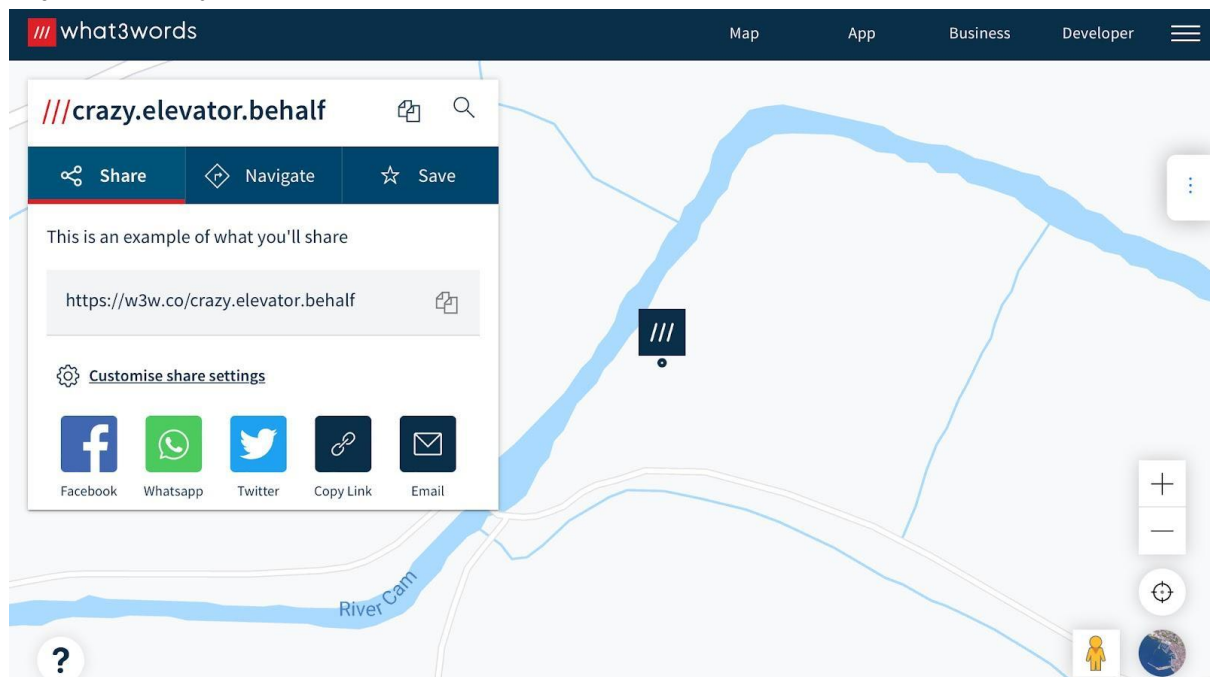


To what extent is certainty attainable?

This exhibition explores how the language and symbols we use in everyday life communicate knowledge with varying degrees of certainty depending on context and interpretation. Through comparing objects from different areas of knowledge, it is clear that complete certainty is often unattainable, as it is limited by the methods and tools utilised in acquiring the knowledge.

Object 1: 'Crazy.Elevator.Behalf' What3Words location, 30th June 2021



This screenshot from 'What3Words' demonstrates the certainty that is possible to attain when sharing location, such as this site I shared with my friend to coordinate a meeting point last June.

The app itself was designed to increase certainty in geolocation, allowing users to identify precise locations whilst mitigating the ambiguity of common addresses. This object demonstrates that certainty is attainable because in an emergency situation, the only thing responders require in order to know the exact location are the three location-specific words. The algorithm ensures that the generated combination is unique to reinforce this certainty. Meanwhile, the simplicity of only having to use three words to convey a precise location also enhances reliability by mitigating the risk of misreading complicated coordinates, as well as the risk of the nearest address being an inaccurate representation of location. This is relevant to my personal use of the app, as my friend and I wished to meet in the countryside, far away from named addresses.

