

Based in Melbourne, Australia, eamon sprod / TARAB explores borrowed sounds re-contextualised into dynamic, psycho-geographical arrangements for rooms, speakers, discarded and found things. More than simply documenting a given site, TARAB is interested in a direct engagement with our surrounds, teasing out half narratives, visceral sensation and false leads.

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HOLES by Tarab on [Bandcamp](#)



photograph: John Grzinich

Tom Soloveitzik: Can you tell me a bit about your working process while working on HOLES? Did you have any preconceived ideas to start with? Did you look for specific materials?

TARAB: I often start out with a bit of a mess of ideas or questions about *something*, which slowly come together over the course of a project. Things get discarded and added in along the way. I often start by wanting to address some of the things I had left un-resolved or I wasn't happy with in the last project. So one project kicks up a bunch of questions which forms the start of the next one. I often start with a series of "what happens if... ?" or "how can I... ?" questions, and through following them along something starts to come together (or not!). Usually by the time I come up with a title I have managed to figure out what the central theme is. I don't tend to have something I wish to tell a listener, my work is not didactic, but it is a way for me to question or attempt to understand, to learn through making, and the results of that process are slowly shaped into works to share.

I started *HOLE*S by pulling apart the piece I made for Jon Abbey's *Amplify 2020* series, called *41containers*, which was made during the first months of COVID related lockdown here in Melbourne, from recordings gathered within my own home. Over the last couple of years I have been undertaking a research project (which is why this may all seem a little over-thought), looking into various methods and ways for working with spaces, rooms, so once we were instructed to stay at home, I simply continued that process within my own domestic space.

For both pieces I started by collected sounds in two main ways. Recording around the house, often late at night when the house was very quiet, due to there being no traffic or planes going over head (I live very close to a flight path), but also the various appliances, simple domestic activities (often recorded from the next room), or even the sounds of my neighbours through the walls. I also played sounds back into the various rooms of my house (primarily recordings of other empty rooms gathered earlier), using small blue-tooth speakers which I could move around the room easily by hand, attempting to use these sounds to somehow draw out or describe its character.

I often think quite formally when I start a project, almost sculpturally. So I had been thinking for some time to make a work with very small or short sounds only; pieces of sound/recordings; percussive or pointillist sounds. So once I finished *41containers*, I started by stripping out all of the longer sounds, leaving a very simple skeleton, and started again.

I had also been somewhat haphazardly collecting a series of photographs around the city, of holes, which I had been mentally grouping together as *holes in the city*. This led me to wonder what a possible sound work could be to accompany these photographs, so I started to question what a sound hole could be? What could be the sound equivalent of a hole poked into something? or what a hole in sound could be? What can be heard through a sound hole, in the way that we can see through a hole to something else? Is a hole an absence of something or is it a thing in itself? I started to wonder about not just representing a hole, but also how I could actually make holes with and in sound. I had the idea of starting from one state, and to slowly move to its opposite. This nice neat transition got lost along the way of course, but I often start with these sorts of formal, material or spatial ideas, and then see what comes out of the process of working with and through them.

I also ended up moving away from the connection to the photographs (mainly because they were all from outside and I was stuck inside) but I would like to revisit this at some point. To make a book of images with a CD. Not photographs of the things I record, but sound and images working together in conversation, to make one work. But we shall see where that goes.

While listening there's a feeling of diffusion, movement and drifting between places in different paces. At times there's a notion of (the improbability) being in more than one place at once. Could you reflect on your personal approach for working with various spaces and how it developed over the years?

I have always been interested in collage, the idea that you can layer up or combine two sounds or images, which somehow results in something new. I'm sure I remember reading William Burroughs talking about his cut-ups as being closer to our actual experience of reality, as when we are in any situation we are often taking in multiple perceptions; listening to someone talk while watching something else; thinking about something else entirely; remembering yet another; basically creating our own cut-ups with external reality and our perception of it, and then in turn how we combine that perception with our feelings and memories. So in many ways we are always in more than one place at once!

