

The unsound object and intimate space.

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Abstract.

The unsound object and intimate space.

This research proposes the *unsound object* and *intimate space* as new approaches to listening to, writing about and performing creative sound works. The writing and the practical works sketch new territory around these two terms to pluralise sound art histories, with the aim of opening up practical discourse between artistic fields.

The research begins with *musique concrète* and Pierre Schaeffer's sound object, but draws on Mladen Dolar's voice object, Christof Migone's unsound and *Six Years*, Lucy Lippard's account of conceptual art, instead of a strict acousmatic music narrative. A deliberate 'wandering across borders' is maintained throughout, to unpick the *unsound object* and *intimate space* through live work and 'writing through' of texts.

My practice shifts between object based sound works, live art performance presentations, and open-ended text works. It tilts at *intimate space* by operating from the tabletop, from just beyond the page; my practice is made more uncertain and less fixed by its investigation of the unsound object. The project offers this as a positive outcome.

In this project, I draw connections between the art object and the sound object, between mesostics and live art practice, between *writing* and *space*. These are tentatively offered as overlapping histories, as overlapping methods. Not as fixed Venn diagrams, or word clouds, but part of a flickering, oscillating *unmethod* that allows for both abstract *and* concrete, for waves *and* particles.

The *unmethod* proposed in this project uses words like unshackling, unfixing, unpicking, and untethering to unsettle my practice and writing. The project suggests that destabilising existing definitions offers the potential of sound in silent media, and music beyond sound.

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The unsound object and intimate space

Introduction

This tale grew in the telling.

I'm not the kind to complain.

The subject of this book is not the void exactly, but rather what there is round about or inside it.

Sometimes when I write I am envious of more intense modes of expression.

For twenty-five centuries, Western knowledge has tried to look upon the world.

Nothing is accomplished by writing a piece of music.¹

Borges' cartographers of Empire² made a map so large that it "coincided point for point"³ with the land that it described. As Jean Baudrillard's chosen analogy for his concept of simulation,⁴ Borges' parable also encapsulates the problem faced by any introduction to a body of work – how to frame the project, without simply repeating it in its entirety? How to provide context, without telling the whole chronology of your scholarly thought, from proposal to submission? How dull that sounds.

A research project must aim to contribute to the intellectual infrastructure of subjects and disciplines. Within this aim, it must often follow certain forms to be considered appropriately scholarly. With this in mind, the first line of this introduction is:

This research project proposes *the unsound object* and *intimate space* as approaches to listening and performance, as well as to writing 'about' sound. The project draws on multiple, overlapping disciplines in an attempt to pluralise discourse on sound and performance. As a practitioner as well as a writer, I feel it is important that both are reflected in the development of the project; over the past four to five years my practice has moved from a creative sound practice, using small objects and speakers, into territory framed by live art, incorporating elements drawn from performance lectures and gestures, and finally into a practice that draws on text, language, performance and writing sound. A practice that, while still emerging, might sit within the radical inventions represented by the Pened In The Margins collection *Adventures in Form*⁵ as well as the tabletop investigations of artists like John Macedo or Rie Nakajima.⁶

The methodological approach mirrors this 'between and both' state. By unpicking strands from *musique concrète*, conceptual art and experimental approaches to literature, the project aims to synthesise disparate elements to pursue a working method that is equally unsound. Taking an expanded view of the connections and contradictions between multiple historical and contemporary approaches to sound, listening and space means the project can aim towards openness and new territory, rather than attempting to *pin down* one small micro-realm.

Why the *unsound object* and *intimate space*? The *unsound object* is perhaps in the end simply useful for *me* in getting a handle on my practice; a way to pull together a series of percolating thoughts, word games, hunches. *Intimate space* is also just a group of thoughts that flit between performance experiences; in my own work, cupping a speaker with my hand to shape the sound, breathing in and out through a harmonica; elsewhere, the feeling of fingers of sound creeping round my skull and neck as an elderly Alvin Lucier manipulates all encompassing feedback by the merest tilt of his head. This project points towards those things. In the course of my investigations into sound, listening and performance, stretching back beyond early versions of this thesis (which was originally going to feature Glenn Gould heavily), there is a trend to *pin things down*, to give power to ideas by naming them. This is the end of history. This is postmodernism. This is electroacoustic-improvisation (EAI). This is jungle. This is ambient. These names are pulled apart, argued over, redefined over time (I look briefly at the “classification debate” in Chapter Three), and they either remain useful, or they do not.

Adding new definitions to the pile might not seem the best way of addressing this, but the *unsound object* in particular embraces contradiction and ‘cross-reading’. Mis-readings and appropriations of cross-genre definitions are also addressed in Chapter Three, but an example of how the *unsound object* approaches fixed lines of definition might begin with Jonty Harrison’s *Unsound Objects*: a thirteen minute piece of acousmatic music. For Harrison, as the piece contains both sound objects *and* recognisable sounds, it is a “dangerous” challenge to received ideas of Schaefferan thinking (a more thorough investigation of which is in Chapter One). Therefore, the piece and the objects are “unsound.”⁷⁷ Unsure, unstable, undecided. For Harrison, acousmatic music can represent:

“the ability of material to be heard/perceived/understood *simultaneously* as abstract musical events, sound events abstracted from the real world to participate in a musical discourse and soundscapes referring to real world sound events we may all recognize.”⁷⁸

The *unsound object* might usefully take this as a starting point, if we read it solely from an acousmatic music history. But this history is limited by insisting on an approach to sound and music that “relies on *perceptual* realities rather than *conceptual* speculation to unlock the potential for musical discourse and musical structure”, and the idea that it is “positively detrimental to be encumbered by the visual sense.”⁷⁹ The *unsound object*, as we will see, argues for the *simultaneous* to be extended to all aspects of listening to and writing about sound.

Whilst still trying to maintain this plurality, a single line through Chapter One might look something like this: before John Cage and *4’33”*, there are musical sounds (music) and non-musical sounds (noise/sound). After Cage and *4’33”*, all sounds, intentional or not, are musical. Then Adam Harper draws ideas from Cornelius

Cardew's *A Scratch Orchestra: Draft Constitution*; "[t]he word music and its derivatives are here not understood to refer exclusively to sound and related phenomena (hearing, etc.):¹⁰ for Harper there is music *outside of sound*.¹¹ There is Pierre Schaeffer's *objet sonore*; the sound object formed at the moment of perception, without referent or signal – a phenomenology of sounds. There is Seth Kim-Cohen's non-cochlear sound art – which unpicks the sound object using Derrida's *différance*.¹² Affect theory, describing the capacity for bodies to affect and be affected by events, by sounds, by other bodies, is also touched on. All this is filtered through Christof Migone's concept of the *unsound*: "...the realm of what cannot necessarily be heard, and what is left unsaid still belong nervously, tenuously, longingly to the territory of sound."¹³ Chapter One proposes the *unsound object* - an unfixing of Schaeffer's sound object that allows for both phenomenological bracketing and affective responses. That allows for listening in silent media.

Chapter Two attempts to inhabit and describe a space that is intimate. Whilst drawing on Richard Coyne's *The Tuning of Place* to distinguish general notions of space and place, this chapter looks specifically at a space for performance, listening and language. It proposes that a space that is *small* and *intimate* can be created through performing with, listening to, speaking with, the *unsound object*. Looking at this from the opposite end, the chapter proposes that *small* and *intimate* spaces are suited to, and perhaps even necessary for, the *unsound object*. Chapter Two suggests that intimate/small space can be seen as condition, as method, as potential; as *a set of possibilities*, rather than just as objects occupying space. Smallness is suggested as a quality arising from language and imagination, rather than specifically from Edward T. Hall's notion of proxemics. Small and intimate space is proposed as a threshold condition, as between the inside and the outside, the *what is* and the *what if*. Chapter Two examines gesture; how it might function in performance spaces; the role of gesture in the *activation* of small and intimate space; and finally, the role of drift in performance gestures – a way of approaching space-relationships as something always in-between, always moving, as something whose exact meaning is a little different each time we look at it.

Chapter Three looks at how I have approached this, in particular via a look at John Cage's *writing-through*, which has (obliquely) informed the whole process of compiling the project. Chapter Four contains commentaries on the Portfolio of practical works that accompany the research project. Each chapter is also preceded by a brief introduction, highlighting points of interest, contradictions, mis-appropriations of art historical terms, and setting out the limits of the investigation.

Throughout the project, there is overlap. There is no 'traditional' contextual review; the context for the arguments, the historical and contemporary examples,

arises alongside those discussions. This method is reflected in Chapter Three's examination of *writing-through*, which also informs how the practical commentaries are assembled. This overlap, this wandering across margins, is an accurate representation of how the project was written. Where the project stands now is considerably distinct from where the original proposal suggested it might have stood. The overlap, the style of writing, the practical works; all suggest that the project *the unsound object and intimate space* has been about asking better questions rather than answering the original ones I posed.

How is does this overlap affect the relationship between the written sections and the practical pieces? One of the approaches to constructing this kind of project is to use the practical works as tests, as deliberately constructed territories to probe parts of the research questions. For example, I might design a piece to answer the question "How might text scores contain maximum potential for the sounding of intimate spaces?" The piece would then be performed, and the conclusions written up and fed back into the on-going written argument. However, I am working on the assumption that an artistic practice made up *entirely* of PhD-led questions might not be all that interesting, might be too inward looking, and too 'goal-oriented'. While the pieces that accompany the written sections of this project do attempt to answer, or re-frame, or 'think-out-loud-about' particular questions, it is important to see them as part of a practice that is also on-going, looking outwards beyond these pages.

All the pieces here draw from a similar pool of interests; small sounds, small audiences, interesting objects, liveness, a matter of fact delivery and so on. But while these areas overlap considerably with the main thrust of the project, they are not necessarily the exclusive area under investigation (as the first approach above would insist on). Cage might say that this first approach was *not* experimental – as the questions are being worked on "prior to the finished works, just as [...] rehearsals precede performances,"¹⁴ but that describing works as *experimental* was appropriate if it was "understood not as descriptive of an act to be later judged in terms of success and failure, but simply as of an act the outcome of which is unknown."¹⁵

How experimental then, are the practical works that fall within the frame of the project? Might there be *degrees* of open-endedness that would be more appropriate than simply saying 'this is/this is not, experimental'? (Chapter Four, which contains more detailed examinations of the practical works that make up the project, addresses some of these issues as well.) One approach might be to echo Cage again; the lecture piece *Composition as Process: Indeterminacy* begins each section in the form: "This is a lecture on composition which is indeterminate with respect to its performance. [X] by [composer] is an example. [Y] is not an example."¹⁶ This could be adapted to cover experimental works and methods; *this piece is experimental with regards its composition but not its performance* etc., in a way similar to Michael Nyman's composing, performing and

listening vectors in *Towards (a Definition of) Experimental Music*.¹⁷ This reading might then generate strings of versions like ‘composition-experimental/listening-traditional’, ‘composition-indeterminate/performance-experimental’ and so on. Chapter Four approaches these vectors through an examination of how the exposing of process through live performance could exist alongside more fixed outcomes.

In some ways then, the relationship between the written and practical parts of the project is an unequal one. The written parts draw specific elements from the practice. The practice, while dealing with listening, small spaces and gaps between text and sound, is still free to take a light-hearted approach: jokes about the Beatles, cassettes of Ravi Shankar and Phillip Glass, presentations that go backwards. However, this makes sense; the pieces’ relationship with live art and liveness, while central to their development and outside context, is less central to the written component. On the other hand, the writing within the practical works (for example in *A Young Person’s Guide To Musique Concrète*, or the later text pieces) has direct bearing on the production of meaning within the project as a whole.

The practical pieces covered within this project are:

5 actions / 5 texts / 5 songs; performed in Battersea at Testbed 1 on 21st October 2011, in Norwich at BETA Festival, 23rd May 2012, in Colchester at the Minorities Gallery, 29th June 2012, in Norwich at Norwich Arts Centre, 30th June 2012, and several times in Ipswich at SPILL Festival of Performance, 1st November 2012.

frog pond plop; performed at South London Gallery for “*Dom Sylvester Houédard and the Cosmic Typewriter*”, 2nd December 2012 and at Hardy Tree Gallery, London 24th January 2013.

A Young Person’s Guide To Musique Concrète; performed eight times in Glasgow at BUZZCUT, 29th March 2013, eight times in Cambridge at Sampled Festival, 4th May 2013 and three times at Norwich Arts Centre for the Norfolk and Norwich Festival 13th May 2013.

Research Environment and *Phones in the first hundred pages of Zero History* are new text pieces that have yet to be performed in public. They are discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

In addition to these pieces, the research was presented a number of times at Norwich University of the Arts and University of the Arts London. Each of these presentations contained at least one performative action; slides saying ‘To Be Ignored Throughout’, presentations that went backwards, scripted drinking of water from a glass, inappropriate sounds overlapping the text from the podium and so on. These fed into the most recent two text pieces (again discussed in Chapter Four), and

informed a number of performance presentations given at Toynbee Studios, London and Norwich Arts Centre (for the Writers' Centre Norwich). Though they included many of the strategies employed by the pieces above, indeed they included some of the texts from these pieces, they were perhaps not as well thought through, as well as being partly written deliberately outside of the concerns of the project (including as they did; spirit photography, wine drinking, banana eating, being rude about slam poetry).

I wrote this project because I was uncertain.

Over the years, I have never been sure that the strands of my interests could overlap, were even meant to overlap. It is possible to compartmentalise aspects of your creative practice; this is theatre reviewing, this is live art, this is serious sound art? Though the outcomes of this project have not drawn in *all* these threads (the link between banana eating and *musique concrète* remains untapped), I am willing to draw connections between the art object and the sound object, between mesostics and open ended live art practice, between *writing* and *space*.

These are tentatively offered as overlapping histories, as overlapping methods. Not as fixed Venn diagrams, or word clouds, but part of a flickering, oscillating *unmethod* that allows for waves and particles. That is content to suggest the potential of sound in silent media, as well as the power of sound and silence to crawl around your body like bats.

The *unmethod* proposed in this project uses a collection of words like unshackling, unfixing, unpicking, untethering to unsettle my practice and writing. Taking concrete methods outwards, into “escapes out of fixity.”¹⁸ The idea of “music outside of sound”¹⁹ should be expanded to cover text outside of language, literature outside of text, and as many permutations as is useful in unfixing creative practices.

This project, *the unsound object and intimate space*, proposes that thinking about sound, music, performance and space might always be many things at once. The project, by taking Christof Migone's *unsound* into new areas (using it to unpick the sound object proposed by Pierre Schaeffer for example), and proposing *intimate space* as transitory “small moments of space,” opens up the process of writing about sound, and performing with sound (at least with regards to my own practice) to multiple, simultaneous readings.