Through this object, certainty appears to be substantially attainable because although there are only 26 characters in the English alphabet, there are enough combinations of three words for every $3m^2$ in the world, allowing location-specific reliability. These limitless arrangements for the whole world display the certainty that can be attained through the infinite arrangements language can have. Additionally, the entire what3words grid is fixed, so the 3 word address for a particular location will never change even if buildings or streets are redeveloped. This means that certainty is maintained because the map is not reliant on the

territory, further increasing the reliability of this object as a geolocation method. As a result, this object illustrates complete certainty is attainable when language is used precisely.

Object 2: My NHS COVID-19 Booster Vaccination Email, 6th April 2022

Book your COVID-19 booster vaccination now Inbox



COVID-19 - Email Invitations 6 Apr
to me ▾



Dear Miss [REDACTED]

We are writing to you again as our records show you are eligible for a COVID-19 booster vaccine but have not yet had one. Getting fully vaccinated, including a booster dose, is the safest and easiest way to help you avoid catching and spreading COVID-19, even if you have had the virus before. Vaccination gives you stronger immunity compared to natural immunity following COVID-19 infection.

We also know that the effectiveness of earlier doses reduces over time, making you more vulnerable to COVID-19, which is why a booster is needed for maximum protection. It could also help to protect you against future variants of the virus.

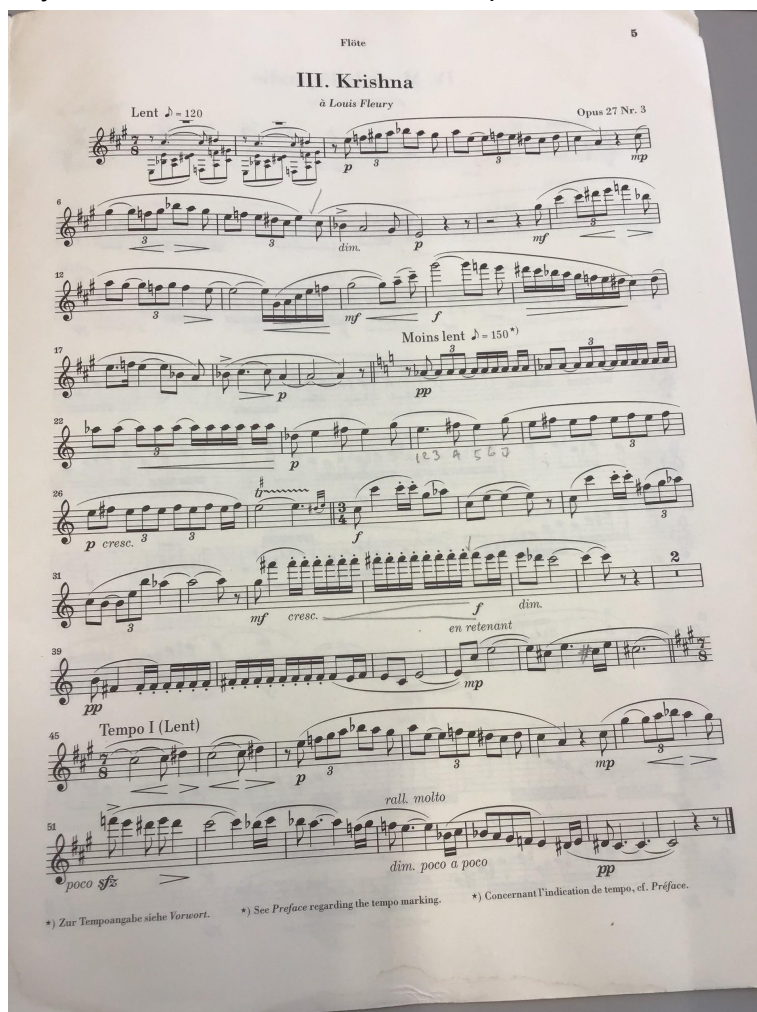
If you have now had your booster, or have an appointment booked for it, please ignore this letter.

