I Am My Own Messiah
Jim McIntyre 2006 – 2011

This work is about my life with a debilitating illness, chronic fatigue syndrome, that has been terribly exacerbated by a severe, long-term adverse reaction to the antibiotic Levaquin.

Seriously ill people encounter great challenges when trying to relate their experiences. Drastically altered realities, deeply affecting emotions and strong, often long-lasting sensations are difficult to convey with any effectiveness. These challenges are magnified by the profound physical isolation my specific health problems demand: how can I expect anyone to comprehend what I'm dealing with when I'm forced to experience it in solitude? My condition also amplifies problems of communication with doctors. At this time, there are no tests or procedures doctors can do to directly diagnose CFS or antibiotic reactions, and only a few limited tests offer glimpses into the extensive workings of these disorders in the body. Those methods of communication are trivial at best. I'm left with words to explain my plight to doctors and words seem woefully inadequate for the task.

The title refers, in part, to my struggle to connect with my situation. Doing so is critical because I must shape my behavior in ways that lessen my symptoms and mitigate the long-term toll these health problems take on my body. It took more than six years to complete this project because I could only work an extremely limited amount of time, usually for only a few hours a month.

1. Koan Luke 9:51 9:57 9:58

James Tenney/Marc Sabat/Father Ted Tyler

"As the time approached for Jesus to be taken up to heaven, he resolutely set out for Jerusalem. As they were walking along the road a man said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go'. Jesus replied, 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head'." - Luke (abridged)

The spoken audio used here was taken from a [Youtube video](#) uploaded by Father Ted Tyler, a Catholic priest of the diocese of Parramatta in Sydney, Australia. The music samples are from an mp3 encoding of a [recording](#) of Marc Sabat performing James Tenney's Koan, as it was originally written for solo violin. Koan is one of Tenney's [Postal Pieces,](#) so named because he had them printed on postcards; simple instructions are given for performing each piece. Koan continually oscillates between two notes, starting at the G below middle C and the D just above it, and rises using a "very slow glissando" so the performer will "gradually move toward (the) bridge, until nothing but noise is heard", encouraging listeners to be especially attentive to both the moment and the overall form.

This graphic shows the progression of the two different note lines in Koan. The arrows connect the phrases of the Luke passage with the locations of the short Koan samples they are paired with.
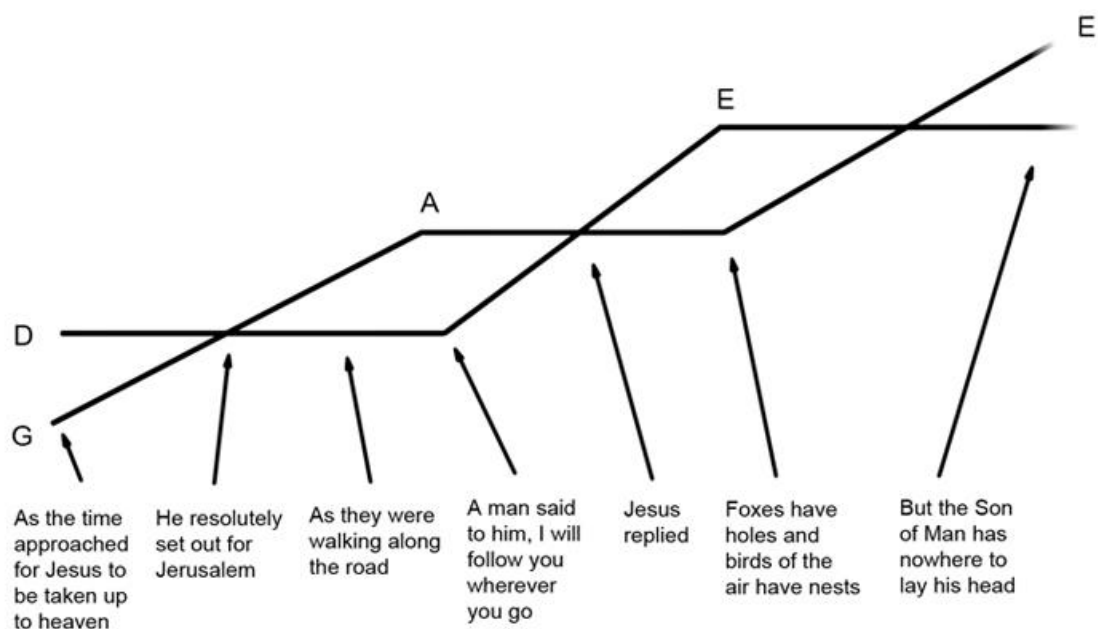
The spoken phrases and Koan samples were combined into 4 to 9 second segments, then repeated. Each of these sections was chopped into segments and then reconstituted in a slightly different manner, as was the entire piece. These manipulations give the piece it's phasing and disintegrating/ reintegrating characteristics, ensuring that two spoken phrases are almost never heard as if in balanced conversation.