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- ¹ Tolkien, JRR. (1966) Foreword to the Second Edition. In: *The Fellowship of the Ring*. 2nd ed. London: Harper Collins. p.xiii
- The Incredible String Band. (1967) *The Hedgehog Song* from: *The 5000 Spirits or the Layers of the Onion*. USA, Elektra. [CD].
- Perec, G. (1974/1999) *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*. Translated from the French by John Sturrock. London: Penguin. p.5
- Schaeffer, P. (1952/2012) *In Search of a Concrete Music*. Translated from the French by Christine North and John Dack. Berkeley: University of California Press. p.3
- Attali, J. (1974/1985) *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. Translated from the French by the University of Minnesota. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. p.3
- Cage, J. (1961) *Silence: Lectures and Writings*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press. p.xii
- ² Borges, JL. (2000) *On Exactitude in Science*. In: *The Aleph and Other Stories*. Translated from the Spanish by Andrew Hurley. London: Penguin. p.181
- ³ *ibid*
- ⁴ Baudrillard, J. (1994) *Simulacra and Simulation*. Translated from the French by Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 1994. p.1
- In fact, Baudrillard shows how this map is no longer the “most beautiful allegory of simulation”, as simulation is now generated by “a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal.” The idea that something that we imagine is formed as a process, and has *no origin in the real*, is a useful one. However, the analogy can still stand as it does here – as an approach to framing the problems of writing *generally* about a PhD that is attempting to write about *specific* things.
- ⁵ Chivers, T. ed. (2012) *Adventures in Form: A Compendium of Poetic Forms, Rules & Constraints*. London: Penned In The Margins.
- ⁶ John Macedo (2014) *John Macedo – The Intimate Sound System*. [Internet]. Available from: <<https://vimeo.com/104910856>> [Accessed 12 March 2014]
- Rie Nakajima (2014) *Rie Nakajima @ Audiograft 2014*. [Internet]. Available from: <<https://vimeo.com/90363481>> [Accessed 03 July 2014]
- ⁷ Harrison, J. (2002) In: Palmer, J (2002) High Spirits with Jonty Harrison. *21st Century Music*. [Internet] January 2002 vol.9 (1) p.2. Available from: <<http://www.21st-centurymusic.com/ML210201.pdf>> [Accessed 28 September 2014]
- ⁸ *ibid* [italics in original]
- ⁹ Harrison, J. (1999) Imaginary Space – Spaces in the Imagination. Australasian Computer Music Conference 1999. [Internet]. Available from: <<http://soundartarchive.net/articles/Harrison-1999-Imaginary%20Space.pdf>> [Accessed 28 September 2014]
- ¹⁰ Cardew, C. in: Parsons, M. (2001) The Scratch Orchestra and Visual Arts. *Leonardo Music Journal*. [Internet] vol.11. p.5. Available from: <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1513420>> [Accessed 25 August 2013]
- ¹¹ Harper, A. (2011) *Infinite Music: Imagining the Next Millennium of Human Music Making*. Alresford: Zero Books.
- ¹² Kim-Cohen, S. (2009) *In the blink of an ear: towards a non-cochlear sonic art*. New York: Continuum.
- ¹³ Migone, C. (2012) *Sonic Somatic: Performances of the Unsound Body*. Berlin: Errant Bodies Press. p.4
- ¹⁴ Cage, J. (1961) op. cit. p.7
- ¹⁵ *ibid* p.13 Indeed, Cage also said that “I [now] use it in fact to describe all the music that especially interests me and to which I am devoted, whether someone else wrote it or I myself did” *ibid* p.7
- ¹⁶ *ibid* pp.32 – 41. A specific example would be: “This is a lecture on composition which is indeterminate with respect to its performance. The *Intersection 3* by Morton Feldman is an example. The *Music of Changes* is not an example.” *ibid* p.36
- ¹⁷ Nyman, M. (1999) *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.1
- ¹⁸ Cascella, D. (2012) *Tweet from @enabime to @johnbournell*.
- ¹⁹ Harper, A. (2011) op. cit. p.31

Chapter One

Towards an Unsound Object

In which we: / meet Christof Migone's unsound / revisit John Cage in the anechoic chamber / discuss the generative potential of failure / the generative potential of listening / encounter Mladen Dolar's object voice / encounter Pierre Schaeffer's objet sonores and musique concrète / encounter some objections to the sound object / examine the dematerialization of the art object via Lucy Lippard / take a detour into Fluxus / arrive at Adam Harper's "music outside of sound".

Fizz.

Buzz.

Squelch.

Rumble.

Christof Migone's concept of *unsound* runs throughout his book *Sonic Somatic*, the introduction of which contends that sound art "has a propensity to not know itself...its very constitution is up for debate and continual reconsideration."¹ This, Migone continues, allows the following discussion to have as its thread, as its "fundamental characteristic," the unsound: his definition of which is worth quoting more fully: "Unsound...the realm of what cannot necessarily be heard, and what is left unsaid still belong nervously, tenuously, longingly to the territory of sound."²

How is this uncertainty, this openness, arrived at? To begin to outline what Migone's concept of unsound is, and how we might begin to point this towards an *unsound object*, we return once again to John Cage in the anechoic chamber. In a much repeated story ("Anybody who knows me knows this story. I am constantly telling it."³), Cage went to the anechoic chamber at Harvard University in search of silence. Surrounded on all sides by sound absorbing spikes, instead of the absolute silence he expected, the absoluteness required for measurement, calibration, 'proper' science, he heard two sounds – a ringing, fizzing sound, and a low rumble. On exiting the chamber, Cage was told by the engineer that the high-pitched sound was his nervous system, the low-pitched sound his blood circulating round his body. Cage went to the anechoic chamber to "secure an experiential and scientific legitimization for his musical thought"⁴ and came away with his ideas about sound, silence and essentially, *audibility* shifted significantly.⁵

Douglas Kahn raises two points from this story: first, he marks it as the point where Cage begins to think about "the impossible inaudible" – no silence at all, where "all space becomes indelibly, inaudibly, or pervasively filled with voices and sounds awaiting to be heard by the right person (or personification) in the right place,"⁶ and that there might be *degrees* of silence.⁷ I'll discuss this briefly later in this chapter, but it is Kahn's second point that marks the start of Migone's proposal for unsound.

Aside from the two sounds of Cage's body in the chamber, Kahn identifies a third sound – the third voice; Cage's - interrogating the experience (as Kahn puts it "Hmmm, wonder what that low-pitched sound is?"⁸) The third voice; the unpicking of subject and object by an outside "I"; self-aware, which "insists on talking, on emitting, on transmitting"⁹ - the *process* of listening exposed in the meeting of the "concrete and causal"¹⁰ sound subject and sound object. One reading of this third voice might draw parallels with Mladen Dolar's *object voice*. Separate from voice as "vehicle of meaning"¹¹ and from voice as source of "aesthetic admiration" alone, Dolar proposes "an object voice which does not go up in smoke in the conveyance of meaning...but an object which functions as a blind spot in the call and as a disturbance of aesthetic appreciation."¹²

I'll return to the *object voice* later in the chapter, and though Kahn points out that the "quasi-sounds" heard by Cage in the chamber were "antithetical to Cagean listening by being in competition with *sounds in themselves*,"¹³ Migone says that this discursiveness, this apparent contradiction, "is useful to consider as a reformulation of the *itself-ness* which *does-not-know-itself*."¹⁴

First, echoing sound's plurality (sound and listening are both present at point of origin, at point of reception, sound is both *heard* and *felt*; sound *pervades*), Migone writes against the demarcation, the strictly linear historicisation of sound art, instead attempting to "pluralize the inevitable – towards *histories* of sound, some disparate, others overlapping, all *sound*."¹⁵ This seems more appropriately in line with a sound that *does-not-know-itself*, and allows for multiple readings of sound that can draw in literature and conceptual art as equally valid points of reference, as Migone does.¹⁶

He also points to imaginary pre-figurings of the technology that allowed for spatial and temporal displacement of sound – telephony and phonography – as almost 'pataphysical in nature¹⁷ (appropriate since a Jarry quote opens the book).¹⁸ "This kind of paradoxical and proleptic formulation speaks to the methodological quandary faced by those with the task of historicizing sound art."¹⁹

That is, "sound art precedes itself"²⁰ – it rushes into other territories, it seeps into literature, into Futurist manifestos²¹ – not one history but many – real and imagined. A theory of (un)sound that does not have an absolute historical start point is likely to be as open and nervous as Migone suggests.

In this chapter, I am going to propose two ways in which the unsound could inform the challenges of contemporary sound object-based performance/artwork/sound-work. First, as a strategy for interrogating the *sound object* – a method to *unfix* sound object discourses (for example the criticism of Brian Kane and Seth Kim-Cohen) and as a process of drawing in, drawing *through* other practices.

This strategy supports the idea of the sound object as a conceptual object with *oscillating* definitions, the sound object as a *cloud* of manifestations. Secondly, as a way to approach practice. That is, the practical works themselves. The unsound (as proposed by Migone) links the *conceptual, imaginary, provisional, textual* and *fictional* strands that make up practice-based work into a simultaneously coherent yet open method for creating, performing and critiquing new work. The third chapter of this thesis will begin to apply these thoughts to my own body of practice and writing. Finally, this first chapter will outline a proposal for the *unsound object* – a re-reading of the Schaefferan sound object that attempts to answer the question:

“Has the sound object always been dematerialised?”

Failure, presence and time.

One strand that Migone’s unsound follows is the generative potential of failure,²² stoppage, muting, the *taciturn*. Bruce Nauman’s works *Concrete Tape Recorder Piece* and *Tape Recorder with A Tape Loop of A Scream Wrapped in Plastic Bag and Cast into the Center of a Block of Concrete* (both 1968) are posited by Migone as a response to Morris’ *Box with Sound of its Own Making* (1961), both touched by a “Beckettian failure aesthetic.”²³ By contrasting the apparent finality of concrete, the solid sculptural presence that we see, against the hidden, buried, *muted* noise that is suggestively still present (the cassette player remains plugged in), Migone identifies the unsound strategy of suggestion, of imagination. In addition, *Tape Recorder with A Tape Loop...* is a piece that could exist through title alone.²⁴ (Parallel to this is Seth Kim-Cohen’s suggestion that a piece like Alvin Lucier’s *I am sitting in a room* could be approached through the title and the instructions alone, and need not actually be listened to, to “best engage it.”²⁵ Kim-Cohen’s reading of *I am sitting in a room* as a “retrospective composition”²⁶ is relevant to how I have presented my Portfolio of works at the end of this research project, by seeing the score as “only available (constructable) after the performance/production.”²⁷). The suggestion of the contrasting states – concrete – sound loop – reveals the unsound’s blurring of identifiable fixed points.²⁸

There is a Möbius strip of paradox running through works like Nauman’s that ‘tilt’ at failure – witness also works like Nauman’s *Failing to Levitate in the Studio* (1966), or even Richard DeDomenici’s *Break-in* (2001)²⁹ – “To represent failure... is to articulate expressions of unintentionality with expressions that affirm intentionality.”³⁰ Not only that, argues composer and ‘pataphysical writer’ eldritch Priest, but as time passes and art works become canonised, ‘failure’ becomes increasingly relational and “is easily overturned or inverted with the simplest change of context or relevance.”³¹ Priest’s quoting of Emma Cocker: “[failure] is a device for deferring closure or completion, or... a mode of resistance through which to challenge or even refuse the pressures of dominant goal-oriented doctrines”³² neatly outlines failure as a method for creating

work like Nauman's *Tape Recorder with A Tape Loop*... The foregrounding of failure as an effect, as an aesthetic, is the realm of the "purposeful mistake,"³³ is oxymoronic but productive; new work is still 'created'.

The suggestion of contrasting states (concrete, sound loop), are also present in Morris' *Box with Sound of its Own Making*. A wooden cube, about nine inches each way, Morris' piece is accompanied by an audio recording of Morris building the box – a process that took around three hours. *Box with Sound of its Own Making*, created in 1961, emerged as Morris was creating Minimalist works that questioned the material and space of the art-work, pieces that continued and stepped beyond his earlier work as a member of the Judson Dance Theater and contributions to early Fluxus³⁴ events.

Brandon LaBelle describes *Box...* as a "self-referential object: what is heard is process and yet what is seen is the result of such process."³⁵ LaBelle frames the work within the shifting positions of 'the real' with the recorded, of the here and now, and the past. As the viewer/listener grapples with their perception of the box – the physical box in front of them, and the repeated sounds of its construction, these shifting positions give rise to phenomenological "presence"³⁶ (LaBelle cites Merleau-Ponty's passage from *Phenomenology of Perception* where he describes "the inherent tension between the ideal, conceptual form, and the actual experienced variable"³⁷). For LaBelle, *Box...* appeals to "an active listening that is analytical", and asks – which is the real box? The physical object, or the sound that is "an index of its past? [...] Is the art object...found in the process behind the object, or in its final form?"³⁸

As an aside here, might LaBelle's positioning of Morris' *Box...* not also directly apply to how we might listen to a record (a compact disc even) of music? Though a record of Miles Davis (for example) does not literally contain all the sounds that led up to us standing here, holding it – no sounds of manufacture or distribution, but the amount of time it takes to mechanically inscribe the Miles Davis' sextet recording of the piece *Milestones* onto the record is precisely the same amount of time it takes us to listen to it.³⁹ And how might we possibly square the framing of our perception, with a studio recording – one made from endless takes, splices and studio hours?⁴⁰

John Cage attended a playback of the recording of *Box...* at Morris' studio, and listened all the way through.⁴¹ The piece takes as long to hear fully as it took to make.⁴² The box is the product of the sounds. That is, the box is the product of the actions that created the sounds we hear now. The sounds are not being made *by* the box.⁴³ The source of the sound is both *hidden* and *visible*. We, as audience, spectator, listener, can identify the box as both process *and* product.

Listening and phenomena.

This more complex relationship, of process and product over time (though *product* is perhaps an overly simple way of describing sound in this context), is expanded by Salomé Voegelin's unpicking of subject and object relationships through the writing and broadcasts of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Drawing attention to Merleau-Ponty's lecture on Cézanne, where he talks initially about visual perception, Voegelin highlights his preference for works that "deal with the emergence of being over time,"⁴⁴ rather than forcing a single perception. From a simple object/subject 'over-there-ness' to a shifting *phenomenology of perception*. This becomes increasingly important when we discuss Pierre Schaeffer and the *objets sonores* of *musique concrète*, but Voegelin's dissection of the area foregrounds particularly well the status of listening in this exchange: "listening to sound is where objectivity and subjectivity meet."⁴⁵

The *generative* potential of listening is key here - "Sound does not describe but produces the object/phenomenon under consideration"⁴⁶ - in fact replacing the word *sound* with *listening* in this statement would be equally accurate. In Voegelin's description of listening to Waterlow Park, her listening "produces the park as an invented space," one that is created by her "lived reality"⁴⁷ - one that carries traces of previous visits, but is rooted in the particular empirical experience of listening, now.

Listening - the moment of creating/receiving sound - places the listener, the writer, the researcher even, at the centre of the experience. Again and again Voegelin returns to the "lived and concrete experience"⁴⁸ at the heart of listening, while emphasising the formlessness of the empirical subject; that is, as "phenomenological intersubjective selves, who *experience* rather than *abstract* social relations,"⁴⁹ rather than as Adorno's *transcendental* subjects.⁵⁰ And while sound "insists on being heard", Voegelin emphasises that "listening's focus on the dynamic nature of things renders the perceptual object *unstable, fluid* and *ephemeral*."⁵¹

Voegelin identifies the moment of listening as uncertain - not in terms of "did I hear that or not?"⁵² - but in terms of knowing: "Such a listening does not pursue the question of meaning [...] but that of interpretation in the sense of a phantasmagoric, individual and contingent practice."⁵³

Both Voegelin and Migone identify a difference between silence and muteness - for Voegelin, muteness "numbs the auditory engagement. It applies a local anaesthetic and disables the hearing process"⁵⁴ - it aims to provide a stability in the face of sound's dynamism, a stability separated from the "action of perception." But this becomes impossible within the conditions of our listening - even the donning of the Walkman or iPod, for example to 'mute' the noisy train carriage merely shifts the listening space. Migone points to Roland Barthes, who "distinguishes between *tacere* and *silere*, the first indicates a mutism in the context of speech and hence is embedded in a power equation, the second points to the quietude of nature and the divine."⁵⁵

While I'll return to speech in a moment, the relationship between sound, silence, and *silencing* is touched on by both Kahn and Voegelin; in Voegelin's library, after one too many loud noises, "a reproaching chorus of sounds ensues that leads the offending noise back into the approved sphere,"⁵⁶ while in Kahn the *approved sphere* of the concert hall is challenged by Cage's 4'33". This piece, "by tacitly instructing the performer to remain quiet in *all* respects, muted the site of centralized and privileged utterance, disrupted the unspoken audience code to remain unspoken [...] 4'33" achieved this involution through the act of silencing the performer. That is, Cagean silence followed and was dependant on a silencing."⁵⁷

The object voice.

A closer look at the voice also reveals that it sits in a complex system of signifiers and linguistic webs. As Dolar proposes the *object voice*, he identifies that the voice might be defined by "what does not contribute to meaning,"⁵⁸ leading us to an examination of the role of the signifier in language and speech.

Repetition – "every signifier is a signifier by virtue of being repeatable"⁵⁹ – becomes significant when we examine Pierre Schaeffer's reduced listening, as well as its relation to ideas of ritual,⁶⁰ but for now we see the signifier "fixed only by a web of differences, through differential oppositions, which allow it to produce meaning."⁶¹ By being made up of these oppositions, the linguistic sign has a "negative nature." What does this do to the voice? First, Dolar says, "there is no linguistics of the voice. There is only phonology, the paradigm of the linguistics of the signifier."⁶² Moving beyond phonetics, the *how* of voice production, and into phonology - the play of differential oppositions, Dolar then shows how this grid fails fully to pin down the voice into a neat system.

He does this first through looking at hiccups and coughs – sounds produced by the throat, the body, best described as "manifestations of the voice outside speech,"⁶³ the non-voice.⁶⁴ At first these sounds appear to be outside of language too, but Dolar points out that a taxonomy of coughs, used to communicate something, could be easily assembled – the cough to announce oneself, the cough of disapproval, the cough as ironic device (*ebem*). These coughs and hiccups, alongside the child's pre-language noises, form for Dolar a potential "zero-point of signification" – somatic sounds, non-voices "around which other – meaningful – voices can be ordered."⁶⁵ Objects with no meaning that problematize the simple *inside-language* / *outside-language* relationship.