I have become increasingly interested in the idea of creating spaces or situations with my work, not simply trying to document them or in creating imaginary landscapes. Not to be representational, but to actually shape a thing, a space in-itself. Both in terms of the physical spaces of "live presentations" (if anyone has heard me play live *performance* is really not the right word!) or installations, but also attempting to do this within the arranged CD based pieces. I am curious what it is, or could be, to create a space within two speakers, for an individual listener. It is almost like trying to render a 3D object in 2D in a painting as the cubists did, by showing you multiple surfaces and angles all at once. I became interested in the idea of creating some abstract spatial form, or conversely a vessel or container, with sound, by rapidly shifting between a series of sonic surfaces, depths, textures, points. But of course a space is more than just an empty geometric box, it is a social construction, shaped through use and activity. So I am trying to address that also, or at least starting to question how I can address it. So these surfaces and textures are not simply abstract sounds, but from the tangible and everyday, the sounds of people, things and their various interactions.

You utilize a lot of editing (or one might say, composition) to construct HOLES. Silences, short bursts and rapid movements are just some of the tools that are used as building blocks in the album. Do you recognize a certain change in the decisions you made in this album in contrast to previous albums?

I try to avoid the word composing: I am not interested in being *a composer*. I tend to use the word arrangement, which I like more. But yes my works are very composed. How I arrange the sounds is as important as the sounds themselves. Both contain ideas or prompts towards *potential* meanings or affect. So this is very important to me. This has always been there, but I guess my approach has shifted over time. Away from something more narrative perhaps, towards... I am not sure. But as you say there is still this sense of moving and shifting through space(s)...

If we are listening to a somewhat obtuse or abstracted sound, we often hear its character most clearly in reference to what we have heard before it or what we hear after it. One sound seems more distant if it is preceded by a sound which is perceived as being very close. I am curious to explore what a sound in-itself can share with us, not simply thinking about its source as symbol or sign, so these interactions or conversations between sounds have become quite interesting to me. For what they share with a listener.

In many ways I am starting to think of the pieces I make as part of an evolving process, with each piece being a node or point along a meandering, destination-less trajectory, rather than separate, complete and fixed objects. And each work or set of questions requires, or prompts, a slightly different response or approach... I am trying to let the sounds arrange themselves a little more, to follow their lead, to be a little looser and less precious within my approach, add a little randomness, be more playful in the process, but I am not sure this is entirely apparent in the end results.

As I mentioned I am increasingly interested in sound as a fragment, small pieces of sound, acknowledging a recording as being both sourced *from something* and as a thing in-itself; but this is already in my earlier works, along with the silences and hard cuts. But I am perhaps more interested in addressing the construction now, to avoid any sense of naturalism. This process started while making *I'm Lost*, but perhaps I became more fully conscious of it through making *An Incomplete Yet Fixed Idea*. But yes I tried to push some of those aspects even further, or in different directions, on this album.

What are your thoughts in regard to the way you present the places you inhabit and dwell in? Do those places still reflect some aspects of their essence to you, so to speak? or is it a new 'imaginary landscape'?

I think over time my ideas of places and space have changed quite a lot. I think I used to essentially approach spaces as an instrument, for producing interesting sounds, or for narrative reasons, to add a bit of a post-apocalyptic ruin-porn vibe. Basically I approached spaces for what I could take from them. And yes with my earlier works I very much thought of them as "new imaginary landscapes". Even a work like *Apophenia* is still working like this, in many ways.

However over time I have started to think about this a little differently. I think largely through my live works, trying to work with the presentation space in some way, to invite the space into the experience of the work. Which has led to an increased interest in installation works, which I am trying to make more of, although it is often difficult for me to find spaces to make them in, as I prefer to work outside of gallery spaces (and galleries often don't like me much either it seems!). So I am moving towards the idea of shaping a space, or a situation, whether it is within the stereo field of a pair of speakers or whether this is through creating a work within an actual room, rather than simply trying to make "imaginary landscapes".