2. In the Waiting Room

Elizabeth Bishop/ReadPlease 2003.1.10 software

The most important thing I deal with is the fact that any exertion intensifies my sickness, causing my symptoms to flare. This includes the exertion required by reading. Reading makes the skin on my hands wrinkle and turns my scalp to a white, oily film. It causes my skin to tingle with peripheral neuropathy. It makes my head hurt and gives me what is known as "mental fog", which makes thinking difficult and painful. It inflames my tinnitus and makes me more sensitive to light, sound and heat. It causes my achilles tendons to ache. It increases my crushing exhaustion. So I tried using the ReadPlease text-to-speech software to turn reading into a listening experience. This was far from a perfect solution, though; the software read the web text, but I still had to expend effort copying the text and pasting it into the software. The intellectual depth of the reading, or listening, material matters as well. Reading or listening to articles about sports requires much less effort than reading or listening to poetry or art analysis or music theory.

The idea of the waiting room itself is a painful one for me. I saw a doctor in Lancaster, Kentucky who claimed he could cure my chronic fatigue syndrome when no other doctor could. I will never forget sitting in the waiting room, which I think of as not looking much different from the one Bishop experienced as a child. The doctor's office was in a very old house and the furnishings seemed like they hadn't been updated in many decades. During my final visit, the doctor took a sample that was difficult to give. I yelped when I produced it and my cry was heard in the waiting room by the friend who drove me to the doctor's office that day.

The doctor was an arrogant fool, a quack who was heavily into the "anti-aging" scene. He was also a Christian interested in end times and the Apocalypse. He was charismatic, with a conviction that he could heal me, and I was desperate for help. He had me taking vitamins and other supplements along with various exotic substances. He prescribed a litany of different medications as well, culminating in a high dosage of Levaquin -- a powerful medicine that wasn't properly vetted by the Food and Drug Administration even for normal amounts (in the years since I took Levaquin, the FDA has multiple times updated the drug's labeling to include stronger safety

warnings). I suffered an awful reaction and for more than six years have existed in the aftermath of an absurd transformation.

3. Death by Levaquin Triadic Memories

John Fratti/Morton Feldman/Markus Hinterhauser

This section pairs audio from a Youtube video with samples from an mp3. The Youtube audio is from a [video](#) entitled "Levaquin reaction FDA failure Google: 'Death by Levaquin' for my website" that was made by John Fratti and uploaded to Youtube by Bob Grozier. John also suffers from a severe, long-term reaction to Levaquin (as does Bob to a related antibiotic, Cipro) and has become a leading advocate for the awareness of the dangers these quinolone antibiotics pose. The audio of John speaking is coupled with samples from an mp3 encoding of a recording of pianist Markus Hinterhauser performing Morton Feldman's Triadic Memories.

Triadic Memories is built around the use of the piano's sustain pedal; Feldman emphasizes the decay of the notes and chords to poignantly evoke memory. I truncated this decay in the first sample I used, when John says "I took a drug called Levaquin". At the end I did the opposite, removing the last 3 chords, leaving silences that are followed by the sounds of the chords decaying. Memory weighs heavily on someone in my or John's position, as it does for anyone who has experienced significant loss. Remembering and forgetting can both be agonizing.

To make obvious the artificiality of the construction, I repeated the last part of John's audio but divorced it from the sample that had accompanied it. I did the same with the last Triadic Memories sample, decoupling it from John's voice.

The composing process Feldman used for part of Triadic Memories was what he [described](#) as, "a conscious attempt at 'formalizing' a disorientation of memory". He composed, forgot, then reconstructed, so that in the result, "there is a *suggestion* that what we hear is functional and directional, but we soon realize that this is an illusion; a bit like walking the streets of Berlin -- where all the buildings look alike, *even if they're not*". This seems a lot like living in the netherworld of debilitating chronic illness, where the days pass in a disorientation of sameness and uncertainty.