Dolar's examination of *singing* begins to highlight some of the problems of the status of the object within the sound/music continuum.⁶⁶ Singing introduces a new set of codes, reversals and layers of meaning – especially when the voice, the sound of the voice, is emphasised over the meaning of the text (Dolar remarks here that hymns and

psalms, which always attempt “an anchorage in the word”, represent an area of philosophical mistrust; a “flourishing of the voice at the expense of the text.”⁶⁷). Singing, causing aesthetic pleasure, with “expression beyond meaning,”⁶⁸ can become a fetish object – the opposite of Dolar’s voice object. However, even at this seemingly certain point, Dolar describes this moment as “always ambivalent: music evokes the object voice and obfuscates it; fetishizes it, but also opens the gap that cannot be filled.”⁶⁹ This *always ambivalent* status of the object leads us, via Migone’s tentative histories, towards the *unsound object*.

Within the play of signifiers surrounding speech and the voice, the very materiality of the voice and the body seem removed – it is *bracketed* by the signifier – indeed “[i]t is only the reduction of the voice [...] that produces the voice as object.”⁷⁰ However, for Dolar the voice as object appears to resist differential opposition; it becomes “a non-signifying remainder resistant to signifying operations.”⁷¹ Because the voice “must have a point of origin and emission in the body,”⁷³ it resists the oppositional turn, seems “to embody a presence, a background for differential traits, a positive basis for their inherent negativity.”⁷⁴ This is all very well, but the introduction of the acousmatic voice complicates things.

The acousmatic voice is a voice without visible source, where the origin point of the voice is hidden, a voice “in search of a body.”⁷⁵ The voice from behind Pythagoras’ curtain, dispensing wisdom to his students. The separation of body and spirit that, Dolar notes, can make the acousmatic voice sound omnipresent and omnipotent. When the source is revealed, as a body, or even as a speaker or phonogram, the results can be either uncanny – Dolar uses the example of the source of the mother’s voice in Hitchcock’s *Psycho* - or funny: the Great Oz hiding behind the curtain in *The Wizard of Oz*. But Dolar’s point is to highlight that the revealing of the source, the matching of the voice to the body “doesn’t quite work, the voice doesn’t stick to the body.”⁷⁶

The reveal, the matching, is what Michel Chion calls *disacousmatization*, but Dolar finds that the appearance of the mouth, the bodily aperture, the void, encourages the (Freudian) fetish state of the voice “which fixes the object at the penultimate stage, just before confronting the impossible fissure from which it is supposed to emanate”⁷⁷ – and instead likens the emission of the voice to that of *ventriloquism*. “When we see a living person talking, there is always a minimum of ventriloquism at work: it is as if the speaker’s own voice hollows him out and in a sense speaks ‘by itself,’ through him.”⁷⁸ In effect, the voice “appears in the void from which it is supposed to stem but does not fit, an effect without a proper cause.”⁷⁹

This is the voice object – a break, a truth in the continuum of bodies and languages. For Alain Badiou, truths are “incorporeal bodies, languages deprived of sense, generic infinities, unconditioned supplements [...] they are suspended [...]

between nothing and pure event.”⁸⁰ It is this ‘between nothing and pure event’-ness, along with Dolar’s identification with the whole process as at least partly methodological,⁸¹ that places the voice object as a component of the *unsound object*.

Modes of listening and the sound object.

Which brings us to *objets sonores*, Pierre Schaeffer’s sonorous objects. Pierre Schaeffer coined the term *musique concrète* to describe the music he and his colleagues began to make in the late forties in France; a music made by manipulating sounds on acetate records and latterly magnetic tape - sounds of voices and traditional instruments, as well as including sounds that we would now call field recordings - that formed a new *bricolage*, a new body of work. He also worked on music for film, collected African music for French radio, and helped create the animated series *Les Shadoks*.

There have been dozens of papers and books featuring Schaeffer and sound objects - I’m not planning on offering a comprehensive dissection of the whole of his theoretical oeuvre, settling grudges or rewriting histories; rather I intend to examine the sound object for how it might operate within the field marked out by the previous passages – that is, within overlapping histories of sound, the uncertain ground of the unsound – as well as pointing to where it sits within my own practical thinking.⁸²

To do this, I’ll first outline the creation of the sound object – firstly through a simple look at three modes of listening outlined by Schaeffer’s pupil Michel Chion in his book *Audio Vision*,⁸³ and secondly through the more detailed examples in *Guide des Objets Sonores*, Chion’s own annotations to Schaeffer’s 1966 text *Traité Des Object Musicaux*.⁸⁴ Secondly, I’ll take a brief look at some objections to Schaeffer’s method: this will serve to situate the sound object in more contemporary discourse and while the object of this thesis is not to take sides or propose definitive answers, a defence of Schaeffer’s project will be tentatively proposed by examining his earlier text *In Search Of A Concrete Music*,⁸⁵ and by examining where Schaeffer’s sound object might sit in relation to the *unsound object*.

Chion’s simplified guide to listening modes runs like this: there is *causal listening*, which consists of “listening to a sound in order to gather information about its *source*.”⁸⁶ So even if we can’t see what is barking, we attempt to identify what is making the sound; a dog.⁸⁷ Causal listening is the drive towards *disacousmatization* that we encountered earlier, an attempt to peer behind Pythagoras’ curtain. The drive to reveal is a strong one: “Pythagoras’ curtain doesn’t suffice to divert our curiosity, which is instinctively, almost unstoppably occupied by what lies behind.”⁸⁸ This ‘instinctiveness’ is identified by Dolar not only as a desire to reveal the source of the sound or voice, but “in order for something to be seen there, namely ourselves stepping behind the curtain.”⁸⁹ Thus for Dolar, “we have ‘always already’ stepped

behind the screen and encircled the enigmatic object with fantasy.”⁹⁰ The drive to *see* and to imagine *seeing*, make causal listening the most common mode of listening in ocular-centric culture.⁹¹

Semantic listening is a little more complicated, bound up as it is with the voice and language. Chion approaches his unpicking of it much in the way that Dolar does. Semantic listening focuses less on the acoustic properties of the sounds (“This sound is high. This sound has a complex envelope”), than on the components of language, the phoneme, as part of “an entire system of oppositions and differences.”⁹² Chion identifies the semantic mode of listening as *purely differential*, though goes on to say that of course causal and semantic modes can be (and are) combined; “we hear at once *what* someone says and *how* they say it.”⁹³

Reduced listening leads us to Schaeffer’s *objets sonores* – his sonorous objects; the sound object. Our encounter with the sound object is made possible by the acousmatic situation, which allows us the possibility to approach the practice of reduced listening – focusing solely “on the traits of the sound itself, independent of its cause and its meaning.”⁹⁴ As we saw earlier, the acousmatic voice is a voice without visible source; by extension, Schaeffer uses *acousmatic listening* specifically to describe the hearing of “sounds with no visible cause on the radio, records, telephone, tape recorder etc.”⁹⁵ Reduced listening then, is achieved *through reproducing technologies*:

“if curiosity about causes remains in acousmatic listening (and it can even be aroused by the situation), the repetition of the recorded signal can perhaps ‘exhaust’ this curiosity and little by little impose ‘the sound object as a perception worthy of being listened to for itself’, revealing all its richness to us.”⁹⁶

So repetition through recorded media becomes a key part of Schaeffer’s thinking, and the practice of reduced listening “focuses on the traits of the sound itself, independent of its cause and of its meaning.”⁹⁷ and brings us to the *sound object*. This is the simplified version of how we might arrive here; a movement from *causal listening* towards *reduced listening* and our goal.

A closer look at Chion’s guide to Schaeffer’s listening mode reveals something a little less neat; a more fluid process that moves between two sets of oppositions, that travels *around* four modes of listening. Rather than being seen (or heard) as a sequence of modes, Chion describes these four modes; *Écouter*, *Ouïr*, *Entendre*, *Comprendre*;⁹⁸ as a circuit, “where perception moves in every direction and where the four sectors are most often involved simultaneously, interacting with each other.”⁹⁹

The pairs of oppositions are Abstract/Concrete and Objective/Subjective, and Schaeffer’s table looks like this:¹⁰⁰

<p>4</p> <p>Comprehending</p> <p><i>means grasping a meaning, values, by treating the sound as a sign, referring to its meaning through a language, a code, semantic listening.</i></p> <p>(Abstract/Subjective)</p>	<p>1</p> <p>Listening</p> <p><i>means listening to someone, to something; and through the intermediary of sound, aiming to identify the source, the event, the cause, it means treating the sound as a sign of this source, this event.</i></p> <p>(Concrete/Objective)</p>
<p>3</p> <p>Hearing</p> <p><i>means showing an intention to listen, choosing from what we perceive what particularly interests us, in order to make a “description” of it.</i></p> <p>(Abstract/Subjective)</p>	<p>2</p> <p>Perceiving</p> <p><i>means perceiving by ear, being struck by sounds, the crudest, most elementary level of perception; so we “hear” passively lots of things which we are not trying to listen to or understand.</i></p> <p>(Concrete/Subjective)</p>

While this all seems a little dry, the circuit gives us a useful ground for talking about how the sound object operates within the scope of what we have already identified as components of listening. It also highlights the importance of *intention*, which I’ll return to in a moment. The placing of the elements here, whether aligned to abstract, concrete, objective or subjective, is also unstable within the text of the *Traité des Objets Musicaux*,¹⁰¹ and this reminds us as theorists, as practitioners, that this is an experimental process (a parallel to the approaches suggested by Cage or Nyman, as suggested in the Introduction above), a speculative ‘working out loud’ through writing.

So let’s take closer look at *reduced listening*. Intention remains important. Rather than the “twofold curiosity about causes and meaning (which treats sound as an intermediary allowing us to pursue other objects),”¹⁰² and rather than our desire to see ourselves stepping behind the curtain to discover the source of the sound, in *reduced listening* this curiosity, or *intention*, is focused on sound *in itself*, and the values which it carries *in itself*.¹⁰³ This turning in on itself (which Chion describes as an “anti-natural” process¹⁰⁴) is framed by the phenomenological reduction, the *Époché*, which strips the sound object of everything that is not “*it itself*” – much in the way the voice object becomes a “non-signifying remainder”¹⁰⁵ for Dolar.

The *Époché* is a term borrowed by Schaeffer in the *Traité* from Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations*. It describes a putting to one side, or “putting in parenthesis,” the ‘problem’ of the external world – its objects, signs, and meanings in order to focus on the perceptual object, the experience of perceiving. In specific relation to listening, the *Époché* represents a “deconditioning of habitual listening patterns”¹⁰⁶ in order to focus

consciousness back onto the *sound object* at the moment of perception; reduced listening uses the ‘bracketing’ of the *Époché* to allow us to focus on sound *in itself*.

Our *intention* as listeners is key: Schaeffer never asks us to ‘pretend’ that the other indices of sound do not exist, or are illusionary, rather he unpicks the perceived sound, “unravelling the various *intentions of which it is composed* and turning those intentions back on to the sound object [...] and so defining it through a new *specific intentionality, reduced listening*.”¹⁰⁷ This highlights the creation of the sound object as tactic, as method.

So we arrive at the sound object itself. Some of the working of the sound object will be examined in the next section as I examine some criticisms to Schaeffer’s programme. For the moment, I am content to quote Chion on the definition of this elusive *objet*:

1. The sound object is not a body
2. The sound object is not the physical signal
3. The sound object is not a recorded fragment
4. The sound object is not a notated symbol on a score
5. The sound object is not a state of mind.¹⁰⁸

Against the sound object?

Again, this is not included to ‘solve’ the sound object argument, but to place the sound object in more than one context, so that the *unsound object* can also draw on multiple *histories* of sound art, remain nervous, remain unfixed.

In his book *In The Blink Of An Ear*, Seth Kim-Cohen argues for a ‘non-cochlear sonic art’ that mirrors the conceptual turn taken by visual art:¹⁰⁹ a proposed ‘*rehearing*’ of sound art from Russolo onwards. Throughout the book Kim-Cohen, while keeping non-cochlear sound moving into other territories and across borders, places a “healthy scepticism”¹¹⁰ to *sound-in-itself* at the centre of his proposal. As such he has criticisms of Schaeffer’s sound object.

For example, *sound-in-itself* - the sound object, arrives with no referent, no source. As we have seen, this status is arrived at through reduced listening – which is achieved at through the acousmatic situation and *repetition*. Kim-Cohen points to Jacques Derrida’s unpicking of Edmund Husserl’s phenomenological method as crucial to disassembling the sound object,¹¹¹ as well as Rosalind Krauss’ critique of art historical theories, *The Blink of an Eye*.¹¹² For Husserl, repetition is crucial to “confirm form by confirming its essential qualities”¹¹³ – the examining, for instance, of an object from many angles. For Derrida and Krauss, this repetition is a “confirming revisitation”; *time* and *difference* appear in the equation, meaning that the now, the instance of the *Augenblick* (the blink of the eye that is a pure perceptual moment), “must be a product

of differential meaning making.”¹¹⁴ A product of the play of difference that “distinguishes the thing in question...from all that it is not,”¹¹⁵ - the world of signs, memories, contexts that the *Époché* seeks to bracket out. For Kim-Cohen, there is no corresponding *Obrenblick*, the blink of the ear, that would allow for *sound-in-itself*, no sound object that exists in isolation from sign and signal.

Kim-Cohen’s critique of the sound object hinges too on what he describes as Schaeffer’s “lack of material obligation,”¹¹⁶ where the sound object (and music) is “reduced to its minimal, inaudible condition.”¹¹⁷ A good real world example that Kim-Cohen gives is the length of magnetic tape containing a sound. To audition this, it must be played back and forth, scrubbed across the tape head. When it is still, when there is a ‘freeze frame’, there is no sound at all; “the sound occurring at the moment of interruption does not hang, object-like, in the air, but evaporates, recuperable only in memory.”¹¹⁸ A ‘silencing’ of the sound object. Kim-Cohen sees Schaeffer’s process of reduction as a ‘stripping away’ of the characteristics of music; rhythm, melody, pitch, until, quoting Brian Kane, Kim-Cohen reaches the point where “there can be no essential difference between imagined hearing and actual hearing.”¹¹⁹

This approach emphasises the problems with reading Schaeffer *strictly* (or reductively). For Schaeffer, the sound object is “a sound unit *perceived in its material*, its particular texture, its own qualities and perceptual dimensions”¹²⁰ and exists not “in itself,” but as a product of a “specific foundational intention” – reduced listening. Far from “reducing music,” denying pitch, placement in time or loudness (as Kim-Cohen seems to suggest¹²¹), the Schaefferan project aims *towards* music.

The *Traité des Objets Musicaux* concentrates on the sonorous, but aims to “suggest ways of accessing the musical”¹²² through *suitable* choices of sound objects (“Sound objects are called suitable when they seem to be more appropriate than others for use as a musical object.”¹²³). Most importantly, Chion identifies the musical aims of the *Traité* as a *programme*, as “models for a method.”¹²⁴ A reading of the Schaefferan sound object as a proposed *method* gives us the sound object as tool, as technique, and as more outward looking than at first glance – reduced listening and the sound object “demands that virtue of ‘wonder’ at the world, which Pierre Schaeffer displays, and from the very beginning of *musique concrète* exhorts the researcher to display.”¹²⁵

Though in his introduction to Chion’s *Guide* Schaeffer says that his research programmes are not “something that could lead to music,”¹²⁶ (and claims in an interview in the late eighties that “I wasted my life!”¹²⁷), I propose that we see the Schaefferan project at the very least as a useful experiment,¹²⁸ and hear the sound object as a tool for *encountering* sound – one which forms part of the relational group around the proposed *unsound object*.

Compare this to the ‘Awkward Ecologies’ outlined by Dugal McKinnon.¹²⁹ Rather than favouring *musique concrète* OR the electronic music of the Cologne school

(representing total control of electronically generated sounds by synthesis), McKinnon claims that “electroacoustic technologies” have fulfilled one possible endgame of BOTH musique concrète and abstract/formalist/technological music by “the subsuming of the traditional instrumental domain into the infinitely manipulable manifold of sound.”¹³⁰ A “*technorational mastery*” of sound which subsumes causal, semantic, reduced listening within a technological listening; where encounters with “the material world are approached only through the framing and filtering devices of recording technology.”¹³¹ For McKinnon, the ‘failure’ of *musique concrète* – its inability to extract itself fully from cause, from the source, is actually to be celebrated. It is this struggle, this attempt to “efface the source and to imagine something else into being” that allows *musique concrète* to draw attention to technology as a “fallible object”¹³² and the human imagination as inescapable.

Interestingly, both McKinnon and Kim-Cohen overlap in their description of the Schaefferan sound object as ultimately *unsuccessful*, but draw different conclusions – for Kim-Cohen, non-cochlear sonic-art moves beyond the outlines of ‘just’ sound-in-itself; for McKinnon, Schaeffer’s *musique concrète* stops short of the technological event horizon and reaffirms human presence.

