imaginary concert. I was listening to the premiere of my new music, which I have no recollection of composing. Sitting in the audience, I listened with fascination to this dark, discordant, fractured work, which was dense in texture. It sounded like it had a microtonal system beyond the 5-limit, with a nuanced relationship between tones. Perhaps a hybrid instrument? I tried to see the performer and instrument on stage, but all I could see was an impressionistic blur.

Dreams, for many people, can be a type of heterotopia – a safe space for the mind to wander and express what is not possible in the outside world. This is especially true in the context of a global pandemic or any other tragedy. Heterotopias are complex multitemporal spaces. They can be physical or mental spaces[1] that break from the normative set of relations that define our everyday conventionality. Heterotopias allow people to act out different modes of being, how we relate to each other, and express differing systems of thought and behaviours that can liberate or oppress us. Foucault usually refers to heterotopias as 'different spaces' – such as prisons, cemeteries, museums, gardens, libraries, and art galleries. But his definition was vague and problematic. Some believe the definition was more suited to fictional representations of these places, that are in the realm of the impossible.[2] Back in 1967, when Foucault coined the term, he could not have predicted the virtual spaces and subcultures people inhabit today.[3] William Forsythe even describes the human body as a heterotopia, as bodies also take up space. As he explains, when the dancers' shapes are translated into sound their bodies occupy other spaces and become heterotopias.[4] But what is our experience of the real anyway? The real can be defined as the direct perception of external stimuli as it exists also known as our veridical perception. How can this understanding of heterotopias be understood in relation to what is imagined, fictional, simulated, virtual, or to notions of the ideal?

[1] Jennifer Charteris, Marguerite Jones, Adele Nye, and Vicente Reyes. "A heterotopology of the academy: mapping assemblages as possibilised heterotopias." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, vol. 30, no. 4 (2017): 340.
[2] Kelvin Knight, "Placeless places: resolving the paradox of Foucault's heterotopia." *Textual Practice*, Routledge, vol. 31, no. 1, (2017): 142.
[3] Mihai Burlacu, "The "Virtual Heterotopias": Reimagining Nature-Culture Relations, Institute of Ethnology", *Czech Academy of Sciences*, vol. 104, no. 2 (2017): 183-198.
[4] Daisy Schofield, "Sex workers are thriving on Animal Crossing." *I-D Vice*, June 16, 2020, https://i-d.vice.com/en_uk/article/qj4kdx/sex-work-animal-crossing-new-horizons-bdsm-financial-domination.

# VIRTUAL / IMAGINARY / DISEMBODIED / DOUBLE HETEROTOPIAS

The term virtual heterotopia has been used to describe experiences such as reading a book, watching cinema, playing a video game, or listening to music. When people think of the virtual, they may think of computer simulated reality, but dreams are also a constructed virtual reality made by the brain. It involves virtual representations of people simulated in our own inner virtual world.[5] They are sites of contradiction, reversal, or transformation,[6] where the rules of reality break down, and spaces mirror, distort or unsettle other spaces.[7]

In 2020, because of coronavirus, and because a bill in the US was introduced to curb online sex trafficking, sex workers and BDSM workers turned to the new online platform Animal Crossing to meet with clients. Some met in virtual gardens where clients weed with only a paper bag on their head, engage in financial dominations, or are whipped by a butterfly net.[8] BDSM is already a heterotopia – a group marginalized by society where the legality of the 'hard' aspects of sadomasochism are always in question.[9]

I call this a double heterotopia, when one place of refuge (meeting in a virtual garden during a pandemic) is nested inside another (the BDSM community). A juxtaposition between spaces. A sanctuary in a placeless place. When spaces of refuge sit within spaces of Otherness. A temporal division inside a temporal division. Another way of thinking about a double heterotopia would be to imagine a cemetery in a prison or a circus in an art gallery. In the context of music, it would be like dreaming of a concert while sleeping on a boat.

Dreaming is much like a boat as it floats on a river. A moving piece of space that is knocked about by the changing water surface.[10] The space on the boat is like the stillness of the body and the water beneath is the dream that pushes the boat in all different directions. But what is space? And is dreaming a space?

# THE FIDELITY OF SOUND AND COLOUR IN DREAMS

In this context, dreams are seen as virtual representations of space, and states of consciousness as imaginary places. We also dream of impossible spaces. So, music in impossible spaces, is, for me, music performed in a dream. But in order to do that we have to look at its sensorial dimension.