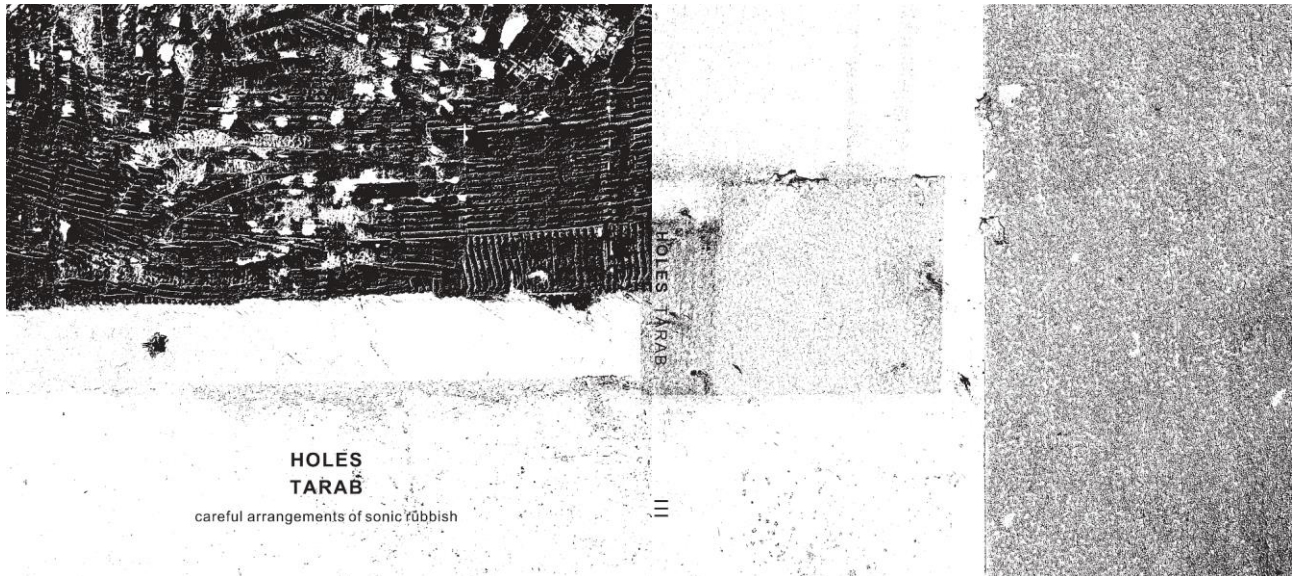
In most cases I don't really make any real attempt to document a specific place. I am not studying a specific location but I am more generally curious about the spaces we occupy and shape, and how they shape us. There are exceptions to that of course.

I am always wary of ideas like essence. It seems too much like scientific reductionism, whereas these things are a little more elusive and intangible. I am not sure we as humans can really claim to grasp, let alone designate, the essence of things. But I have been trying in some ways to get at what might be clumsily called the *thing-ness* of the things I work with. Trying to somehow draw out the sound of an object or a space, to draw out its sound, to work *with* rather than to impose myself upon them.

I guess the short answer is that it varies. Recently I have been making a series of recordings of *empty* rooms. When you take a random 30 second section, it can simply sound like *noise*, especially when you push the gain up. So yes it can retain some trace of the room, but also it can simply become an audio signal. In many cases if I am to play one of these recordings to someone without telling them what the source is, I am unsure as to what they will hear of the original room. But I find this interesting: to really ask what is in a recording? My friend Camilla Hannan and I discussed often whether highly processed sounds still retained something of the original sound and its reference to its source. Camilla liked to use processing more heavily, while I tend towards processing minimally. She insisted that heavily processed sounds retained something of the original, whereas I suggested that while they can, there is a point where they no longer do, it becomes something else entirely. Likewise another local artist Martin Kay has been presenting/creating live works which he titles *Conditioning Silence*. He starts by having an audience sit in silence for 10 minutes or so, listening, which he records in various ways, and then plays back and diffuses those recordings to the same audience. When listening to this work I was immediately struck by how different listening to the recorded version was from the original. Despite being able to recognise many of the sounds I had just heard, the experiences were completely different. It seems sort of obvious that this would be the case and I am not sure this was exactly Martin's central aim, to highlight this separation, but I found it extremely interesting!