In a further blurring of positions, consider Bennett Hogg’s framing of the sound object as a Duchampian found object – one that is “strange and malleable through a process of recontextualisation.”¹³³ It is Hogg’s played *responses* to the stream of objects he encounters as part of group improvisation that bring context and meaning to the sounds (rather than the sounds themselves). Hogg admits reduced listening can only be useful and meaningful for improvisers like him “if it is tapping into the same sorts of cultural filters that generate meaning”¹³⁴ (through meaningful responses to found/sound objects). But his pleas to ‘reach across the floor’ (in his case between free-improvisers and electro-acoustic composers) chime with Kim-Cohen’s desire to move a non-cochlear sonic-art “beyond the territory of the ear,”¹³⁵ as well as with Christof Migone’s aim for the unsound to be “resolutely open.”¹³⁶

A true Schaefferan sound object coupled with an awareness of the (non)idioms of free improvisation. A sound object that refuses to be fully bracketed. A sound object that embraces the possibility of “no essential difference between imagined hearing and actual hearing”¹³⁷ and sees this as possibility, rather than dead end. These three ‘versions’ of the sound object all play with absence in some form; a resistance to fixedness that we can begin to see as a characteristic of an *unsound object*.

Kim-Cohen's proposal is for a non-cochlear sonic-art that follows a conceptual turn, and this shares a number of overlaps with the proposed *unsound object*, not least the desire to cross territories and question categories. Presenting the 'non' part of a non-cochlear sonic-art, Kim-Cohen reassures us that it is "not a negation, not an erasure."¹³⁸ However, the scepticism of Kim-Cohen's proposal towards sound-in-itself draws criticism from Will Schrimshaw's proposal to include a theory "inclusive of affectivity"¹³⁹ in any conceptual turn.

Simply, Schrimshaw would prefer Kim-Cohen to not completely negate the *in-itself* in sound and silence – an "avoidance tactic" – and while broadly agreeing with the non-cochlear approach as "embracing the relational logic and discursive contingencies of the linguistic turn,"¹⁴⁰ proposes that we "reposition conceptual practice within a materialist continuum, exposing its conditions through an *experimental* practice exploring relations between concept and material."¹⁴¹ An unpicking, a laying bare of method, process, and unrestricted by one theory or another.

Schrimshaw's call for the inclusion of *affectivity* also informs how the *unsound object* is drawn up. And while the *unsound object* passes through most of the same territory as the path cut by the non-cochlear, the way it draws on *unsound*, on "music beyond sound,"¹⁴² aligns it with Schrimshaw's sketch of sound *affects* beyond the ear, of extra-somatic activity.¹⁴³

To talk about affect is to talk about the body – more importantly, relationships between bodies and "the fluctuations of feeling that shape the experiential in ways that may impact upon but nevertheless evade conscious knowing."¹⁴⁴ For Marie Thompson and Ian Biddle (introducing *Sound Music Affect*), 'the affective turn'¹⁴⁵ is open-ended, uncertain, ungeneralizable. Affects – emotions, physical reactions, communal atmospheres – are situated in-between states, in-between bodies. Bodies that simultaneously are affected and have the capacity to affect other bodies.

For Schrimshaw, the inclusion of affectivity into a theory of non-cochlear sonic-art means it can account for sonic affects outside of the realm of the ear; "the affectivity of sonic events both unintentional and unheard, events finding resonances in bodies other than the body"¹⁴⁶ – extra-somatic sounds that point to outside us, to "non-anthropoc" sound spaces:

"Opening onto a larger vibrational continuum of sonic affects, both non-sound and the non-cochlear can be utilized in accounting for the inaudible conditions of the heard."¹⁴⁷

Not just music outside of sound, but *sound outside of sound* – Schrimshaw's "clamorous silence" is the perfect territory for the *unsound object* to exist in.

The dematerialization of the art object.

This section will propose that the dematerialization of the art object provides a useful parallel to the sound object in our task of framing the *unsound object*. As before, this does not aim to be a definitive examination of all aspects of dematerialization,¹⁴⁸ rather seeing this process as informing one of the *methods* by which we approach the unsound.

Lucy Lippard's *Six Years: The Dematerialization Of The Art Object*¹⁴⁹ is a thorough, as well as an *unfixed*, overview of the dematerialization of the art object (and is the source of this project's engagement with the term). By documenting the conversations *around* the emergent term (and the emergence of idea art or conceptual art) as well as the critical shows and works, Lippard does identify the dematerialized art object not as a *thing* (or a not-thing), but as part of a process.

In her essay with John Chandler, she points towards the increasing "self-containment" of art objects in this period (roughly 1960 onwards) – objects which demand more from the audience – more *time*.¹⁵⁰ Why? Because there is less there? Or because there is less of what is normally there? In part, Lippard and Chandler argue, it is because there are fewer details, fewer external signs.

Lippard and Chandler draw on Joseph Schillinger's *The Mathematical Basis of the Arts* to place dematerialized work somewhere before Schillinger's fifth stage, the post-aesthetic; "which will make possible the manufacture, distribution and consumption of a perfect art product and will be characterized by a fusion of the art forms and materials."¹⁵¹ The dematerialized object falls short of the 'post-aesthetic' in that its *visual* presence is reduced, while still retaining other signifiers of aesthetic engagement – the example Lippard and Chandler give is of scientists (for example Richard Feynman) being aware of the *beauty* of their abstract, purely theoretical equations; the contention being that order, simplicity, ideas are an aesthetic quality in themselves, though this presents certain difficulties though, as we'll see in a second.

As the art object tends towards dematerialization, towards what Lippard and Chandler dub *ultra-conceptual art*, the need for art criticism diminishes; art criticism here appears in its broadest sense - meaning *objective reception of the work* by any audience: "If the object becomes obsolete, objective distance becomes obsolete."¹⁵² The complex play of meaning between object and subject, normally played out between artwork and audience (or sound and source),¹⁵³ becomes embedded *within* the dematerialized work.

The parallels with the sound object, and with the third voice of Cage's anechoic chamber, are now a little clearer to us. With the emergence of the dematerialized art object (still best framed by Lawrence Weiner's "declaration of intent"¹⁵⁴), the status of the art object is to be *realised by the audience* (or the listener) "upon the occasion of receivership."¹⁵⁵ So the work is created through encounters with dematerialized objects, though the sign, the instruction, the score, is not the art object: "When works

of art, like words, are signs that convey ideas, they are not things in themselves but symbols or representatives of things. Such a work is a medium rather than an end in itself or “art-as-art.”¹⁵⁶

That is, the signs and instructions are the medium, rather than the art – the signal, rather than the sound object. Compare this also with Dolar’s framing of the voice as a carrier for language. And language remains.¹⁵⁷

Which is where much of the work we describe as being dematerialized, parts ways with the sound object. Language remains at the core of much of how this work is encountered,¹⁵⁸ and how it talks about itself (within itself), its interrogative voice. The dematerialized object, despite claims to have internalised the objective dialogue, remains aware of the wider context of its dematerialization/reduction – refusing its “special *in-itselfness*” whilst simultaneously attempting to free itself from existing structures.

So what we have identified here are *two* strands of dematerialization – first; “the dematerialization of the art object” as a *process*, a method, a reduction.¹⁵⁹ Second, the dematerialized art object *itself*, existing somewhere between the work itself, and the documentation and descriptions that exist.¹⁶⁰

That this strand of thinking contains both method and outcome, appearing uncertain and contested, makes it an ideal parallel to the *oscillating* definitions and states of the sound object. Chapter Three examines this combined method in more detail, but it is important to draw connections between conceptual art and the *unsound object* because of how this might disrupt the perceptual/conceptual opposition proposed by Jonty Harrison in his remarks on acousmatic music (see Introduction).

Towards music beyond sound.

In this next section, I’d like to further complicate the reading of dematerialized art practices by examining both Fluxus art and performance art – the first could be generally held to precede the period of conceptual art previously discussed, the second roughly concurrent – though as we are interested not with *one* history, but many *histories*, an expanded view will be more useful in answering the question “how might Fluxus and Performance Art inform the sound object, and lead us towards the *unsound object*?”

While there are specific pieces within these traditions that specifically address sound,¹⁶¹ this section will draw on ideas around liveness, the body and the performative (as well as reiterating the role of instructions and scores), to further construct an *unsound object*.

Fluxus – by its very nature changing and unfixed – represents not one body of work, but many overlapping *bodies*. Rather than generalise about Fluxus as a whole, or make special claims as to the anticipatory nature of Fluxus, I’m going to focus on a

few pieces that might inform (and help reveal) the *unsound object*.

On one hand, George Brecht's *Incidental Music* (1961) represents a straight-forward event score, a series of instructions for piano; short enough to be quoted here in full:

George Brecht - Incidental Music

Five piano pieces, any number of which may be played in succession, simultaneously, in any order and combination, with one another or with other pieces.

- 1. The piano seat is tilted on its base and brought to rest against a part of the piano.*
- 2. Wooden blocks. A single block is placed inside the piano. A block is placed upon this block, then a third upon the second, and so forth, one by one, until at least one block falls from the column.*
- 3. Photographing the piano situation.*
- 4. Three dried peas or beans are dropped, one after another, onto the keyboard. Each such seed remaining on the keyboard is attached to the keys or keys nearest it with a single piece of pressure-sensitive tape.*
- 5. The piano seat is suitably arranged and the performer seats himself.*

This is one of my favourite pieces of art; it is beautiful in its simplicity and wit; it is simultaneously quotidian and *extraordinary*. (Though I'm keen not to want to conflate simplicity or elegance *in-itself* as inherently beautiful; in his essay letter *Concerning the article "The Dematerialization of Art"* Terry Atkinson takes issue with what he sees as Lippard and Chandler's aesthetization of equations and the scientific method, pointing out that just because theoretical physicists like Richard Feynman might have aesthetic sophistication, from that alone we cannot draw any conclusions about the effectiveness of the equations they describe¹⁶²).

A closer look at where condensed event scores like Brecht's sit places them at the point where language meets performance meets object. Liz Kotz, writing in *October*,¹⁶³ identifies the risk of "circularity"¹⁶⁴ in attempting to place works of this kind alongside particular models of *textuality*. Though the "operational dimension"¹⁶⁵ of these event scores operates "completely counter to the self-enclosed activity of the irreducibly plural 'text' proposed by Roland Barthes"¹⁶⁶ (in *Image-Music-Text*) and can be aligned more successfully to the *field of relations* of Umberto Eco's *The Open Work*,¹⁶⁷ Kotz argues that the origins of *both* these texts draw from a well of "Cagean models of desubjectivization"; with a particular relationship to writing and the text.

What this means for Kotz is that these small Fluxus score pieces are “inseparably both language and performance,”¹⁶⁸ as well as tied to the encounter with objects – for example the sound producing objects and quotidian objects used in early La Monte Young performances and the more sculptural work by Brecht, Yoko Ono and others. In fact, Kotz identifies this three-way relationship as allowing the event scores (such as the Brecht piece above) to take object form and produce a “material residue.”¹⁶⁹ This triangular play of language, object, performance, Kotz continues, anticipates later conceptual works – for example Joseph Kosuth’s *One and Three Chairs*.

Distinct from the atomisation of language present in concrete poems, event scores represent for Kotz an “alternative poetics” to the semiotic disruption of the “asyntacticality, musicality”¹⁷⁰ of earlier avant-garde poetic forms. Despite his placement of *sounds in themselves* within the wider world, Cage for Brecht remains “a musician, a composer,”¹⁷¹ while Brecht’s small events –

standing

sitting

walking

(George Brecht – 3 Piano Pieces 1962)

- “are an extension of music.”¹⁷² Not *extramusical*, not *theatre*, but an extension of music. In the same way that silence and noise become part of the territory of sound, so too the event form “works like a little device for cutting into the perceptual flow of [Brecht’s] ‘everything that happens’ ”¹⁷³ Event as interruption, as noise. In Adam Harper’s *Infinite Music*, he makes the case for expanded parameters of music – what he calls “non-sonic variables”¹⁷⁴ – that allow for “*music beyond sound*.”¹⁷⁵ For Harper, non-sonic variables might be as simple as a piece of music being performed in a different location each night, or performed during the daytime or night-time, or even how the performers or even the audience dress.

For Harper, an autonomous listening to ‘sounds in themselves’ (which he describes as a *sonocentric practice*)¹⁷⁶ that regards other forms of music and listening not privileging this mode of engagement (by having extramusical factors influence the experience for example) as inferior, as less rigorous, “cannot reflect the true breadth of possible musical experience.”¹⁷⁷

Now Harper is talking specifically about *music* – though we see that his is a greatly expanded view of this territory. But *music beyond sound* is a key reversal in the way we can approach work like that of Brecht, and in a wider sense, approach the *unsound object*.

In this Chapter, wandering across a number of areas, I've identified two main strands of approaching sound; the first is to focus on sound itself, to bracket all context. The second is to open listening in all forms, to all possibilities, all contexts. If taken at face value within a sound art historical position, these positions seem comprehensively opposed. However, beginning to unravel the positions a little by drawing on ideas of affect and the conceptual turn suggested as a rehearing by Kim-Cohen,¹⁷⁸ we start to see the advantages of using *both* of these positions as ways of writing about sound, and listening with sounds. The advantages become clearer when we start to encounter sound in spaces, where boundaries become less important as we start to view sound encounters as sites of potential action, rather than simply 'objects in space'.

¹ Migone, C. (2012) *Sonic Somatic: Performances of the Unsound Body*. Berlin: Errant Bodies Press. p.3

² *ibid* p.4

³ Cage, J. (1967) *A Year From Monday* Middletown: Wesleyan University Press. p.134

⁴ Kahn, D. (2001) *Noise Water Meat: A history of sound in the arts*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press. p.190

⁵ And also, Cage comes away with a story. In the previous quote, Kahn goes on to say "...and to create his own anecdotal text."

Storytelling, particularly storytelling in pursuit, or in suggestion, of sounds, is something this project touches on briefly. An anecdote – in the 6th October issue of the NME, 2001, Piers Martin interviewed Richard D. James (aka. Aphex Twin) in an anechoic chamber – apparently because James thought it might disturb the journalist (the Aphex Twin has a history of winding people up – deliberately spreading false rumours about himself – he has a tank – he lives in a power station in the middle of Elephant and Castle roundabout).

"Ooo, got my first brain sound there," claims James at one point, no doubt grinning madly.

⁶ Kahn, D. (2001) *op. cit.* p.200

⁷ For example musical silence; actual silence; "old and new silences." *ibid* p.193

⁸ *ibid* p.190

⁹ Migone, C. (2012) *op. cit.* p.8

¹⁰ Voegelin, S. (2011) *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art*. New York, London: Continuum. p.15

¹¹ Dolar, M (2006) *A Voice and Nothing More*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press. p.4

¹² *ibid*

¹³ Kahn, D. (2001) *op. cit.* p.190

¹⁴ Migone, C. (2012) *op. cit.* p.7

¹⁵ *ibid* p.4

¹⁶ And as I will continue to attempt to do.

¹⁷ "The most serious of all the Sciences and the end of all ends, 'Pataphysics is the Science of Imaginary Solutions. Although unknowingly practised by everybody at all times, it took the pistol toting, expert fencer, literary madman, maniac midget and designer of the time machine, Alfred Jarry, to recognise it and give it a name."

Hugill, A. (2006) Sleeve-notes to 'Pataphysics [CD] curated by Andrew Hugill and produced by Sonic Arts Network. Also available from: <<http://andrewhugill.com/pataphysicscd.html>> [Accessed 22 September 2014]

¹⁸ One example he omits is the Apollinaire short story *The Moon King* (1916), where a traveller to the moon discovers King Ludvig II of Bavaria playing an instrument that can only be described as a sampler, or at the very least, a Mellotron.

"The flawless microphones of the king's device were set so as to bring in to this underground the most distant sounds of terrestrial life. Each key activated a microphone set for such and such a distance. Now we were hearing a Japanese countryside. The wind sighed in the trees - a village was probably there, because I heard servants' laughter, a carpenter's plane, and the spray of an icy waterfall. Then another key pressed down, we were taken straight into morning, the king greeting the socialist labour of New Zealand, and I heard geysers spewing hot water."

¹⁹ Migone, C. (2012) *op. cit.* p.5

²⁰ *ibid*

²¹ Not just Russolo's *Art of Noises*, but also F.T. Marinetti and Pino Masnata's *La Radia* (1933) – "Futurism has radically transformed literature with words in freedom aeropoeetry and the speedy simultaneous freeword style emptied the theater of boredom through alogical surprise synthesis and dramas of objects immensified the plastic arts with antirealism plastic dynamism and aeropainting created the geometric splendor of a dynamic architecture that uses lyrically and without decoration the new construction materials abstract cinematography and abstract photography"

²² Migone, C. (2012) *op. cit.* p.10

²³ *ibid* p.8

²⁴ In fact, this could be a thesis in itself...