I manipulated John's audio more than any other sound source used in I Am My Own Messiah. I slowed his voice down by about 50 cents and lengthened the time between phrases to add gravity to his delivery. This also had the effect of fortuitously matching the rhythm of John's speech with the tempo that Hinterhauser chose to play Triadic Memories -- our instincts paralleled. I

chose the starting points for the two longer samples, placing them in gaps between John's words, but the way they fit with the speech as it unfolds is due to chance and the likemindedness between myself and Hinterhauser.

4. Al-Noor Grido del Venditore di Pesce

Carl Stone/Unknown/Angelo Vitello/Luciano Berio

This section is an audio representation of the written graphic in the photo below as well as a representation of how the act of speaking causes my symptoms to flare. The photo is of the Kolakoski mathematical sequence, written by myself on a piece of paper, and includes evidence of work done when generating the sequence.
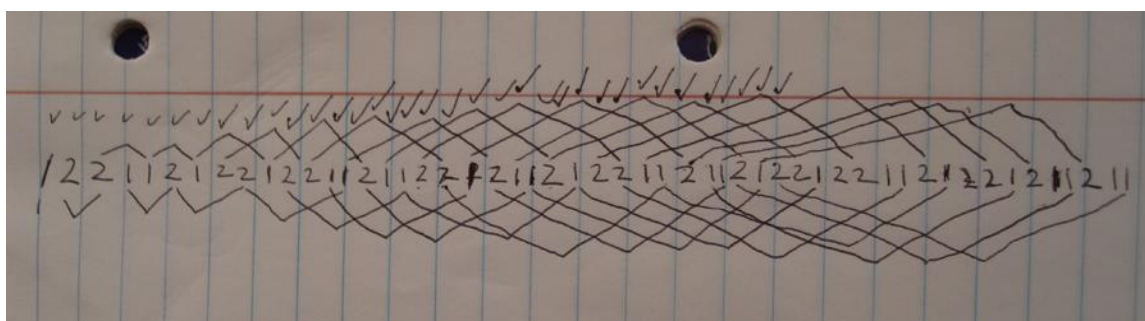
Like the next section, 18 Hours in 18 Weeks, this section represents my day-to-day experience with illness. 18 Hours in 18 Weeks is a macroscopic view of months of my existence while Al-Noor Grido del Venditore di Pesce focuses on the toll just one conversation can exact. The biggest difficulty I face is the fact that any exertion causes my symptoms to worsen. Talking is very strenuous; every utterance carries a cost. The written Kolakoski sequence afforded me the opportunity to represent this with audio. The buzzing drone, created using square waves, builds with the repetitions of the sampled voices. The sample repetitions increase the volume and pitch of the synthetic-sounding square wave drone, as the words I speak increase the severity of my unnatural, Levaquin-fueled symptoms, until I am overwhelmed and must stop speaking. Ceasing the activity doesn't immediately stop the inflamed symptoms, however, and ending the sample repetitions doesn't stop the square waves. My symptoms, like the square waves, only die down in due time. Unfortunately, unlike the audio, my symptoms never die down to zero; there is always a baseline of discomfort. And my inflamed symptoms last for a much longer time with respect to the length of a conversation than what is represented here. The increased distress created by an hour conversation lasts for two or three weeks or more.

The Kolakoski sequence is an infinite list of numbers that consists only of the

numbers 1 and 2, alternating between them. To generate the sequence (from [Wikipedia](#)):

(1) write 1; read it as the number of 1's to write before switching to 2;
(2) write 2; read it as the number of 2's to write before switching back to 1;
(3) so far... 1,2,2; read the new 2 as the number of 1's to write;
(4) so far... 1,2,2,1,1; read the new 1,1 as the number of 2's and then 1's to write;
(5) so far... 1,2,2,1,1,2,1; continue generating forever.

One thing that becomes readily apparent when writing the Kolakoski sequence is that it's impossible to write the sequence without keeping track of the last number consulted (in the photo, the tick marks I used to keep my place can be seen). This is because there is an increasing lag that emerges between the number consulted to generate the next number(s) in the sequence and the last number it generates (the leading edge of the sequence). The number consulted to determine the next segment of the sequence proceeds ordinally, from the first number to the second, then to the third, fourth, fifth, sixth, etc...never skipping a number. However, the leading edge of the sequence skips ahead when the number consulted is a 2 because two numbers are written before consulting the next determiner. As the sequence becomes longer, the leading edge moves farther and farther from the number being consulted. This lag is delineated by the lines in the photo. The lines connect the number consulted with the last number it generates and naturally get longer as more of the sequence is written.