So while I am always doubtful that recordings can capture something like essence, like some sort of sonic ghost hunter, yes I think they can contain some trace which we, as listeners, can pick up. However it is often a fine line between representation and abstraction, and I am curious about this interplay. I guess this is where the arrangements come in. How sounds are combined can help us to read what the sounds are sharing with us. Without resorting to words to tell us what we are listening to.

I guess the simplest answer would have been: HOLES has been made from recording almost entirely within my house, but it is not *about* my house. It is highly unlikely that it tells you anything much about my house, but hopefully it shares something about the spaces we inhabit.



As a listener I can recognize your presence in the album. What is your attitude to recording devices in your practice? Is recording a personal thing to you? Do you try to intervene or manipulate recording technology?

Yes this is an interesting one. I think the whole field recorder as outside objective observer is sort of redundant. Of course this is not a new idea, and there are many people working under this understanding. The mere fact that there is a recording, means there is a recorder. So I have started to leave various elements of myself in the recordings. Accidental elements, equipment failure, bad recording technique, clumsiness. Quite often the things that I did not intend or attempt to record are more interesting than what I did. I think everyone has at one time pressed pause when they intended to press record and reversed the recording process, gathering the bits you didn't want and omitting the things that you wanted. This can be interesting. While I am very wary of the practice of making poetic whispered descriptions while recording in a forest, I think some small acknowledgement of our/my presence is important to the process. Because really this is at the heart of the process. A collaboration between me and whatever it is that I am working with. I have a new collaborative work soon to be released on Unfathomless, made with my friend David Prescott-Steed in a storm water drain here in Melbourne, which is not so far from running directly under my house. For me, this work is not a document of the tunnel, but a series of recordings generated between David, myself and the tunnel: a three way collaboration. So us being there, our presence, IS the work. Therefore we used various recordings of us walking, talking, tripping over, zips being done up, clothes and bags rustling. These actions, which were not intended musically,

often revealed much more about the space and our activities there, than anything we attempted intentionally, so we used them.

I think recording is very personal. Not always. Sometimes it is sort of fleetingly so, as I am just grabbing a sound, and scurrying off, on my way to something else. But perhaps that is actually more personal in a way, part of my everyday life. But to sit and really pay attention to something, to listen, to touch, you engage with the world in a different way than you usually would. I think lots of us feel very disconnected from the world, from each other, and this process helps to re-connect me to things, just a little... As I said before, it is a process of me learning about things, through making or through simply paying attention.

I don't really try to manipulate the recording technology, I am not really interested in technology as such. But it is good to acknowledge its presence, and its role as a go-between every now and again, both as inscriber and projector. Or even as an embalmer! I try to acknowledge speakers and microphones as active things, rather than thinking of them as passive, transparent or neutral replicators.

You use recorded voice in the 3rd track which shifts in a sense the abstraction of previous materials for a moment. Can you expand on this notion and more in general: is voice and language something you worked with in the past?

I am quite wary of words, for a variety of reasons (despite my tendency to over use them). I think often we tend to over value them to the exclusion of other things. So no, I don't tend to use words often in my works, and I try to use written words minimally also. In fact for a long time I worked to remove obvious traces of people altogether, but this is changing. In this case the voices are radio, we often have the radio on around the house in the morning or evenings, listening to the news, especially during our COVID lockdowns (and I am currently being ordered to stay at home once again!), listening to the incessant updates of government and media bumbling around. It was a part of the sounds of my house. So I recorded it. I was not so interested in the words, but in some ways the layering up of or bombardment of information, which in fact contained mostly nothing.

It is interesting that you mention abstraction. I have been told many times recently that my work is becoming increasingly abstract, and to some extent this is true. But in many ways I think it is also the opposite. I am increasingly interested in the sound or a recording being what it is, not necessarily simply a proxy for an idea, or a re-presentation of something. So the sounds I use are treated actually more as concrete material things.

Can you talk about memory - as broad as this term can be - and its role in this album and in your practice in general?