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- ²⁵ Kim-Cohen, S. (2009) *In the blink of an ear: towards a non-cochlear sonic art*. New York: Continuum. p.193
- ²⁶ *ibid* p.188
- ²⁷ *ibid*
- ²⁸ Other examples in a similar vein might include Christian Marclay's photograph of a framed (and therefore sealed/silenced) copy of Simon and Garfunkel's 'The Sound Of Silence' (*The Sound Of Silence* (1988)), which, while perhaps as not as conceptually suggestive as Nauman, is still pretty funny.
- ²⁹ Where DeDomenici tries (unsuccessfully) to break into Cardiff prison by climbing the walls. He is arrested.
- ³⁰ Priest, e. (2013) *Boring Formless Nonsense: Experimental Music and the Aesthetics of Failure*. New York: Bloomsbury. p.10
- ³¹ *ibid* p.1
- ³² Cocker, E. (2010) Quoted in: Priest, e. (2013) *ibid* p.6
- ³³ *ibid* p.11
- ³⁴ Morris knew La Monte Young, who introduced him to John Cage at one of the concerts Young organised in Yoko Ono's loft. Morris R. (1961) Letter to John Cage. In: Kelly, C. ed. *Sound*. London: Whitechapel. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press. pp.177-181
- ³⁵ LaBelle, B. (2007) *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art*. New York: Continuum. p.81
- ³⁶ *ibid* p.81
- ³⁷ *ibid* p.82
- ³⁸ *ibid* p.84
- ³⁹ 5m42s
- ⁴⁰ See Miles Davis (1970) *Bitches Brew* USA, Columbia 1970 [CD] for comparison.
- ⁴¹ "When [Cage] came I turned it on ... and he wouldn't listen to me. He sat and listened to it for three hours and that was really impressive to me. He just sat there." Robert Morris, interview by Jack Burnham, 21 November 1975, Robert Morris Archive. In: Joseph, B.W. (2007) *The Tower and the Line: Toward a Genealogy of Minimalism*. In: Kelly, C. ed. (2011) *Sound*. op. cit. p.48
- ⁴² I think of my Mac at home – If I listened to all the music in my iTunes library back-to-back, it would take four days.
- ⁴³ Is a flatpack box still a box? Does Morris' box only become one when the sounds of its making are finished?
- ⁴⁴ Merleau-Ponty M. (2008) *The World of Perception*. In: Voegelin, S. (2011) op. cit. p.6
- ⁴⁵ *ibid* p.14
- ⁴⁶ *ibid* p.10
- ⁴⁷ *ibid* p.14
- ⁴⁸ *ibid* p.15
- ⁴⁹ *ibid* [my italics]
- ⁵⁰ Which Voegelin describes thus: "According to Adorno, transcendental subjects are more constitutive of a current (visual) society that emphasizes rationality and abstraction over what they are for themselves." E.g. what a sound might mean or signify, rather than *sounds-in-themselves*. While 'straight' empirical subjects have "no visibility or power in that social order", Voegelin contends that the sonic subject is "formless but not powerless: the sonic object/phenomenon blasts the systemic and rational reality through its insistence on being heard, being experienced rather than abstracted." *ibid* p.15
- ⁵¹ *ibid* p.12 [my italics]
- ⁵² "There can be no gap between the heard and hearing, I either hear it or I don't, and what I perceive is what I hear." *ibid* p.5
- ⁵³ *ibid*
- ⁵⁴ *ibid* p.11
- ⁵⁵ Migone, C. (2012) op. cit. p.20
- ⁵⁶ Voegelin, S. (2011) op. cit. p.12
- ⁵⁷ Kahn, D. (2001) op. cit. p.166
- ⁵⁸ Dolar, M. (2006) op. cit. p.16

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- ⁵⁹ *ibid* p.17
- ⁶⁰ “To have ritual value an ‘event’ must *recur*. In other words, it must not be an historical event at all, but an instance of something timeless” [my italics]. Eisenberg, E. (1987) *The Recording Angel*. Picador: London. p.41
- ⁶¹ Dolar, M. (2006) *op. cit.* p.17
- ⁶² *ibid* p.19
- ⁶³ *ibid* p.25
- ⁶⁴ Or the *un*voice.
- ⁶⁵ *ibid* p.26
- ⁶⁶ Sound/music continuum – a hastily coined phrase, used here to point to Cage’s incorporation of ‘extra-musical’ sounds into music.
- ⁶⁷ *ibid* p.30
- ⁶⁸ *ibid*
- ⁶⁹ *ibid* p.31
- ⁷⁰ *ibid* p.36
- ⁷¹ Remainder as the ‘product’ of the voice’s reduction by phonology.
- ⁷² *ibid* p.36
- ⁷³ *ibid* p.59
- ⁷⁴ *ibid* p.36 Dolar continues “To be sure, its positivity is extremely elusive – just the vibrations of air which vanish as soon as they are produced, a pure passing, not something that could be fixed or something that one could hold on to, since one can only fix the differences, as phonology has exhaustively done.”
- ⁷⁵ *ibid* p.60
- ⁷⁶ *ibid* p.61
- ⁷⁷ *ibid* p.69
- ⁷⁸ Žižek, S. (2001) *On Belief*. London: Routledge p.58. Cited in Dolar, M. (2006) p.70
- ⁷⁹ Dolar, M. (2006) *ibid* p.70
- ⁸⁰ Badiou, A. (2006) *Logiques des mondes*. Cited in Dolar, M. (2006) *ibid*. p.60
- ⁸¹ “the methodological isolation of the voice in which we engage for *particular purposes* is always a simplification” Dolar, M. (2006) *ibid* p.67. [my emphasis].
This for me aligns the voice object as a tool to interrogate situations, rather than ‘win arguments’. It can inform our listening and performance practice.
- ⁸² See Chapter Three and Chapter Four.
- ⁸³ Chion, M. (1994) *Audio-Vision*. Translated from the French by Claudia Gorbman. New York: Columbia University Press.
- ⁸⁴ Schaeffer, P. (1966) *Traité Des Objets Musicaux*. Seuil: Paris
- ⁸⁵ Schaeffer, P. (1952/2012) *In Search of a Concrete Music*. Translated from the French by Christine North and John Dack. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- ⁸⁶ Chion, M. (1994) *op. cit.* p.25 [my italics]
- ⁸⁷ Or a recording of a dog.
- ⁸⁸ Schaeffer, P. (1966) *op. cit.* p.166
- ⁸⁹ Dolar, M. (2006) *op. cit.* p.66
- ⁹⁰ *ibid*
- ⁹¹ Chion, M. (1994) *op. cit.* pp.25-27
- ⁹² *ibid* p.28
- ⁹³ *ibid*
- ⁹⁴ *ibid* p.29
- ⁹⁵ Chion, M. (1983/2009) *Guide Des Objets Sonores: Pierre Schaeffer et la recherche musicale. Guide To Sound Objects: Pierre Schaeffer and Musical Research*. Translated from the French by John Dack and Christine North. [Internet] p.11. Available from:
<<http://www.ears.dmu.ac.uk/IMG/pdf/Chion-guide/GuidePreface.pdf>>
[Accessed 28 September 2011]
- ⁹⁶ *ibid* p.12
- ⁹⁷ Chion, M. (1994) *op. cit.* p.29
- ⁹⁸ Listening, Perceiving, Hearing, Comprehending.

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- ⁹⁹ Chion, M. (1983/2009) op. cit. p. 20
- ¹⁰⁰ All italic sections of text in this table are from Chion, M (1983/2009) op. cit. p.20
- ¹⁰¹ Chion highlights how the causal reference to source (listening to an instrument) becomes more associated with the *abstract* as the *Guide...* goes on – “For example, reference to an instrument (such as the violin) on a traditional score shows a certain level of abstraction despite appearances” Chion, M. (1983/2009) p.23
- ¹⁰² *ibid* p.30
- ¹⁰³ “and not the ones it *suggests*” *ibid* p.31 [my italics]
- ¹⁰⁴ *ibid*
- ¹⁰⁵ Dolar, M. (2006) op. cit. p.36
- ¹⁰⁶ Chion, M. (1983/2009) op. cit. p.29
- ¹⁰⁷ *ibid* p.30 [italics original]
- ¹⁰⁸ *ibid* pp.32-33
- ¹⁰⁹ Kim-Cohen, S. (2009) op. cit. p.xx
- ¹¹⁰ *ibid* p.xxii
- ¹¹¹ *ibid* pp.13-15.
- ¹¹² Krauss, R. (1990) The Blink of an Eye. In: Carroll, D. (1990) *The States of “Theory”: History, Art and Critical Discourse*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Cited in: Kim-Cohen, S. (2009) *ibid*
- ¹¹³ *ibid* p.81
- ¹¹⁴ *ibid*
- ¹¹⁵ *ibid* p.14
- ¹¹⁶ *ibid* p.15
- ¹¹⁷ *ibid* p.16
- ¹¹⁸ *ibid* pp.223-224
- ¹¹⁹ Kane, B. (2007) L'Objet Sonore Maintenant: Pierre Schaeffer, Sound Objects and Phenomenological Reduction. *Organised Sound*. [Internet] vol. 12 (1) pp.15-24
Available from: <<http://browsebriankane.com/lobjet-sonore-maintenant-pierre-schaeffer-sound-objects-and-the-phenomenological-reduction/>> [Accessed 1 December 2010]
- ¹²⁰ Chion, M. (1983/2009) op. cit. p.32 [my italics]
- ¹²¹ Kim-Cohen, S. (2009) op. cit. p.16
- ¹²² Schaeffer, P. (1983/2009) Introduction In: Chion, M. (1983/2009) op. cit. p.1
- ¹²³ Chion, M. (1983/2009) *ibid* pp106
- ¹²⁴ *ibid* p.107
- ¹²⁵ *ibid* p.30
- ¹²⁶ *ibid* p.3
- ¹²⁷ Hodgkinson, T. (1987) Pierre Schaeffer interview. [Internet] Recommended Records Quarterly. Volume 2, No 1. Available from:
<<http://www.timhodgkinson.co.uk/schaeffer.pdf>> [Accessed 14 April 2011]
- ¹²⁸ “I prefer an experiment, even aborted, to a successful oeuvre.” Schaeffer in: Pierret, M. (1969) *Entretiens avec Pierre Schaeffer*. Paris: Pierre Belfond.
- In: Palombini, C. (1998) Pierre Schaeffer: Towards an Experimental Music. *Music and Letters*. [Internet] vol.74 (4) pp.547-557. Available from:
<http://www.rem.ufpr.br/_REM/REMr3.1/vol3/Schaefferi.html> [Accessed 25 July 2008]
- ¹²⁹ McKinnon, D. (2011) *Awkward Ecologies*. [Internet] Paper given at Music Forum. 18 March 2011. New Zealand School of Music. Available from:
<<http://dugalmckinnon.wordpress.com/2011/05/07/awkward-ecologies-the-interpretation-of-sound-based-music>> [Accessed 28 September 2011]
- ¹³⁰ *ibid* p.5
- ¹³¹ *ibid*
- ¹³² *ibid* p.6
- ¹³³ Hogg, B. (2009) *Sound Objects, Found Objects – Free Improvisation and Electroacoustics*. [Internet]. Available from: <http://www.bennethogg.co.uk/?page_id=30> [Accessed 16 February 2012]
- ¹³⁴ *ibid*
- ¹³⁵ Kim-Cohen, S. (2009) op. cit. p.259

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- ¹³⁶ Migone, C. (2012) op. cit. p.4
- ¹³⁷ Kane, B. (1997). op. cit. p.20
- ¹³⁸ Kim-Cohen, S. (2012) op. cit. p.xxii
- ¹³⁹ Schrimshaw, W. (2013) Non-cochlear sound: On affect and exteriority. In: Thompson, M & Biddle, I. eds. (2013) *Sound Music Affect: Theorizing sonic experience*. London: Bloomsbury. p.41
- ¹⁴⁰ *ibid*
- ¹⁴¹ *ibid*
- ¹⁴² Harper, A. (2011) *Infinite Music: Imagining the Next Millennium of Human Music Making*. Alresford: Zero Books. p.30
- ¹⁴³ Schrimshaw, W. (2013) op. cit. p.43
- ¹⁴⁴ Thompson, M and Biddle, I (2013) Somewhere between the signifying and the sublime. In: Thompson, M & Biddle, I. eds. (2013) op. cit. p.6
- ¹⁴⁵ *ibid*. Thompson and Biddle quote here from: Clough, P.T., Goldberg, G. Schiff, R., Weeks, A. & Willse, C. (2008) Notes Towards a Theory of Affect-Itself. *Ephemera*, 7(1), 60-77.
- ¹⁴⁶ Schrimshaw, W. (2013) op. cit. p.43
- ¹⁴⁷ *ibid*
- ¹⁴⁸ Which will be spelled with a ‘z’ throughout (see Lippard)
- ¹⁴⁹ Lippard, L. (1973) *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- ¹⁵⁰ Lippard, L. & Chandler, J. (1968) The Dematerialization of Art. In: *Art International*. vol.12 (2) pp. 31–36. In: Alberro, A. & Stimson, B. eds. (1999) *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- ¹⁵¹ *ibid* p.47
- ¹⁵² *ibid* p.49
- ¹⁵³ This is a very crude way of looking at it.
- ¹⁵⁴ This is:
1. *The artist may construct the piece*
 2. *The piece may be fabricated*
 3. *The piece need not be built*
- Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist, the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership.*
- Lawrence Weiner, quoted in Alberro, A. & Stimson, B. eds. (1999) *ibid* p.xxii (originally published in the catalogue for the exhibition “January 5–31, 1969” (New York: Seth Siegelau, 1969).
- ¹⁵⁵ *ibid*
- ¹⁵⁶ Lippard, L. & Chandler, J. (1968) op. cit. p.49
- ¹⁵⁷ Though not necessarily the *voice*.
- ¹⁵⁸ At its simplest level, through written/printed instructions and statements – see for example Lawrence Weiner *Statements*.
- ¹⁵⁹ Terry Smith, in his essay *Propositions* (from the catalogue to the exhibition *The Situation Now: Object or Post-Object Art?* (1971) Sydney: Contemporary Art Society pp.3 – 4) proposes that “the idea of abstraction as reduction has been revealed as self-terminating, especially when it is pegged to the notion of each of the arts separately acting to expel their ‘expendable conventions.’ Each of the arts is, in fact, going further than this – they are dispensing with their essential conventions (the visual arts with the visual, music with structured sound, poetry with linear print conventions etc.)”
- In Alberro, A. & Stimson, B. eds. (1999) op. cit. p.258
- ¹⁶⁰ For example: Alberro identifies that Acconci’s *Following Piece*, once produced, could “then be reactivated or performed by the artist or any other interested party at will. The work is thus reduced to a purely descriptive analysis of an episode, and all composition, narrative, and interiority is negated. In what is now the inverse of a work that functions as “a working out, a thinking out, of all the implications of all aspects of the concept ‘art,’” as Kosuth puts it, the

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- process of decentering is absolute in *Following Piece*—there is no connection back to the artist through the work.” Alberro, A. (1999) *ibid* p.xxi
- See also Douglas Huebler: “Because the work is beyond direct perceptual experience, awareness of the work depends on a system of documentation.” Statement in the *January 5-31, 1969* catalogue. In: Lippard, L. (1973) *op. cit.* p.74
- ¹⁶¹ For example George Brecht’s *Incidental Music*. (1961)
- ¹⁶² Letter to Lucy Lippard, reprinted in Alberro, A. & Stimson, B. eds. (1999) *op. cit.* p.56
- ¹⁶³ Kotz, L. (2001) Post-Cagean Aesthetics and the “Event” Score. *October* [Internet] vol.95 pp. 54-89. Available from: <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/779200>> [Accessed 25 August 2013]
- ¹⁶⁴ *ibid* p.59
- ¹⁶⁵ *ibid*
- ¹⁶⁶ *ibid*
- ¹⁶⁷ Eco, U. (1959) The Open Work. In: Cox, C. & Warner, D. eds. (2004) *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* New York: Continuum. pp.167-175
- ¹⁶⁸ Kotz, L. (2001) *op. cit.* p.60
- ¹⁶⁹ *ibid* p.61
- ¹⁷⁰ *ibid*
- ¹⁷¹ “An Interview with George Brecht by Irmeline Lebeer” In Martin, H. (1973) *An Introduction to George Brecht’s Book of the Tumbler on Fire*. p.84. Cited in: Kotz, L. (2001) p.72
- ¹⁷² *ibid*
- ¹⁷³ *ibid*
- ¹⁷⁴ Harper, A. (2011) *op. cit.* p.30
- ¹⁷⁵ *ibid* p.31
- ¹⁷⁶ *ibid* p.33
- ¹⁷⁷ *ibid*
- ¹⁷⁸ Kim-Cohen, S. (2009) *op. cit.* p.xx

Chapter Two

Towards An Intimate Space

In which I: / misread Species as Spaces / use Brandon LaBelle talking about tea to introduce space / use Richard Coyne to distinguish between space and place / talk about William Gibson as identifying a notional space / explore auditory space and headphone listening / identify the space between what is and what if / use the twelve categories in 'The Tuning of Place' as starting points for talking about the intimate as a threshold state / encounter "the most minimal record ever made" / touch on car audio culture and club culture / talk about the tabletop and gesture / introduce what this project describes as writing-through / write a large section on Benedict Drew's A Folding Table album / examine Edward T. Hall's proxemics / use Anthony Gritten's idea of drift alongside Gaston Bachelard's The Poetics of Space to propose the intimate space.