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[5] Pilleriin Sikka, "How To Study Dream Experiences," in *Dreams: Understanding Biology, Psychology and Culture (in press)* ed. Katja Valli and Robert J. Hoss (Greenwood, 2019), 153-165.
[6] Nicholas Reyland, "The Spaces of Dream: Lutosławski's Modernist Heterotopias." *Twentieth-Century Music*, 12(1), (2015): 37-70.
[7] Jennifer Charteris, Marguerite Jones, Adele Nye, and Vicente Reyes. "A heterotopology of the academy: mapping assemblages as possibilised heterotopias." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, vol. 30, no. 4 (2017): 340.
[8] Daisy Schofield, "Sex workers are thriving on Animal Crossing." *I-D Vice*, June 16, 2020, https://i-d.vice.com/en_uk/article/qj4kdx/sex-work-animal-crossing-new-horizons-bdsm-financial-domination.
[9] Thalia Anthony, "Is It Legal To Engage In 'Hard' BDSM?," *Life Hacker*, April 3, 2017, https://www.lifehacker.com.au/2017/04/fifty-shades-of-grey-and-the-legal-limits-of-bdsm/.
[10] Victoria Jones, "An Outline of Foucault's Six Principles of Heterotopia", YouTube video, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qFcxzoPbJis&ab_channel=VictoriaJEJones.

There have been studies which have tried to measure the colouration or the absence of colour in dreams.[11] It was thought that people dreamed in black and white during the era of black and white television and cinema.[12] But there is uncertainty about whether the dreams themselves were black and white or if it was people's inability to recall the colouration of their dreams.

This article is not intended to be about the subjective meaning of dreams. Contemporary perspectives into dreams[13] are not concerned with interpreting the content of the dreams and how it might relate to people's lives. They look more at empirical evidence and objective trends across large populations of people. They are looking at creating the most ideal situation of capturing dreams via dream reporting to give the most accurate depictions of the dreaming experiences.[14] As well as finding correlations between neural activity and phenomenological experiences.[15] This trust in dream reporting, as the best evidence of dream experiences, is called the *transparency assumption*.

But what I am looking to explore here, building on Windt's dream research, is what are the listening capabilities possible in a dream? What is its frequency or dynamic range? Do these parameters change from person to person? Is it possible that sound hallucinations behave differently, in their variability, to visual hallucinations? Could someone describe the fidelity or quality of the sounds they dream? Is it possible to dream in complex states of time? And what durations are possible? Musicians are more likely to dream about sound as they are more attuned with their auditory cortex, and their ability to articulate music in words would surely help with the reporting.

# MUSIC DREAMING ACROSS CULTURES

I am intentionally distancing myself from the cultural trope of musicians who hear a song in a dream and then transcribe it into music. The western romantic version of this appears rather superficial compared to the history of dream composition seen in First Nations people of Australia, where sacred songs are obtained from ancestors in dreams in a process known as 're-dreaming'.[16] This can often mean that there is no human authorship of these songs.[17] Anthropologist Katie Glaskin uses a classification system that makes the distinction between whether a song is 'oneiric' (originated in a dream) or was 'made in the head'.[18]

Along with the practices of First Nations people, there are particular societies who are more prone to dream about music than other societies, such as the Pima, the Yuman and the Shoshoneans, a group of Indian tribes[19] where music, dreaming, and teaching music is an integral part of life. In some regions, in order to sing, one must first dream one's own song.[20]

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[11] Jennifer Michelle Windt, "Reporting dream experience: Why (not) to be skeptical about dream reports." *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 7, 708 (2013): 7.
[12] Windt "Reporting dream experience", 7.
[13] Windt 2020, 2018, 2013.
[14] Windt "Reporting dream experience", 8.
[15] Julian Mutz, and Amir-Homayoun Javadi, "Exploring the neural correlates of dream phenomenology and altered states of consciousness during sleep Neuroscience of Consciousness, Volume 2017, Issue 1.
[16] Jim Wafer, "Introduction: everything got a song." in *Recirculating songs: Revitalising the singing practices of Indigenous Australia*, ed. Jim Wafer and Myfany Turpin (2017): 4.
[17] Jim Wafer, "Everything," p. 4.
[18] Jim Wafer, "Everything," p. 16.
[19] Irving, J. Massey, "The musical dream revisited: Music and language in dreams." *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts, S*(1), (2006): 42.
[20] Irving, J. Massey, "The musical dream," 42.