How we read sound, or understand sound is mostly through memory. We know a specific material, object or action causes a specific sort of sound because we have heard it before and remember it. There are various cultural associations which go along with that also. This of course gets interesting when we are not certain of what the source is, if we are not told, so therefore we unconsciously start to assign a cause or source from our memories, to find something similar that fits. In a way we are inventing a source for a sound, and relating it to our own experience of that source. I often choose not to list the material or places that I have borrowed sounds from, but instead leave it up to the listener to make up their own minds. The sounds are there to prompt this. I have something in mind, but I am not attempting to convey that fully formed to a listener in some

sort of didactic manner, but to share a series of surfaces, textures, distances, things, spaces, and to leave room for them, to invite them, to complete or in fact create the work, their relation to it or its possible meaning, for themselves.

While speaking about sound you use some terms that have direct reference to *musique concrète*. Can you tell us what is your relation towards it?

I have to admit that I didn't really think about it too much until someone brought it up in regards to my *An Incomplete Yet Fixed Idea* LP, that maybe I was making a form of *musique concrète*. While there are many histories around sound/experimental music, clearly it is foundational if you are working with sounds of the everyday. I am a little ambivalent about *musique concrète*, like a lot of people no doubt. But I guess it makes a difference whether we are talk *musique concrète* with capitals or lower case. The institution versus a way of working with recorded sounds.

There are many things I love about it, and some things which are not so interesting to me. Clearly there is a lot of baggage, and lots which I won't pretend to understand. Having said that, I have been listening to more and more music/sound which might fall into this area over recent years, both older and more recent work. I think I have been increasingly drawn to it as my own work started to move that way (more fragmented, constructed, material, abstract) purely out of personal listening preference as much as anything. As much as I love many of the earlier *classic* works, I am just as much interested by Schimpfluch Gruppe; Francisco Meirino; Lucciano Maggiore; Hanna Hartman; Mika Vainio's *Black Telephone of Matter*; Alvin Curran's *Natural History*; Masayuki Imanishi's *Worn Tape*; Choi Joonyong and Jin Sangtae's *Hole In My Head* or Taku Unami and Toshiya Tsunoda's *Wovenland*. Work that takes *something* from *musique concrète*, but take it somewhere else. Move it out of the institution and the concert hall for one thing.

I am interested in working with everyday sounds or everyday things, but I am not so interested in completely removing them from their source, reducing them to pure aesthetic appreciation. I want people to hear that there is a source, even when the *exact* nature of the source is not always so important. I don't want to *elevate* the everyday to the level of the classical music concert hall. But maybe let music back into the everyday, into the *here and now*, rather than to create an imaginary spectacular *other*. I am interested in making multi-speaker or spatial works, but I am not interested in *diffusion* as such. Moving a completed composition around in space, but to play with the space, allow it into the work. A *situated music* perhaps? I have been working with a small simple multi-channel setup for a while with small speakers, transducers, found objects, in direct contact with elements of the room etc ... which Pierre Judon from Aposiopèse cleverly and somewhat cheekily dubbed the *Acousmonium Povera*. This interests me much more than a *speaker orchestra*.



Can you emphasize your ideas of conveying with sound the social construction of a space?

Yeah I have to be careful here not to make too many under substantiated claims here! I am not sure I am really conveying the idea of social construction, rather than attempting to consider or include it more within my work. As I mentioned earlier, my work tends to come from asking myself a whole bunch of “what happens if...?” or “how can I ... ?” type questions, rather than making any attempt to *explain* an idea, but to see what comes of following an idea. As much as anything recently this has prompted a change in thinking around why I choose to record a sound, a move away from considering it purely aesthetically, toward a focus on what it does within a space or what it does for a listener.