There *are* voices in there.

Spun microphones / clouds of insects / voices wrenched from shamanic throats / cabaret drum rolls / drowned brass sections. Mosquito trombones / cooing pigeon bubbling / depth charge timpani buried. These sounds do not refer to these sounds. These sounds are moving from the front of my ears to the back of my head. From proximal intimacy to semi-described non-places. These sounds are simultaneously slow *and* fast – pointillist meets textural. These sounds are rough *and* smooth – rounded electronic tones cutting through swirls of static clouds. The repetitions here are gentle, sedately paced, but insistent – they have momentum. These circuits are autonomous, self-regulating *and* tightly composed. These chants, dances, themes - that never outstay their welcome - are perfectly formed microworlds. This is Rashad Becker's debut album, *Traditional Music of Notional Species*¹.

It is mysterious *and* straightforward. It is upfront in wanting to take a non-referential position to sound *sources*, while concurrently pointing to traditions outside western harmonic structures. As such, it literally *synthesises* outside influences and internal 'from first principals' sound objects. It *does* point unavoidably to say, *musique concrète* or at a pinch David Tudor, but its mastery of its own formal challenges – microworlds, development of non-referring themes, perfectly balanced frequency content – is absolute. Using words to describe something that wants to fold in on itself, to almost disappear, seems close to futile, so we can only point to what these sounds point *us* towards. So: The second side, *Themes*, seems immediately more tonal, though with the edges of these tones bleeding into bell-like buzzes of distortion, this still presents a complex field to unpick. What makes for compelling listening here is how the accumulated texture retains clarity as the layers progress. There is a depth of tone and frequency separation that feels *warm*. And that is one of the many strengths of both sides – while there are touches of bass pressure or almost acidic squelches that give it an oblique nod to techno or dub, the warmth of all the sounds here give it an 'inside out' feel. *Traditional Music of Notional Species* is meditative and humorous – its feedback matrices spiralling inwards rather than outwards; its exuberant pings, sweeps and slides mean it is never dry or academic. It ends, appropriately, with what could *almost* be the sound of a tape player spluttering in its demise. This is a thoughtful, playful record that gently demands your attention, and which rewards close listening with riches. When I first read about the Rashad Becker album, I misread the title as 'notional *spaces*'. Notional *spaces* would be imagined territories, propositional terrain, forming a contingent geography that might bind listening to an interior world of intimate space, as well as reach across the floor to the world of a social listening, a shared space.

This chapter proposes *intimate space* as a site for encountering sound. A space that is *small* and *intimate* can be created by performance, listening and language. More specifically, a space that is small and intimate can be created through performing with, listening to, speaking with, the *unsound object*. Or taken another way, small and intimate spaces are suited to, perhaps even necessary for, the *unsound object*.

This chapter will not seek to define *intimate space*; as we have seen, one of the characteristic features of the *unsound object* is its un-knowableness, its position between and across states, therefore *intimate space* should be approached in the same way - through writing sound, through architecture, through fiction, through the body; this chapter will propose that *intimate space* also belongs “nervously, tenuously, longingly”² to the *unsound object*, to the terrain of sound.

To talk about *intimate space*, then, is to unpick more histories; to wander in an undisciplined manner between literature, architecture, sound based work. While this chapter’s proposal for *intimate space* will emerge through these writings and peregrinations, it is useful to look at what space *is*, or might be, for this project – where we start from. Space is where sound lives, but this ‘space’ covers the air between us, the physical co-ordinates and geographies of the body, the head space of the perceptual object, the personal space of day-to-day encounter, the architectural space that allows for the increased or dampened reflections that shape sounds in the world, the imagined space of a painting, the virtual space of a three-dimensional computer model, the threshold space of undefined areas, and so on.

Each of these loose descriptions are just that – loose. They are not definitions, but nevertheless could be seen to fall within particular disciplines – architectural theory, performance theory, literature. Before I start ‘wandering’ too far across the margins, I’d like to point to two places that will frame much of how *I* talk about space in this chapter. First, Brandon LaBelle, talking about the home:

“To pull off the shoes, make a tea, and sit back on the sofa defines the home as a soft space for quiet moments and relaxing comfort.”³

While focusing specifically on the home in this passage, LaBelle here proposes two approaches to space. First that it is the *actions* – the *act* of making tea, the *act* of pulling off shoes – that *creates* space. Second, these actions occur within a physical ‘soft’ space – the sofa, the physical area of the home. So, the (home) space is both a physical *location*, where things that relax us happen, and a space *created* by this private/intimate activity. This is admittedly quite wide (while also being extrapolated from a fairly narrow description of the *home*), but can act as a framing approach to the rest of this chapter: space is created through actions; actions occur in space.

The second definition of space comes from Richard Coyne. In *The Tuning of Place*, Coyne identifies *place* as separate from *space* – put simply, places *are where people are*; “their concerns, memories, stories, conversations, encounters and artifacts.”⁴ Coyne is

concerned primarily with how we use pervasive media devices – phones, laptops, digital cameras, internet devices, stereos even – to *tune* place; the way the “lived experience”⁵ of adjusting our place is foregrounded by these devices. The lived experience, whether solitary or communal, is central to this project, so it is appropriate that *place* becomes another touchstone of this chapter’s investigation. If I’m interested in space (and place) as something that is created by the actions of people, we must also attend to their concerns, memories, stories, conversations and objects.

Yearning.

“One day, I walked by a bus stop and there was an Apple poster. The poster was a photograph of a businessman’s jacketed, neatly cuffed arm holding a life-size representation of a real-life computer that was not much bigger than a laptop is today. Everyone is going to have one of these, I thought, and everyone is going to want to live inside them. And then somehow I knew that the notional space behind all of the computer screens would be one single universe.”⁶

In the Vancouver of very early eighties, William Gibson, looking for a science-fictional space that wasn’t spaceships and inter-galactic travel, encountered personal computer adverts and teenagers playing in video games arcades – video games that “didn’t even have perspective but were *yearning* towards perspective and dimensionality.”⁷ This *yearning*, this imagining *towards*, lead Gibson to the fictional, propositional space he was looking for: the “consensual hallucination”⁸ of cyberspace. What is relevant about Gibson’s thinking and writing about technology is that it describes the human relationship with spaces that Coyne identifies. And though in Gibson’s fiction, this space might eventually open out into the internet, or the “emergent technology” of the Bridge, it manifests *through objects* that are everyday – whether Case’s ‘deck’ in *Neuromancer*, or Milgrim’s MacBook Air in *Zero History* – and these objects are the focus of the pressures, hopes, livelihoods, fears that the characters face. These characters’ relationships with their objects are primarily solitary; a recurring trope of Gibson’s writing, and us such perhaps unsuitable to draw wider conclusions from. Yet even a solitary lived experience produces *place*.

An *unsound object* that draws on imagined, fictional and uncertain sounds will by necessity have an element of this *yearning*, this imagining towards. And the *notional* space that I am suggesting above – also propositional, also imagined - could be conjured in these small moments of space, in these encounters with objects, that we might suggest constitute an *intimate space*.

On Auditory Space.

In keeping with Migone's view of sound art as "a territory exceeding itself, one that contaminates neighbouring practices,"⁹ LaBelle's quotation from Edmund Carpenter and Marshall McLuhan on auditory space seems appropriate in identifying auditory space as fluid and unfixed:

"auditory space has no point of favored focus. It's a sphere without fixed boundaries, space made by the thing itself, not space containing a thing. It is not a pictorial space, boxed in, but dynamic, always in flux, creating its own dimensions, moment by moment."¹⁰

Auditory space is presented here as the thing itself – as a dynamic, on-going condition – rather than a more fixed view of "space containing an object". The thing itself is made by *us*, in our "always in flux" inner lives, as in David Mitchell's novel *Ghostwritten*, where the character Satoru identifies auditory space as an inner space:

"In smaller cities people can use the space around them to insulate themselves, to remind themselves of who they are. [...] In Tokyo you have to make your place *inside* your head. There are different ways to make this place. [...] Internet, manga, Hollywood, doomsday cults, they are all places where you go and where you matter as an individual. [...] My place comes into existence through jazz. Jazz makes a fine place. The colours and feelings there come not from the eye but from sounds."¹¹

An imaginary city, built from the private spaces we carry with us. A social space built from individual moments of imagination. A collective dreaming, where the inward gaze produces "colours and feelings" from intentional objects.

Here perhaps, a parallel with the act of headphone listening (whether the soft rimmed cans of the 'hi-fi enthusiast' or the commonplace white ear buds of the iPod.) For R. Murray Schafer, this "directs the listener towards a new integrity with himself"¹² by removing the external world, by listening *inwards*. Frances Dyson¹³ meanwhile, links Schafer's interior world with Gaston Bachelard's claim for the potential of radio to unlock the unconscious - "If radio could provide a few hours' rest, a few hours' peace, this broadcast reverie would be a salutary thing [...] there really is a principle of inwardness – the listener must be made to dream."¹⁴ Dreaming, turning inwards, leaving the signs of the external world aside.

In contrast, Christina Kubisch's *Electrical Walks* - a series of headphone pieces - turn our ears outwards. Built into a large pair of headphones the listener collects from a gallery¹⁵ are a pair of electromagnetic coils. These pick up, transform and amplify normally inaudible electronic signals – the currents and fields emanating from all the electronic devices that surround us in a city – automatic shop doors, rolling advertisement boards, strip lighting, cash machines. Clouds of static and pulses envelop the listener – the intensity and complexity of these sounds depending on what collection of electronics the wearer encounters. Standing on the threshold of a department store, your ears might be assaulted by what sounds like a fearsome snarl

of electric bees; while a warm, cyclical drone emanates from the scrolling adverts at bus stops.

In the early 80s, Kubisch was making installations in indoor spaces – running webs of audio cables across the room, each literally piping musical compositions along the walls. Visitors were given cube shaped telephone amplifiers that broadcast the sounds they detected from the lattices of cables. Later, Kubisch replaced these cubes with headphones with the same devices built in:

“It was kind of tiring to have these cubes in your hands all the time. So, four or five years later, I found a factory that built wonderful headphones. I went to them and asked whether they could put the components of the cube in the headphones. [...] The sound was better and more subtle.”¹⁶

After working on other projects for a while, Kubisch was asked to create a large-scale version of these pieces in 1999, at the *Potsdamer Platz* in Berlin – an outdoor space, full of the commercial activity. Putting the headphones on in this situation, Kubisch has said that:

“I heard so many strange sounds: humming sounds, rhythms, and all kinds of things that, of course, disturbed me, because I didn’t want them. Eventually, I realized that I no longer needed to put *my* sounds in cables because they were already out there. So I built a new generation of headphones that are especially sensitive to electricity and that don’t suppress or ignore all these electromagnetic fields but, instead, amplify them.”¹⁷

These specially modified headphones allow the wearer to listen *outwards*, rather than *inwards*. Compare this to Schafer’s description of headphone listening; where sounds “literally seems to emanate from points in the cranium itself, as if the archetypes of the unconscious were in conversation.”¹⁸ There is no narrative drive, no deliberate apex of composition, just a freeform investigation of different phenomena. It is up to the individual listener to hunt down interesting sounds, to find spaces, angles, technology, that produce the most interesting sounds, the most interesting combination of textures. The personal, headphone space, becomes a space of investigation, of active listening.¹⁹ The work requires this space to be taken out into the public realm, where the imaginary city become the real city. Or where the fictional city bleeds into the real, “because in its semi-obscurity, streets multiply, becoming confused and interchanged. [...] reflected streets, streets which are doubles, make-believe streets.”²⁰

Janet Cardiff’s audio walks also play with the headphone situation, bleeding other cities into the now. Again, the listener collects the apparatus of the work (in Cardiff’s case, a CD player and headphones) from a gallery location (in the case of *The Missing Voice: Case Study B* (1999), Whitechapel Library), and presses play. The wearer hears Cardiff’s voice, along with sounds of footsteps, traffic noise, city atmospheres, giving instructions:

*‘I’m standing in the library with you, you can hear the turning of newspaper pages, people talking softly. There’s a man standing beside me... [...]...Close the book. Put it back to where you found it. Go to the right. Walk past the main desk. Through the turnstile.’*²¹

The headphone experience, normally a private, personal one, is first invaded by the artist’s voice, giving instructions as if a particularly personal gallery audio guide, then rendered stranger still by the act of taking this sound world out into the streets of London. If I listen to piano music on headphones in public, as I often do on train journeys, I do not expect to look up and see the piano – but Cardiff’s work takes in recordings from the walk the listener is now taking – a double strangeness – there is the pub she mentions, but we can’t see the traffic that our headphones indicate *should* be there.

“Cardiff’s play relies upon the headphonic, as a psychological opportunity to literally split the listening body: to create an envelope in which to unhinge time and place, dislocate one’s bearings.”²²

The use of headphones here doesn’t create a cocooned, sheltered space, but an *uneasy* one. Much of its strangeness comes from the disjuncture of time – what you are doing *now* and how it sounds *then*; what you *see* now and how the *sound* of then guides the uneasiness. Marla Carlson describes Cardiff’s use of a “cumulative push-and-pull” as a *hypermediation*, as a way to “alter one’s sensory immersion in one’s surroundings”, by switching between parallels and disjunctions.²³

In her analysis of theatre pieces by Leeds theatre company Slung Low - who produce shows delivered mostly through headphones, incorporating unusual city spaces and live sound broadcasting - Hannah Nicklin draws attention to the ability of headphones to conjure “that space between the *what is* and the *what if*.”²⁴ Firstly, this arises through what Slung Low director Alan Lane identifies as the phenomenological re-revelation; the ability of headphones and headphone theatre to draw attention to “the thickness of being”²⁵ – how the reconstruction of meaning in the city is drawn attention to. Secondly, the ability of headphones to “reconcile the individual and site means a radical inbetween is opened at the site of occupation by the Spectacle in the digital age.”²⁶ Most importantly, Nicklin sites this ‘inbetween’ in the *body*; in the intimacy of headphone listening, and the inseparability of this body from the relationship between the technical and the performative.²⁷ The performative, Nicklin points out, continues to locate and interrogate the fissures and thresholds in everyday life;²⁸ analogous, perhaps, with Richard Coyne’s use of the term “wedge” to describe how pervasive digital devices as “generators of, and solutions for, deviation and calibration,”²⁹ that is – for navigating fissures and thresholds.

Objects in the home.

In *Consuming Technologies: Media and information in domestic spaces*,³⁰ Roger Silverstone outlines the four stages of the domestication of technology – appropriation, objectification, incorporation and conversion. Domestication theory refers to “how households communicate their status to the outside world with the help of devices they buy for their home.”³¹

An examination of a *status space*, one formed by the relationships between objects and people in the British class system, could be the focus of a more specific study, but Coyne’s approach to framing the categories of the tuning of place as social, as analogous to musical activity, as interrogative, is perhaps better suited to investigating the intimate space. His investigations proceed through experiences and practices – placing the narrative of his research back at our fingertips; making adjustments, tuning our sense of space, together and alone.

Coyne’s twelve categories of *tuning* are intervention, calibration, wedge, habit, rhythm, tags, taps, tactics, threshold, aggregation, noise and interference. Even within Coyne’s specific concerns (pervasive digital media devices and practices), these are clearly relevant to this project’s focus on the *unsound object* and the *intimate space*, and as Coyne continues to refer to sound and the sonic throughout, I propose that these areas might provide this chapter with a vocabulary for initiating a dialogue with the *intimate space*, and that the examples in this chapter can be filtered through these ideas. For example, Coyne’s description of “habit” looks at the role of pervasive media devices in the “strangling”³² of familiar places (for example the domestic environment), while “thresholds” proposes that these objects might exist as ‘aerials’ for registering changes in states; territories, perception.³³ As we are increasingly seeing the *unsound object* as a collection of oscillating territories, this is a useful parallel to draw.