# THE PERFORMANCE PRACTICE OF DECORPOREALISED MUSIC

Dreaming is a disembodied state. It is equivalent to your brain floating in a tank and your life being stimulated on a computer. You are decorporealised being detached from the physical reality.[21] Jennie Gottschalk discusses the topic of imaginary music in her book Experimental music since 1970,[22] and refers to it as disembodied sounds. Gottschalk uses the example of Peter Ablinger's piece WEISS / WEISSLICH 11B (1994-), where one is to bring awareness to/and perform with the musicality of their inner reading voice. This introspective 'self-listening' is compared to the inner experiences when listening to 'real' music. I performed this work myself in a workshop in Huddersfield, 2015, run by Liza Lim, and found the intense intimacy slightly confronting in front of an audience. It requires you to be in two minds. Firstly, listening to your own inner thoughts, and secondly, trying to make those inner thoughts waver in and out of the thresholds of audibility.

# (MIS)PERCEPTION / ERRORS / CONCEPTUAL SPACE

Daily experience is full of interruption and errors in perception. 30 to 50% of our waking life consists of the mind-wandering.[23] [24] Such errors put into question the levels of determinacy, indeterminacy, and agency we have in our daily lives. When a musician daydreams during a performance – the sudden shift in attention can be constructive in adding subtle variations of the musical expression. Think of an improviser's purposeful reactions to their own involuntary behaviours - that may have led them to spontaneously change key. Other musicians on autopilot after months of practice allowing them to push through the dips and lapses of their attention. As Windt explains,

> *This then leads to the claim that conscious experience itself is in a sense virtual, an internal simulation upon which external stimuli exert a merely modulatory influence. In a sense, waking is just a form of online dreaming.*[25]

So, even without being a brain in a tank, the mind still constructs what we experience. It acts as a veil. Our brain also projects, what you could call, 'conceptual space' (Brenner 2019)[26] onto the structures and world we inhabit. It affects our perception of time and how we listen to music. As Gottschalk explains,

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[21] Santiago Gabriel Calise, "A Decorporealized Theory? Considerations About Luhmann's Conception of the Body," *Pandaemonium, São Paulo*, vol. 18, no. 26 (2015): 104-125.
[22] Jennie Gottschalk, *Experimental Music Since 1970*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2016.
[23] Alyx Gorman, "Welcome to my nightmare: researchers to investigate the strange world of Covid dreams", *The Guardian*, September 1, 2020,
https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2020/sep/01/welcome-to-my-nightmare-researchers-to-investigate-the-strange-world-of-covid-dreams.
[24] For an example of misperception and illusion see this video on binocular rivalry - https://vimeo.com/282140221 also see http://www.memo.tv/works/fight/
[25] Jennifer Michelle Windt, "Predictive brains, dreaming selves, sleeping bodies: how the analysis of dream movement can inform a theory of self-and world-simulation in dreams." *Synthese*, 195, (2018): 2577–2625.
[26] Manuel Brenner, "The Geometry of Thought…how the brain creates conceptual spaces," *Medium*, November 1, 2019, https://towardsdatascience.com/the-geometry-of-thought-700047775956.

> *... to see time as having its own structure; not as something imposed on it from the outside by music, but something which is already present, which exists alongside the music.*[27]

We are full of complex structures that change our perception as we co-exist with the music.

# CONSCIOUSLY INFLUENCING INVOLUNTARY EXPERIENCES

Considering the recent neuroscientific and philosophical perspectives on dreams, I decided to write a short excerpt of music to be performed in another person's dream, *Dream Recorder*.[28] I was interested in whether a performer could have any conscious or unconscious agency in forming their interpretation of the work. By unconscious agency I mean consciously influencing what will be in your memory and dreams leading up to the event. Thematic content of thoughts and dreams can be predetermined, directly or indirectly.[29] Although the memory may come to mind involuntarily, it was at some point a conscious decision to embed the idea into the memory – and associating multisensory or strong personal emotions to the idea can help with intentional involuntary memory recall.

To perform this work, a person would need to practice lucid dreaming. There have been recent scientific discoveries into methods for making lucid dreaming more effective.[30] External signifiers can be used during REM sleep to help people indicate they are dreaming, such as flashing red lights and short pulsating violin sounds.[31] It is also possible to communicate with someone who is asleep. In study, lucid dreamers answered math questions with their eye movements.[32] REM is usually when lucid dreaming would most likely occur, particularly during the end of sleep when the duration of REM increases.