The first number in the sequence is a 1 and has no line drawn from it. This is because that first 1 only generates itself; the lag has not emerged yet. The second number is a 2, which when consulted generates itself and the following 2. Thus, there is a line drawn from it to the next 2, indicating the first appearance of lag. That first line covers one space (the space between the first and second 2). Each time a 2 is consulted, the distance of the lag (counted by spaces between numbers for the purposes of this composition) is increased by one whole number. The last number in the sequence in the photo (which is not the last number in the composition, I extended the sequence after I took the photo) is a 1 and the line from it extends 17 spaces back to the 2 that was consulted to generate it. I stopped drawing the lag lines long before the end of the sequence, if I had drawn them all they would have extended past the end of the sequence as the square waves extend past the end of the repeated samples in the audio.

The audio was created from two samples, one of a male voice and the other of a female, that were combined and later overlaid with square waves. This combined sample (from here on referred to simply as the sample) corresponds to the numbers in the photo and the square waves correspond to the lines. The sample was then resampled from 44,100 Hz to a rate of 2000

Hz. These two different sample rates take the places of the 1 and the 2 in the Kolakoski sequence:

Lower fidelity (2000 Hz) sample = 1
Higher fideltiy (44,100 Hz) sample = 2
Square waves = lines

I inserted silences between the sample repetitions to facilitate the translation of line lengths to square wave durations. This can be seen in a screenshot of an early version of the audio file:
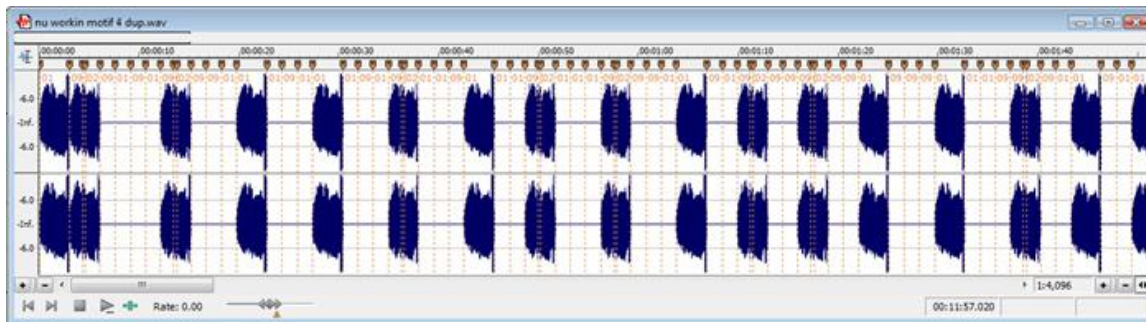
Later I added a new square wave immediately after each sample repetition to re-create the lines.

The audio starts with the lower fidelity sample (representing the 1), immediately followed by the higher fidelity sample (representing the 2). There is no time between the sounding of these first two samples because there is no line drawn between the first two terms of the written sequence in the photo. Next is a section lasting 6.076 seconds that is filled by a 50 Hz square wave (representing the first line). I made this space between the second and third samples (the first two 2's) equal to the time of the sample twice, 6.076 seconds. I then divided that amount into fourths, which allowed me to cut and paste two-fourths or three-fourths of the 6.076 second section between the repeated samples throughout the piece to make the increasing lengths of the square waves correlate with the increasing distances of the lines in the photo. For example, the line from the 8th term in the sequence in the photo (which is a 2) to the last number it generates (which is also a 2, the 12th term) covers 4 spaces between the numbers. So the square wave that begins immediately after the 8th sample lasts for 4 x 6.076 seconds = 24.304 seconds, from the end of the 8th sample to the beginning of the 12th sample. The sequence in the photo contains 52 terms and the longest line covers 17 spaces. The audio composition is extended to 113 terms, and the longest, final square wave (beginning immediately after the final sample) is 58 spaces long (352.408 seconds).

The loudness of the individual square waves rises and falls as the lines in the

graphic extend outward from and back to the number sequence (the pitch of each individual square wave stays constant). This translation exposes problems encountered when converting a graphic to audio, especially a graphic not specifically designed to become sound (there is software that translates digital images into sound but that didn't allow the specific symbolic expression of experience I wanted here). The square waves represent the lines but the need for each square wave to begin at 0 decibels, thus relatively mimicking my symptoms, means the two have conflicting properties: the square waves can't fall and rise like the lines drawn below the number sequence. Also, sound waves interfere with each other as they are overlaid. Each line in the graphic can be followed and distinguished, but the same can't be said of each square wave in the audio composition.