I tend to be fairly solitary and isolated in my work and working methods. I have a slight tendency towards misanthropy, so as mentioned earlier I have tended to avoid the sounds of people in the spaces I have recorded in, which have most commonly been spaces vacated of people. I have been more interested in the remnants or traces of people, rather than the people themselves. And in many ways that is still true. Empty buildings or rooms and the things left behind that I find there. (And indeed a recording itself could be considered as exactly this, a trace of something past.) These *empty* places are just as much a product of social construction just as more overtly peopled situations. There has been a great rise in social practice or activity over the last years, as a way of addressing or even responding to these ideas of social construction. However I am a little too solitary for that sort of thing, so I try to somehow address this in a different way. In the traces of the social in the world of things. Without wanting to be too grandiose, an analogy could be the difference between urban archaeology, rather than anthropology.

I guess the real shift has been in a further understanding of the term space itself. Musicians and artist (including me) often talk about *the space*, when what we really mean is the room/building. It is sort of a shorthand. A space is more than the building, but arises out of what goes on there, how people put it to use. There is a park outside my house. During the day it is full of kids and their (currently masked) parents. But at night, a completely different set of people use the park, young adults escaping their parental oversight to meet, talk, smoke weed, whatever. One use is for safe supervision, while the other is for a lack of supervision. The physical place does not change, but it could be considered to become a very different space at different times of the day. But it is somehow more than that also, the space in turn has its own affect upon the people that occupy and use it. There is a conversation and exchange of sorts.

So within HOLES a lot of the sounds are coming from the use of the house. Even though this might not be exactly obvious. Someone having a shower, the sound of all the various electrical devices, someone packing the dishwasher, the kid next door jumping up and down on the floor, or me simply walking around the house. I am not trying to document the building, its infrastructure or the activities that go on. But somehow include them in the work. I am not trying to *explain* or *project* these ideas within the work, but they are bouncing around in my head and exert influence on how I work with the space and the sounds I have gathered from within it. Perhaps some of this is all more of a reflection of the things I have been working on more recently, rather than in HOLES specifically. It can be hard for me to remember sometimes, to separate what I was thinking about a previous project from what I am thinking about now.

It's interesting, in that respect, to think about the effects of COVID and its physical limitations on creativity. What's your personal take about it? What were the benefits for being in and around your living space?

I have always included my living space within my work one way or another. I am pretty sure recordings from my home have been in most of my works. As with lots of people I make at home, I have a small studio here. And I do spend a reasonable amount of time at home regardless. So I don't mind spending extended periods of time without being able to leave the house. But I am lucky, my living situation is easy and good, a nice place which I share with my partner and daughter. Which is not the case for everyone of course.

The limits on creativity, for me, have been, as you say, more physical limitations, but that of course bleeds over into other things. I had been planning to pursue more site-based installation works, but this became impossible for most of last year. So I made works about what I thought of as *speculative spaces*, or explored this idea of using sound to create a space somehow within the speakers and ears of a listener. This probably increased my tendency to over think things, and not always in any useful or even interesting ways ... just tying myself in mental knots!

One more Covid related question: what are your plans going forward and how, if at all, has the pandemic and global warming is affecting your practice and plans/thoughts for the future?

Plans going forward ... on one hand it is hard to think too far ahead ... but at the same time, I have to. A dilemma of sorts. I have some pieces either scheduled for release or in progress. I have some plans for a small expansion of my little *sonicrubbish* publications. What I really want to do is make more installation works. Find spaces to make works within. We shall see how that goes ... COVID has made this more difficult, in many ways, but perhaps it will also open some possibilities. I am coming into my last year of a research PhD ... so that will keep me busy and indoors for a while! I was hoping to apply for some residencies after that but ... travel outside of Australia is difficult at present. Who knows!

Over the last decade (?) I have found a little more interest in my work outside of Melbourne, and made some good friends along the way, but I have been aware for a while that it is not so sustainable for me to travel as often as I would like, financially as much as anything. So it has become apparent that I need to find some way to set up some sort of *space* for myself here in Melbourne, or Australia at least. How, and what that is exactly, I have no idea though ... and COVID has made this perhaps even more apparent.

As for global warming ... Other than the obvious, I don't think that it has directly affected how I approach my practice. The fact that the human race is killing itself through greed and stupidity is not such a surprising thing to me, unfortunately. As depressing as it is. "You must go on. I can't go on. I'll go on."