# SCORES FOR DREAMS AND OTHER STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

A processual mindset is needed when engaging with these types of scores. They may seem more like thought experiments or theoretical scores, but they are plausible - and can be realised with the right person under the right conditions.

The hypnagogic hallucinations stage occurs when you first fall asleep – a transitional state between wakefulness and sleep. *Music in Impossible Spaces* is a work for a solo performer of any instrument, who imagines a performance in the hypnagogic state. The performer is to do this while in a heterotopic location, such as: a place of crisis, deviation, of, or outside of, time; a place of ritual or purification; a space of illusion; or a space that is other. The performer is encouraged to bring their own thoughts, ideas, and desires to the imagination of

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[27] Jennie Gottschalk, *Experimental Music Since 1970*, (Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 135.
[28] http://danielportelli.com.au/dream-recorder/
[29] Eric Klinger, "Goal Commitments and the content of thoughts and dreams: basic principles." *Frontier Psychology*, 4: 415 (2013).
[30] Denholm J. Aspy, "Findings From the International Lucid Dream Induction Study", *Frontier Psychology 11*, (2020):1746.
[31] Karen R. Konkoly et al., "Real-time dialogue between experimenters and dreamers during REM sleep," *Current Biology 31* (2021):15.
[32] Konkoly et al., "Real-time," 4.

the concert. They are to contemplate the concert deeply right up until the moment of sleep allowing the involuntary nature of the hypnagogic hallucinations to take over. The performer wakes up, writes down what happened, and the description of the work is to be turned into a waking performance. The performer then uses their dream report to influence a hallucination in the hypnopompic phase just before waking up. The performer writes another dream report which is also used to construct the concert.