In Bijsterveld and Jacobs’ study on the domestication of the reel-to-reel tape player, they find in contemporary adverts that the reel-to-reel moves from being seen as an individual object – something for activity and attention – to being part of the furniture; something permanently installed, indistinguishable from other status symbols; and as such eventually stabilised. However, Coyne identifies that “strangling,” the de-familiarising of spaces and objects to “rehabilitate the strangeness of everyday situations, devices, and scenarios,” is a common strategy used by designers of digital devices. This de-familiarisation means not only that “the home is brought into relief when considered as a site of otherness,” but that it creates “a play between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the everyday and the extraordinary, the sequential and the singular.”³⁴ Similarly, in Solène Bertrand’s essay *From Domestic to Aesthetic: Art in Everyday Life*, the production of “new spaces, new dimensions” is tied to the need to

disrupt familiar spaces, to “flaunt daily life in order to be able to break away from daily life.”³⁵

Breaking away from daily life through a disruption in the repetition of actions, events, habits. Whilst specifically focusing on pervasive digital devices, Coyne aligns repetition as a “tool of spatial organization” – how designers and particularly architects frame their compositions; but more importantly, he identifies repetition as an “affirmation of habit, inhabitation, habitat and home,”³⁶ relating especially to Henri Lefebvre’s description of *rhythm*. Within everyday repetition, small changes create rhythm, create small instances of fracture. The minute accumulated changes in long-form pieces of music use this tension between staying the same and introducing *difference* to create momentum, to introduce a teleology to the listener’s (and the performer’s) experience.³⁷

The disruption of repetition is also one of the central tenets of Jacques Attali’s essay *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. His linking of music to power structures, and the ability of sound and music to unpick how we consider time – the use of time, the stockpiling of time - means that the disruptions of *noise* and *composition* that Attali identifies in *Noise* are relevant to how we might construct a space that is between two states, or rather, may exist in both the physical everyday, *and* as a consequence of everyday actions.

Noise positions music at the place where noise, violence, economics and meaning meet. It traces the influence of power and the codes of ideologies and technology on the progress of music, a music that Attali sees is approaching a state of freedom he calls *composition*. *Composition*, beyond its more general usage, means “the conquest of the right to make the free and revocable choice to interlink with another’s code,”³⁸ to disrupt repetition, to “compose one’s life.”³⁹ Repetition for Attali, as it is for Schaeffer, is made possible by the advent of recording technology – the phonograph, gramophone record, magnetic tape – and for Attali, signals the end of the communality of music; music is no longer “a form of sociality, an opportunity for spectators to meet and communicate,” but a collection of time; literally the stockpiling of use-time, existing as a highly individualised pursuit. For music “to take on meaning, it requires an incompressible lapse of time, that of its own duration.”⁴⁰ But with repetition, with recorded sound, we arrive at this contradiction:

“*people must devote their time to producing the means to buy recordings of other people’s time, losing in the process not only the use of their own time, but also the time to use other people’s time. [...] People buy more records than they can listen to.*”⁴¹

This is what Attali means by the stockpiling of use-time. This stockpiling means that music, sound, activity, “no longer constructs differences.”⁴² It no longer creates the gaps, fractures, wedges that we require to create *place*. Interestingly, one of the reasons suggested in Bijsterveld and Jacobs’ study as to the failure of listening to reel-to-reel recordings as a family ‘ritual’ akin to sharing photographs, is that “listening to

recordings required all people present to be involved in the activity at the same time. Everyone in the room had to be quiet.”⁴³ Whether this still applies today, with overlapping technologies increasingly operating in parallel, is perhaps the focus of a more specific study, but repetition represents a flattening of potential, rather than the fissures offered by noise as *intervention* (as it is in Coyne) or as destruction of existing networks and structures (as in Attali).

Thresholds and habits.

As already mentioned, Coyne sees pervasive devices as aerials for registering transitions between states; and as components of habit, catalysts for “stranging” familiar places. If we draw a line from digital devices; which are objects of activity, of responsiveness, of anxiety; towards our *unsound object*, which is anxious, which is always shifting, which is *intimate* – we might also apply Coyne’s ideas of threshold and habit to places where the object is shifting as much as the territories and zones. For example, Coyne identifies the city as an overlapping patchwork of “zones, spaces, fields and thresholds” – which are encountered as “knots of concentration”⁴⁴ when navigated – whether tuned by our personal stereo or not. Thresholds, aural ones, do not necessarily coincide with ‘actual’ doorways, and this play of misaligned spaces leads to interference patterns,⁴⁵ like two speaker tones cancelling and reinforcing in a room. The act of navigating these overlapping zones, between sound spaces both visible – the jackhammers digging up the sidewalks again, the Sally Army band near the old Habitat – and hidden – the roar of distant crowds, or the sea, or animals; the breaking of glass; moving between these states, holding both these states simultaneously; listening is our aerial.

Though drawing on traditions from Indian vernacular architecture, the way the Raqs Media Collective approach threshold spaces can be applied to this sense of overlapping spaces, and how we might realign some sense of the intimate space with our domestic, lived experience of small spaces, of the home. Raqs Media Collective, based in Delhi, is made up of Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula and Shuddhabrata Sengupta, and “enjoys playing a plurality of roles, often appearing as artists, occasionally as curators, sometimes as philosophical agent provocateurs.”⁴⁶ Raqs frame the veranda and the inner courtyard of Indian and middle-eastern architecture as liminal spaces that give a “sense of the privileging of the threshold between inside and outside space,”⁴⁷ opening up private space to the ‘outside’ as well as providing a ‘doubleness’ to the space – a sense of reality but also of dreams, and the projection of social status and aspirations; a ‘phantasmic’ place of overlapping states.⁴⁸ It is this shifting uncertainty between positions that make Raqs’ ideas appropriate for looking at thresholds; first within the listening space of the home, and secondly around the construction of the *intimate space* alongside the *unsound object*.

What better way to investigate the thresholds of the listening experience than (re)stranging your own home with sounds? Berlin artist Carl Schilde has produced *WOW* - “the most minimal record ever made” – a record with a 33Hz tone on one side (to be played at 331/3 rpm) and a 45Hz tone of the other (to be played at 45rpm). This record is designed to test the limits of record players and speakers, to interact with the architectural conditions of your room, to be played with other copies of *WOW* to produce complex interference patterns. Each experience of *WOW* will be different – different record players, amplifiers, speakers, rooms – so I’m going to write here about my experience of playing *WOW* at home.

WOW.

After a few false starts – checking my speakers can handle the low-frequency (they can, sort of), removing plastic ornaments from the top of the left speaker which vibrated, rattled – I can begin. The first word I would use to describe the sound filling the room is ‘warm’. Using simple words to describe individual experiences has its limits of course – mastering engineer Bob Katz for example, describes the ‘warm’ part of our audible frequency range as being between 200 and 600Hz⁴⁹ - and while I’m attempting to use it to suggest a benign envelopment, the sheer physical presence of low frequency sounds can become oppressive – if neighbours play music too loud, if a lorry with an idling engine vibrates your floorboards, if a hostile government flies faster than sound planes over your city at night to produce fear-inducing sonic booms.⁵⁰ The way bass ‘takes over’ a space reminds you that an outside exists, one that exerts pressure on the everyday. These concerns are addressed in Sarah van Sonsbeeck’s artworks *Letter to my neighbours* and *Machine for my neighbours* – the first a letter that begins “Dear Upstairs Neighbours, [...] I’ve come to the conclusion that you take up 80 percent of my apartment with your sound. I would like to ask you to pay the corresponding amount in rent, please.”⁵¹ The second (*Machine...*) records neighbourly noise and plays it back by pressing a large loudspeaker up against the party wall. Childish, perhaps, but part of a practice that encourages us to think about the space that sounds occupy, by realigning sound practice to the scale of the small apartment, of the individual sharing a space, however contested, with others. Her *My real house* installation – a 1:1 scale model of the spaces in her apartment into which the neighbours cannot see – while not strictly about the way sounds bleed into our spaces, can be seen as exploring how the inner, domestic spaces we construct as private, are shaped just as much by outside influences.

I keep the volume at a reasonable level. There are tiny crackles from a slightly dirty stylus, adding a little hint of Pole-esque texture if I walk close to the speakers,⁵² but this is not too distracting as I move about the house, dowsing for ripples. My speakers are not too far apart, so I’m not expecting too many soft spots of interference. The

bass almost completely disappears in the kitchen – meaning that to walk back into the front room is like changing altitudes, changing pressures, like walking into a hothouse. Standing in the doorway, a physical threshold, a simple correlation. At this remove, it could actually be a lorry outside; this huge presence is also unobtrusive. Normalised almost. Walking out of the other door up the stairs has initially the expected effect – the bass falls away almost to silence, and then, suddenly flares back to full pressure as I reach the landing; the bass by the time I reach the bedroom is a penetrating fog of tone. I am quite taken aback; while I was anticipating some lulls and re-enforcements of sound within the house, nothing like this. Yes, this simple tone has redefined the space in the house, has presented overlaps where no (visible) thresholds are present.

Slowly fading the record out, the rest of the world re-asserts itself – the faint boom boom of a radio across the street, dogs barking, voice from the gardens – but my ears feel relieved, open, tingly. A weight lifted.

An almost completely opposite effect to listening to *In Search of Wild Tulips*, a compact disc recording of improvisations by Tetuzi Akiyama, Erik Carlsson, Toshimaru Nakamura and Henrik Olsson.⁵³ I press play, and sit back down on the sofa to listen. Ringing percussion, crackles from the speakers. The occasional buzz of a string. Unidentified pulses of noise, all proceeding at a quiet, spacious pace. The sounds may be abstract, but some of the sources could be guessed at – bowed cymbals, chimes and wine glasses, mixer feedback, Tetuzi Akiyama's measured guitar playing. About six minutes in, a change. A single low note, sounded on the guitar, brings into focus a tide of creeping pure sound⁵⁴ that simultaneously obliterates any sense of its origin, while pressing itself against my eardrums and the back of my neck, where I used to hear the clicks of bats.⁵⁵

I stand up, move around the room – this sound barely changes wherever I move to – there is little sense that the placement of my hi-fi speakers⁵⁶ is having any effect on Nakamura's tones (generated from a no-input mixing board), whereas the placed percussion notes and scraps of strings are still fully placed in a stereo field, shifting depending on my position.⁵⁷ The way Carlsson and Olsson's chimes and scrapes interact with Nakamura's tones (the strategy here, once Nakamura has entered the piece, is to add to or subtract from his sounds, interrupt the sweeps of sound, or complement, tonally), emphasises the ability of these piercing notes to transcend their point of origin. A fact highlighted when I step out of the room, and into the kitchen – all the other sounds, scrapes, rattles, are clearly 'from the next room', are distant, but the pressure and *presence* of the feedback tones remain *physically* close.

My shifting reception of low and high frequency sounds within the house *interferes* with the sounds of the everyday; at once de-familiarising the space and encouraging a new listening, a refreshing of habit – a retuning.

More bass.

Brandon LaBelle, reflecting on car audio culture in an extended (and at times dreamlike – a version of Paul Morley’s driving sequences in *Words and Music* steeped in auditory theory rather than Bill Drummond-esque list making⁵⁸) series of passages taking in Mexican-American ‘lowriders’, Public Enemy, and the car as stage,⁵⁹ identifies car audio listening as forming a private, personal space that also announces itself (loudly) to the environment; while the reclaiming of territory that comes with blasting out tunes (LaBelle boils down one strand of this reclamation to “I dig this song...this song is our weapon”), the bass, the sub-bass, the super-bass itself drives the body “deep into reassuring, auditory pleasure.”⁶⁰ Bass permeates club culture (and club culture seeps into art spaces); dub, dub-techno; expertly tuned in gallery spaces – the architectural resonating pieces by Emptyset⁶¹ or Beaconsfield Art Works⁶² - in Berlin club spaces, or simply blasting out of cheap stacks in sweaty basements.

For Steve Goodman, “every resonant surface is potentially a host for contagious concepts, percepts and affects,” bass as an “ecology of vibrational effects.”⁶³ His method follows ultralow bass sounds through ancient and modern times, bleeding between sonic warfare, resonating architectures, dub space – dub as virus, whilst still acknowledging that:

“for many artists, musicians dancers, and listeners, vibratory immersion provides the most conducive environment for movements of the body and movements of thought.”⁶⁴

What is lower than ultralow? Goodman’s take on unsound is a little more specific than Migone’s, though could be seen to overlap. For Goodman, unsound is arranged around “the logistics of imperception”⁶⁵ – the “apparently paradoxical field of inaudible audio, infrasonic and ultrasonic.”⁶⁶ The unsound here is tied to the politics of sonic warfare, the side of uncertainty that is fear. Unsound here affects the body directly, through ear drum damaging highs, to organ damaging lows.

In Heather Phillipson’s *NOT AN ESSAY*⁶⁷ – an extended text “preoccupied with intimacy and its opposite”⁶⁸ – bodies descend into the heat of nightclubs – clubs where “we’re aware of bodies without being able to read them”⁶⁹ – where heat and proximity and meat and swimming pool metaphors collide – the intimacy of cities where “people exist in rooms, penetrate people’s ozones.”⁷⁰ Phillipson’s text aligns bass and dancing specifically with a mass of anonymous bodies, all generic limbs, dance moves, sweat, orifices. Echoing the protagonist of Ben Marcus’ *The Flame Alphabet* using the chamber of the mouth as a resonator,⁷¹ Phillipson uses somatic images – faces are “the antechamber of mouths and nostrils” – to capture something of the way bodies press against each other in clubs, the way sounds inhabit us as sickening sensations, the “watching yourself from outside” dislocation that late nights bring.

More club culture and spaces.

A radio rotates on a domestic turntable, spitting out static and piercing tones every time it passes a suspended light bulb. The sounds it projects into the room are carefully shaped by the presence of acoustic baffles on adjoining walls – meaning the overlapping of the reflected sounds form new spaces; zones where the ear hears new combinations, and zones where there is almost cancellation. A television in the room mixes film of a stick-fighting wedding ceremony in Kenya with footage of a speech on terrorism by a man in Lahore – these fragments add, at first listen, a random, disruptive element of texture to the pulsing of the radio. In the next room, two cardboard records, one with triangle shapes cut into it, the other quartered by sectional slots, overlap in a brutalist approximation of minimal techno. There is also dry ice, or haze, and lasers - some budget approximation of a superclub. Upstairs, a single speaker, placed on its back, pops in and out – each time sending a pound coin skipping briefly into the air – th-thump, th-thump, th-thump.

Taken individually, these works by Haroon Mirza - *Cross section of a revolution 2011*, *Evolution of a revolution 2011* and *Backfade_5 2011*⁷² - draw attention to the objectness of sound – laying the processes that produce it bare to see, and to be heard. Taken together, though spread out across different rooms, careful listening reveals the pulses, knocks and thumps of each piece to be *beatmatched* to each other. Walking slowly around the piece, with the sounds simultaneously controlled by baffles and liberated by speaker and object placement, our listening is at once focused (as I count “1, 2, 3, 4”) and expanded, straining to make connections between Mirza’s clusters of sound.

These three works change the space they inhabit, and they change how we inhabit space. Through sound shaping, carefully balanced sound levels and frequencies, the spaces are described – through the synchronicities of bouncing coins, cardboard techno pulses, humming radios, we discover the *beat*, larger than individuals, the shared experiences and spaces of DJ culture. Richard Birkett, writing around Mirza’s installation *Paradise Loft*, adds that this beat, this continuous rhythm, is filtered through Mirza’s referencing of New York clubs Paradise Garage and The Loft, where “the motivation to root the beat in a space that negated time was built around the desire to keep people dancing and to defy the presence of an austere and restrictive exterior world.”⁷³ Mirza’s installations – compositions, as he likes to think of them – point backwards to classic club culture, and in their incorporations of objects and editions by other artists (the drum-kit and silk screen prints by Angus Fairhurst⁷⁴ in *I saw square triangle sine* at Camden Arts Centre, Guy Sherwin’s 16mm film *Cycles #1* in *Ad_Infinato*), to the reverse readymades of Marcel Duchamp.⁷⁵ But they also say: “This is the way music is made today”⁷⁶ – as *bricolage*, as a series of live-thought-experiments-objects, as impeccable references; “not as a collection of separate devices which come

together in front of an audience but as a ‘contraption’ with which all listeners interact.”⁷⁷

Mirza’s work suggests space beyond what is merely shaped by the sound pouring from the speakers – an overlapping of ideas and zones that points to something potentially greater than the sum of its parts.

I saw square triangle sine.

There is pulsing from a radio spinning on a turntable near a light-bulb, there is an Electro-Harmonix guitar pedal, there are upturned cymbals, there is a Roland Juno 60, and there is a drum-kit facing seven screen-prints of forests. The Juno is emitting a pulsing 12/8 sequence, the radio static is falling in and out of sync and the sun is flooding the space. I am sitting at the drums, listening intently, carefully, to the pulses and patterns. For a brief moment, I am at the centre of the piece; my focus is on the overlapping components, the room’s focus (though I am alone) is on the drums, waiting for them to join the ensemble. I pick up the sticks and begin.

On the tabletop.