I chose to use square waves instead of sine waves for a few different reasons. Square waves with lower frequency fundamentals are heard as having higher pitches than similar sine waves. This property allowed me, essentially, to use a more compact range of prominent frequencies than if I had used sine waves. Also, square waves seem to convey the buzzing, electrical feel of my neuropathy, and the higher frequency ones used at the end of the piece better approximate the sound of my tinnitus.

The frequencies of the square waves used in this section were generated by dividing the frequency range into equal increments. The first square wave has a fundamental of 50 Hz, and the frequency of each square wave added after a higher fidelity sample (to keep the frequency range smaller, the pitch of newly added square waves only increases after higher fidelity samples) is increased by 5 Hz, up to 335 Hz (the frequency of the fundamental of the final, 352.408 second, square wave). When deciding what gradation of frequencies to use, I had to take into account the fact that I didn't want the first frequency to sound too low, it had to have power, or the last frequency to be too high. The highest frequency had to be in a comfortable hearing range, first and foremost because my illness has made me extremely sensitive to higher frequency sound; a square wave begins to become painful to me when its fundamental is about 400 Hz.

The female voice sample was taken from Carl Stone's Al-Noor and the male sample from Grido del venditore di pesce, a Sicilian folk song. Grido was included on an ECM New Series CD of Luciano Berio's Voci and Naturale, which are both based on Sicilian folk songs, as reference material. It is a recording of the cry of Angelo Vitello, a fish-seller advertising his product. For Al-Noor, Stone manipulated a found recording of a woman singing a Vietnamese lullaby. The sample of Al-Noor I used is untreated by Stone; however, it's from early in the piece before the transformations begin. As Al-Noor continues, he uses software to add Western-sounding harmonies to her originally monophonic vocal.

William Kolakoski himself experienced severe medical problems; he suffered from chronic schizophrenia and struggled with prescription drug issues. From a letter written by Mike Vargo, a former classmate of Kolakoski (via [Wikipedia](#)):

"Here was this extremely active and facile mind...yet there was this thing living within him that was always threatening to *take over*... So, given this paradoxical situation, one subject which preoccupied Bill was the question of free will. This was the central question of his existence. He wanted to think he was free, yet he knew all too well the power of an "invisible hand," and this drove him to determinism. Back and forth he went...it seems to me that, given this quandary, it was very natural for him to try to create a self-generating number sequence. You 'invent' the sequence yourself, thus exercising free will - and yet - it was already 'there' waiting for you, wasn't it..."

5. 18 Hours in 18 Weeks

Unknown (freesound.org)

18 Hours in 18 Weeks deals with the translation of experience most directly. I'm only able to interact with people an average of about an hour a week, anything more is too taxing. Usually this is with my family. I live alone and my mother, sometimes accompanied by my father or nieces, visits once a week to deliver groceries and attend to things I need. 18 Hours in 18 Weeks recreates those visits. It is an hour and 25 minutes in length but more than an hour and 24 minutes is silence. This silence corresponds to the roughly 3006 hours I spend every 18 weeks without human interaction. The other 30 seconds is the only time the silence is broken. That 30 seconds is audio, downloaded as a wav file from freesound.org, of girls having an animated conversation. It corresponds to the roughly 18 hours of contact I get every 18 weeks. The girls' audio is broken up into 18 sections and interspersed somewhat regularly throughout the silence to approximate the rhythm of the weekly visits I receive.

I've tried to find the audio of the girls' conversation again at [freesound.org](#) but have been unable to do so as of fall 2011; thus the uploader's username is not credited. The file may have been removed from the website.

6. Streaming Webcam Gaza, the Morning of January 12, 2009

Unknown

The last section is audio recorded from a streaming webcam located in Gaza City, early in the Gazan morning of January 12th 2009. This was during the Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip known as Operation Cast Lead in Israel and the Gaza Massacre in the Palestinian territories. The camera was placed on a tall building looking out over the city.

Evidence of people trapped by technology is inescapable: the constant sound of Israeli propeller-driven reconnaissance drones overhead mixes with occasional gunfire/explosions, ambulances and Israeli fighter jets. The use of white phosphorous by Israel is also notable. It is a nasty substance, an incendiary munition that causes severe burns and absorption through the burned area can lead to organ failure. I watched this webstream from my sick bed 6000 miles away, during the Gazan nighttime and saw white phosphorous being rained down on Palestinians from Israeli helicopters.

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