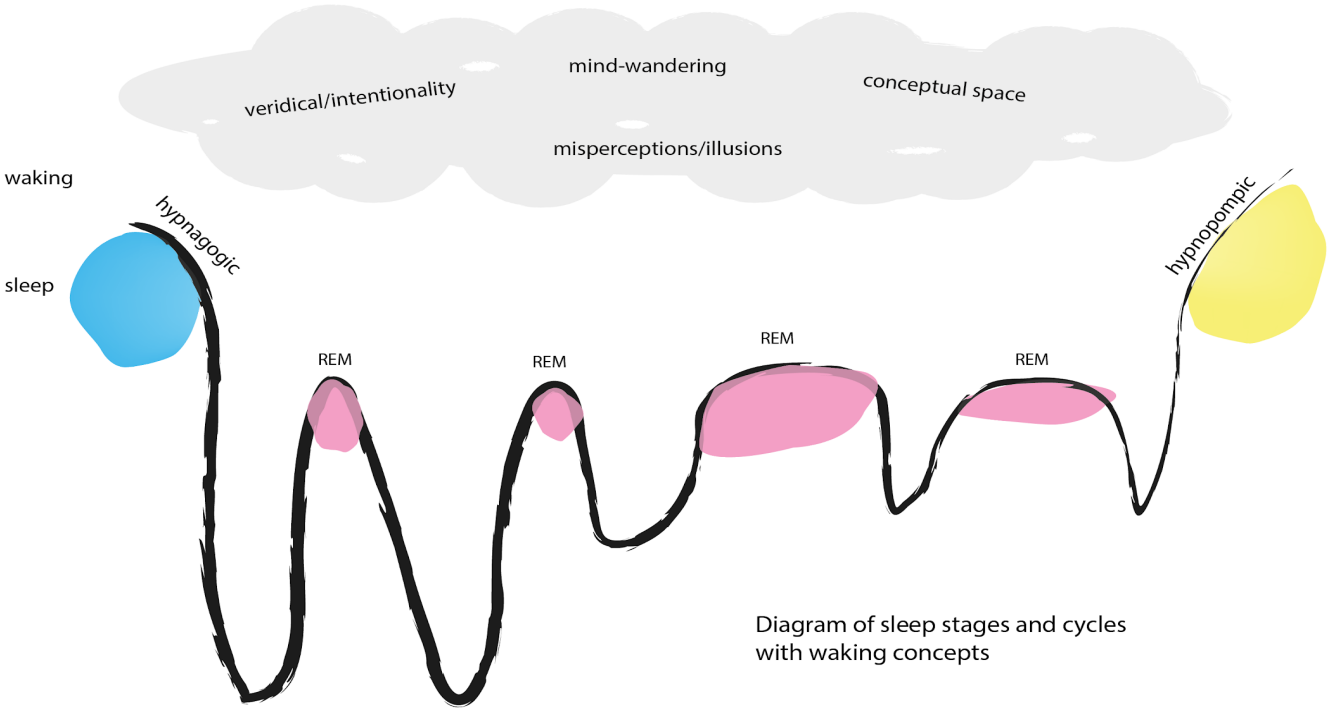


Diagram of sleep stages and cycles with waking concepts

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W V M Rivalry

# WVM Rivalry

WVM Riveralry is a piece where the performer makes changes to the music based on real-time changes in their perception. Below are the notation instructions for a performer to use. They indicate action to do when: their mind has wandered (W), come back on task (veridical perception (V), or has had a misperception (M).

W

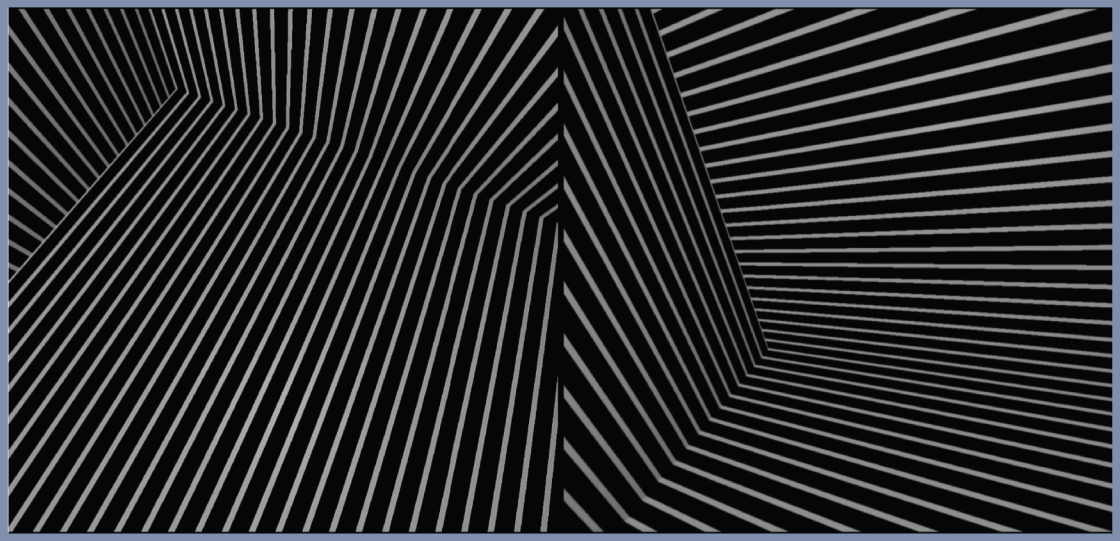
♩ / 𝄽 = An indication to play or rest when the mind wanders.

V

♩ / 𝄽 = An indication to play or rest when the mind is experiencing a more veridical perception.

M

♩ / 𝄽 = An indication to play or rest when the mind is experiencing an illusion or a misperception of reality.



Choose 3 pieces that you know from memory.
Select an excerpt from each one. Assign one to (V), another to (M), and the third to (W).

While playing the excerpts, watch this binocular rivalry video to alter your perception, for example - https://vimeo.com/282140221

When you think your mind is wandering play the first excerpt (W)
When you think you are in veridical perception play the second excerpt (V)
When you think you're experiencing a misperception play the third excerpt (M)

# TEXT SCORES FOR DREAMS AND OTHER STATES OF CONCIOUSNESS

## Nightmare[3]

*Induce a nightmare or wait until you have a nightmare. Immediately after you wake up notate any gestural movements you can remember – such as the aggressive, violent movements of a person or ghost, or you could draw shapes you saw in the background, the temporal pacing of dream, or, for instance, the direction of the river of blood? Give your nightmare a tempo and draw these lines on paper in the order in which they appeared. Each stroke should be separate and spaced one after the other in a row. Play the lines in succession as glissando sweeps on any instrument. Keep the dynamic range the same, at about pp, so the violence sounds constrained. The performance can be for any 3 instruments (e.g.: piano, cello, and viola).*