This email was sent to me by the NHS to encourage me to get my booster vaccine against COVID-19. I have chosen this object because it explores how language conveys the varying degrees of certainty that are possible to attain through the methods and tools involved in natural sciences.

The email claims that 'vaccination gives you stronger immunity than natural immunity' which holds certainty because by following the scientific method, the scientists could create a hypothesis and then generate a set of quantitative data used to verify or invalidate this. Here, the confirmatory language 'gives' reinforces the certainty attained, to persuade me of the benefits of vaccination.

However, the recency of the pandemic also acts as a limitation to certainty in this object, demonstrating that even within areas of knowledge like the natural sciences where rigorous experimentation can be done to harness reliable conclusions, the unpredictability of future scenarios acts as a hindrance. This is clear through the ambiguous language present in 'it could also help protect you against future variants' where no definite claims can be made through the use of the conditional 'could'. This is especially relevant through this object because the mutation of COVID-19 viral strains has been unpredictable and random¹. Additionally, the pressure of COVID's impact on public health has meant this methodology has been rushed, and so the lack of past evidence increases the degrees of uncertainty to this knowledge, despite the accuracy present in the tools. When considering the dangers of incorrect knowledge being shared in the public health domain, it is clear that this caution that limits complete certainty is necessary. Therefore, certainty is attainable in the natural sciences through following the scientific method to test hypotheses, yet cannot be completely relied on due to the unpredictability of future events.

Object 3: 'Krishna' Joueurs de flûte Opus 27 - Roussel. Flute Sheet Music



¹ <https://www.who.int/activities/tracking-SARS-CoV-2-variants>. Accessed 23.05.22.

This is my copy of 'Krishna', a movement from Roussel's 'Joueurs de flute' (1924) which I have performed in a recital. The object explores the extent to which certainty can be obtained through symbols through the tempo marked '♩=150'.

The role subjectivity plays in interpretation of the arts is important here, because although the symbol '=' indicates that this is set, the notes from the foreword of the score reveal Roussel wished the performer to have freedom to speed up here². However, the extent of this is unknown, so certainty cannot be achieved that the ideal tempo for Roussel is being played, despite the initial clarity implied by following the formulaic '=' which could be achieved using a metronome. This demonstrates that even defined symbols are unable to offer certainty, despite appearing to hold fixed knowledge.

Given that music is composed to produce a desired atmosphere by the composer, the formulaic restrictions of the symbols in the score are not enough to reliably transfer the knowledge regarding how to emotionally perform the piece. This is because this interpretation is subjective, despite the objective certainty that the notes offer. This means that certainty in the reproduction of the composer's vision is unattainable, because interpretation relies on personal knowledge and experience to help the performer connect with the emotion of the music, tools which will inevitably differ from the composer's. It is thus arguable whether certainty is necessary here, because as the musician I have the freedom to interpret Roussel's markings as I wish.

Therefore, certain knowledge of the composer's intended interpretation of the music is unattainable. This shows that in the arts, certainty can only be attained through an objective approach, rather than an emotional understanding of the knowledge. Thus, the extent to which certainty can be viewed as attainable is limited.

Total: 941 words

References

Object 1: <https://what3words.com/crazy.elevator.behalf>, Screenshot of website accessed on 30.06.21.

Object 2: Screenshot of email from author's own private collection. 06.04.22

Object 3: Roussel, A, 1924, *Joueurs de flûte Opus 27*, (G.HenleVerlag: May 2012) Score p. 5

External source object 2: <https://www.who.int/activities/tracking-SARS-CoV-2-variants>. Accessed 23.05.22.

External source object 3:

Roussel, A, 1924, *Joueurs de flûte Opus 27*, (G.HenleVerlag: May 2012), Introductory notes p. 3.

² Roussel, A, 1924, *Joueurs de flûte Opus 27*, G.Henle Verlag, published May 2012