## Nightwanderer

*A sleepwalker wears a series of bells and small cymbals that make a sound when walking. They also wear speakers that activates a low rumble and a single high pitch drone. Earplugs ensures they don't wake up. Not knowing when or if the performance will happen, a second person in the house waits for the performance. They are there to listen and document the piece. If successful, the sleepwalker will make involuntary bells and cymbal sounds, and their movements and spatialisation around the house will be indeterminate.*

## Performance for assessing a person's listening capacity in a dream

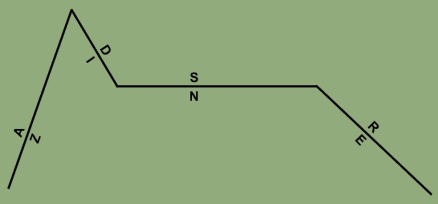
*This piece requires someone who has experience lucid dreaming. One person takes a nap while another person uses the other person's rapid eye movement as a metronome. They are to play any 3 ascending short tones, repeatedly, in time with the eye movement. It can be on any instrument. After some time announce to the person that they are dreaming, and that they need to become aware that they're dreaming. Have the person who is sleeping use their eyes to answer yes or no questions. Say: Is this a minor third? (play a minor 3) wait for a response. Is this a perfect 5th? (play a perfect 4th) wait for a response etc. Play the lowest/highest sound and say can you hear this in this range? Play complex states of time and ask them if they can identify the metric system. Play a low-quality sound and high-quality sound and ask if they can tell the difference (see Konkoly 2021).*

## Onespaceinsideanother

*Dream of playing a drone on a bass guitar with subtle microtonal deviation and complex texture. Play at the loudest volume possible in the dream. When you wake up, write down the experience, and what you felt its duration was. Have someone externally measure how long you were dreaming for. Play a real performance where you alternate between these 2 temporalities and sound worlds. In the first, play the sound you imagined the dream to be, and what you did during the preparations and rehearsals leading up to the dream. In the second duration, play, as best you can, what you heard in the dream. During the performance, alternate between these two temporalities, slowly merging the two together.*

## Nocturnal music

*The performer waits until they are really tired, yawning, have trouble keeping their eyes open, and are easily distracted. They then play a musical score in front of an audience. The performer is to embrace how their body is reacting and prioritise what their body needs over what the score wants them to do. Let whatever happens in the performance be the interpretation of the music.*




# ADSR Zine

[attack, decay, sustain, release]

ADSR Zine is an online platform established in November 2018 by Elia Bosshard, James Hazel and Sonya Holowell. It is a quarterly publication that features writing from contributors who are, or who work with contemporary practising artists. We value the process of reflection, translation, interpretation, critical response and active engagement with Australian art and performance.

We believe that the artist is not only an expert in their field, but offers an important voice beyond the scope of their primary discipline. Artists are welcomed to move beyond this scope to embrace naivety, presenting the sweep, the details, or a combination of both.

As a magazine with a strong interdisciplinary focus, the online format allows for the delivery of written, sonic and visual resources to present, support and facilitate discourse between practising artists.

## WHAT WE DO

ADSR Zine offers a 3-part conceptual scaffold that is designed to evoke experimental and non-formalist approaches to responsive writing and media within a contemporary arts and performance context.

## OUR POINT OF DEPARTURE

ADSR Zine is a platform for discourse that encourages experimental approaches to discussing visual, performative and sound art. Functioning from an ‘art begets art’ premise, we offer contributors significant creative license.
We are influenced by the wave of 70’s and 80’s experimental music and art publications ( NMA, Sounds Australia) which were platforms for creative and innovative solutions to writing and conceptualising experimental work.

## TEAM

Zine Editors = James Hazel and Elia Bosshard
Website Design = Elia Bosshard
Cover Art = Eliza Savage

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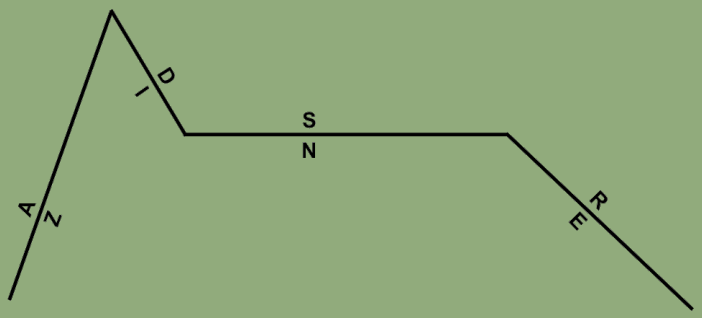
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