One potential place where we can construct *intimate space* is the tabletop. From the operating table, to Coney Island side shows (*Grand Finale: A Tabletop Theatre* by Dick Zigun involved burning a paper house on a table and a dramatic Mob-based narrative⁷⁸); to tabletop role-playing games and Eva Meyer-Keller’s *Death Is Certain*, the tabletop is, amongst other things, a stage – a place for ‘staging’ performance.

One of the most explicit uses of this space as a stage is represented by the four films that make up Tim Etchells’ *Be Stone No More* – four Shakespeare plays restaged on a tabletop one metre square, using everyday objects to stand in as the characters. These are retellings, extracting the groupings, twists, characters of *King Lear*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Macbeth* – Lamb’s Tales meets kitchen sink meets small object theatre. The objects – cups, salt shakers, screwdrivers, harmonicas, a hip flask – are quotidian; drawn from kitchens, studies, living rooms – and yet they stand in for, then become, the characters in these grand narratives.

Etchells is interested in the way these versions explore the “mental space of the theatre,” how with minimal means and space, the imagination creates the space of the stories and especially, the way that language “makes things happen.”⁷⁹ The restrictions on the actual performance space, the length of each story (about thirty minutes), the well trodden source texts; all these things provide space for particular gestures and create a provisional *intimate space*.

“There’s a sort of comical choice if you say you’re going to do *Romeo and Juliet* or *King Lear* with a salt and pepper pot as the central character – that’s a stupid thing to do, but what’s interesting is that having made that choice, some quite amazing things happen about our relation to those objects [...] you do end up kind of investing in them and thinking about them as if they are the characters [...] I like the

mix which the project has in it of very banal things, very ordinary things, objects as objects, and then all those kind of references to Shakespeare, to grand themes...all taking place on the space of this table which is only like a metre by a metre.”⁸⁰

This mix of the grand in the small, and the ridiculous in the everyday is part of what Etchells describes as the *mapping* of the stories, the plots, the staging – and this mapping represents a ‘working through’ of the essence of those four canonical works. A ‘working through’ that, though forming finished pieces, could easily be described as experimental – the initial proposition being “can we remake these texts through small objects and small spaces alone?” Here however, though the experimental *process* is exposed through the relationships between concept and material,⁸¹ the final work is ‘not experimental with regards to performance’ (see again Cage and Nyman in the Introduction); the piece is delivered as a successful ‘take’ to camera.

An introduction to ‘writing through’.

As an extension to this method, I’d like to propose ‘writing through’ as a suitable method for interrogating, and eventually for creating, experiences and performances. I’ll cover this in more depth in the third chapter, with a particular focus on John Cage’s mesostics, but briefly, ‘writing through’ is proposed first as a method of encountering texts (texts in the broadest sense) that places the performer/researcher experience at the centre of the theorizing, through case studies and ‘field reports’, but that also allows for an “undisciplined”⁸² approach to research that has room for cross genre inquiry, and experimental, un-ordered methods of examining ideas.

For example in 1996, dissatisfied with the progress of his book review of Peter Ackroyd’s *Blake*, Iain Sinclair broke his review copy into ten “portable portions”⁸³ and walked with them to London locations in the book – “I couldn’t do justice to Ackroyd’s book without coercing it into another scheme, a quest. I decided to pay homage to the supreme Londoner’s own methodology.”⁸⁴

How might, for example, an auditory space be ‘written through’? How might headphone listening and laptop writing open connections between electro-acoustic sounds, the live writing situation and specific spaces ‘at arm’s length’?

A Folding Table.

I am sitting at a table in the library at NUCA.⁸⁵ The table is functional, veneered (cheaply) and semi built into the side of the library building, giving my place, at the end of the row, a half-sheltered spot from library traffic. Having said that, it’s pretty quiet in here. I’m typing on a wireless keyboard, rather than the one on the laptop – I’ve recently started to be more aware of my writing position – I found myself hunching over keyboards, my right hand almost cramping as I try and use the track-pad. So, a wireless keyboard. My laptop is at the

opposite side of the table – I can just brush the screen with my fingertips if I stretch forward. Leaning forward to do just this – attempting to remove one of the cat hairs that seems to get everywhere, I have just knocked the Apple ‘magic mouse’ onto the floor, using my elbow.

A gradual sound of rain – pebbles – textures. I am listening to the Benedict Drew album *A Folding Table*⁸⁶ on headphones. First though, a word about the headphones – they are the white, Apple branded ones that came with my iPod (now on the blink) a couple of years ago. I’m not really a hi-fi buff. I do not have strong opinions on gold-plated banana plugs. I cannot hold forth on the decline of the British hi-fi industry in the Cambridgeshire area. I do own a pair of KEF speakers, but haven’t got round to fixing the buzz in one of them, the buzz that only appears on guitar chords, or *Holkeham Drones*,⁸⁷ for about a year now.

I think these headphones are better than people give them credit for. Removing them, I hear only a whisper of sound, a faint prickle – the sound of a cellophane bag slowly unfolding. With them in, there is bass, space, the high frequencies sound well defined. In fact now, thirteen minutes and fifty-three seconds into the recording, the first track, *A Table Top*, those high frequencies are popping in my ears like fizzy sweets on my tongue. The sound rolls around my head. The pops move from the drum, the imagined physical threshold of the ear, to where the back of my head joins my neck. Leaning forward to adjust the volume on the laptop (the volume keys don’t work on the wireless one for some reason), I bang my elbow again – this time on the edge of the table. I must be slouching in my chair.

The folding table – loaded with springs, tape-players, guitar pedals, wineglasses, wire wool, contact mics, small percussion instruments – is a common, almost ubiquitous sight in improv/lowercase/noise/sound art/whatever circles. Economics, portability – the ability to fit one into the back of a small car, to carry on the tube.

“Music stands in the background.

We go to the start.

Where demographics are meaningless.

And admit it is hopeless”⁸⁸

[*Jump.*

I almost jumped out of my seat.

This is the problem with headphones – proximity – the imagined, illusionary proximity of jarring, concrete sounds. That seemed to come from behind me and from my right hand resting on the mouse – almost simultaneously.]

Eight minutes into the second section, *A Hinge*; the sound of bowing and the sound of rubbing, and the sound of sawing. The bowing sound has the almost muffled tone of sounds that have been recorded too ‘hot’ – the effect being that my ears almost cringe, almost ‘pump’ – until all the sounds abruptly drop, leaving only a brief hum, before the piece continues with ringing high-pitched sounds and

something which sounds very close to bicycle spokes being pinged. Though not playing anything as recognisable as ‘*Show me the way to go home*’...⁸⁹ More slouching – my shoulders are starting to ache.

We return to the start.

Are all these sounds made from a folding table? Certainly there are bowing, rubbing, scraping, clicking sounds. A great deal of the material is so processed as to obscure any origins – indeed, I’ve focused on the way the sounds affect me – my encounter with the sounds in my ears, my head. At this stage, with little context to draw on, this could be any electro-acoustic album of the last ten (fifteen? twenty? thirty?) years – enjoyable as it is. And yet...

Definitely some piano-like sounds coming in here, in *Some Legs*. Found recording? The piano in the corner of the church hall where the Eddie Prevost workshop meets? (I’m speculating, considerably.) Some *inside* piano sounds – a mallet on strings? Some buried zither-esque tones follow. Could the *legs* be piano legs? Is there something about my encounters with this recording and with these tables that might merit further parallels? I’ve already said that my laptop, at least, the screen, the focal point, of my laptop – is at roughly arm’s length.

At arm’s length – could this be significant? Tabletop music happens at arm’s length; from the next prepared object, from the mixer controls, from our collaborator. *At arm’s length* suggests keeping a distance from a person or situation, but also implies a sphere of influence. An area where we can affect activity. A practical distance, certainly. A tangible one.

D’Arcy Philip Gray, writing in *Leonardo Music Journal* on David Tudor’s performance strategies in the late eighties appropriates the term “table core” from contemporary noise musics⁹⁰ to describe Tudor’s matrices of objects on the tabletop – interlocking circuits of gates, filters, guitar pedals. John Richards, referencing John Bowers’ “a table full of shit,”⁹¹ points to how the tabletop space can dictate gesture – on a ‘practical’ level, having objects within reach – how these restrictions and the position of the performer, stood behind the table, “can be used to create geometric shapes in terms of body movement and gesture, much like the stylized movement in Kabuki theater.”⁹² As an aside, it is interesting to align Richards’ choice of found objects based on “gesture-type” with the way Bennett Hogg responds to the found sound objects of group improvisation.⁹³

With this wireless keyboard, I can make words appear on the screen many feet away. In fact, this sentence was written four whole shelves of film theory away. If I had the relevant program open on the laptop, I could take simple sounds, and process them into scrunches, wisps and shards of noise. I could then email that to my supervisors, or swing the sounds effortlessly between speakers. This piece is not about laptops versus ‘proper’ instruments. It is certainly not about anything quite so tedious

as digital sound versus analogue sound. I'm not even one hundred percent certain it is about sound and listening, though I'm coming at it from that angle. I think there are elements to the idea of the tangible - the haptic - that are not about touch *per se*; not the sensation of touch, not the perception of surfaces. Whether I reach out to the limit of my fingertips and encounter a touch sensitive screen, or a contact microphone taped to a metal tray, or a bell suspended on a string, what is important, I think, is that I can reach it. I can reach it in my everyday activity, as an action of a body – a normal body. It doesn't require a superhuman athleticism, I don't have to *tilt* at the keyboard, there are no extended techniques making me hyper-aware of my relationship to my instrument – again, whether laptop or clarinet. An everyday reach.

This is, I think, one starting point. How this might triangulate with Edward T. Hall's proxemics; with notions of intimate and sociable spaces, is to be conjectured. How the 'reach' of this 'everyday body' (a phrase I am already uncomfortable with; a glib generalisation)⁹⁴ might be squared with the transition to notions of ritual and performance, also remains to be explored. A performing body that refuses to perform is still a performing body. (By comparison, think of *the whole world + the work = the whole world.*)⁹⁵ Are matter-of-factness, the everyday, just excuses for not engaging, not rehearsing, not thinking? By even deciding there is this space called performance (called art, called theatre, called space), what does that do to my notions of my performances? And my reach?

The Victorian medium – fraudulent or not – says two things simultaneously: “This is happening. This is not a performance. This is real.” and “This is special. This means something beyond the everyday. This is real.” A constant oscillation between these two states.

At arm's length / drift.

If I stretch out my arms, I can reach so far. If I lean in the direction of the wall, or the object, I can extend my reach a little further. There is a zone where if I am standing behind a tabletop of objects, or kneeling near a spread of guitar effects pedals, this zone is defined by the length of my arms, and the ability to move my position. Hall's proxemics might define this as existing somewhere between intimate space and personal space; if we are thinking about dynamic space, about interpersonal distance⁹⁶ – that is, space between people (rather than space between the performer and object, or speaker and ear.). Hall's proxemics are attractive to researchers working with music and sound because of their grounding in *nonverbal communication*, as well as the unconscious (Hall would describe as 'out-of-awareness'⁹⁷) nature of much of our embedded knowledge of space (particularly cultural space). The typology of personal distances, from intimate to personal to social to public, might also appeal to scholars

of Schaeffer's exhaustive cataloguing of new musical variables in the *Traité des Objets Musicaux*.⁹⁸

Hall's proxemics provide an interesting analogy to how we talk about sounds and objects; for example Simon Waters' aligning of proxemics with sounds as "a species of touch"⁹⁹ that territorialise experience in the same way (and in particular the way 'physical' instruments act as a component of performance ecosystems – the network of relationships between performer, instrument and environment). However, the limits of proxemics become clear when interrogating complex networks like those described by Waters, and I suggest that they are particularly inadequate when dealing with a sound object that always appears first as *experiential* – which is "given in the process of perception."¹⁰⁰

If I stretch out my arms, I can reach so far. We have already seen how the performer's position (as a 'neutral listening position') at a tabletop can be extended to include gestures – both stylised and drawn from 'found' objects.¹⁰¹ We have seen how a 'mapping' of a tabletop can be part of a method of 'working through' a performance situation. These two examples might begin to hint at how gesture as method exists within performance structures. For Anthony Gritten, dialogue around musical gesture is used to "tighten up" our relation to music by bridging the simple dualisms we encounter – music and noise, brain and body, performing and performance¹⁰² - but also as part of a desire to *possess* music and sound. Rather than possession, Gritten argues for a relation to music that sits on the "infinitely thin" edge of a coin that flips between possession and anonymity. His suggestion is that we *drift*.

In quoting John Rahn on the intimacy of musical experience – "How does music feel when it entwines with its listener like two bodies sliding over and around each other?"¹⁰³ – Gritten proposes that our encounters with music are "troubled and loosened"¹⁰⁴ by drift. Drift is not an object but a movement; not a 'result', but a resistance to musical encounters being broken down;¹⁰⁵ a refusal to be *fixed*.

I propose that Gritten's formation of *drift* could be incorporated gently into a sketch of intimate space, as something always in-between, always moving, as something whose exact meaning is a little different each time we look at it.

Intimate space.

In attempting to sketch *intimate space*, we have touched on the idea that it might be notional, provisional, *yearning*. It could exist in threshold places, between the *what is* and the *what if*. I've used the phrase "small moments of space" earlier in the chapter, and the idea that *intimate space* is created in small moments, in small instances of listening and performance, seems appropriate to an *unsound object* that is also unfixed.

Intimate space, like the *unsound object*, is perhaps better described as a set of possibilities, possible territories. Attempts to pin it down provoke it to change from a space into a method, or from a territory into a threshold, or a doorway.

In unpicking Henri Michaux's poem *L'espace aux ombres*, Gaston Bachelard finds not only the seeds for a phenomenological *exaggeration* which will act as a "positive impulse" in identifying the "opposition between reflexive reduction and pure imagination"¹⁰⁶ (highlighting for Bachelard the role of phenomenology as a test of the "psychological being of an image"¹⁰⁷), but more importantly, a "drama of intimate geometry"¹⁰⁸ between inside and outside.

In the poem, this drama – where inside and outside spaces are both "intimate – they are always ready to be reversed, to exchange their hostility" – the poem's centre, the mind of the poet, "wavers and trembles," is fated to be "reduced to a noise, a thunderous noise."¹⁰⁹ Bachelard reads this poem as "a phobia of inner space,"¹¹⁰ but perhaps we can align his description of Michaux's work as:

"the entire space-time of ambiguous being. In this ambiguous space, the mind has lost its geometrical homeland and the spirit is drifting."¹¹¹

This might sound unsettling, but in locating how we construct a list of possibilities for an *intimate space* that is bound to the *unsound object*, it seems appropriate. A space that hovers between inside and outside, that oscillates in position, that is adrift.

In this Chapter, the importance of unsettling a traditional discourse on space leads the project to the idea that writing, and writing through, are important to the idea of *intimate space* as encountered beyond space, on the page. Or somewhere between the two. Seeing *intimate space* as a set of conditions, possibilities, and potentials, rather than a physical location; this begins to dovetail with an *unsound object* that is on the drift. By thinking about the phenomenology within Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* at the same time as drawing on ideas from writing on gesture in performance, we fold *intimate space* into part of the project's method of unfixing and overlapping boundaries.

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- ² Migone, C. (2012) *Sonic Somatic: Performances of the Unsound Body*. Berlin: Errant Bodies Press. p.4
- ³ LaBelle, B. (2010) *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life* New York: Continuum. p.48
- ⁴ Coyne, R. (2010) *The Tuning of Place: Social Spaces and Pervasive Digital Media*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press. p.xvi
- ⁵ *ibid*
- ⁶ Wallace-Wells, D. (2011) William Gibson, The Art of Fiction No. 211. *Paris Review* [Internet] Summer 2011, no 197. Available from: <<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/6089/the-art-of-fiction-no-211-william-gibson>> [Accessed 4 September 2013]
- ⁷ *ibid* [my italics]
- ⁸ Gibson, W. (1984) *Neuromancer*. London: HarperCollins. p.67
- ⁹ Migone, C. (2012) op. cit. p.4
- ¹⁰ Carpenter, E. & McLuhan, M. (1960) Acoustic Space. In: Carpenter, E. & McLuhan M. (1960) *Explorations in Communications* Boston: Beacon Press. Quoted in: LaBelle. (2010) op. cit. p.xxi
- ¹¹ Mitchell, D. (1999) *Ghostwritten*. London: Hodder & Stoughton. p.38
- ¹² Schafer, R. Murray (1973) *The Music of the Environment*. Vienna: Universal Edition. Cited in: Cox, C. & Warner, D. eds. (2004) *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* New York: Continuum. p.36
- ¹³ Dyson, F. (2009) *Sounding New Media: Immersion and Embodiment in the Arts and Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- ¹⁴ Bachelard, G. (1971) *The Right To Dream* New York: Grossman/Viking. p168-170 Cited in: Dyson, F. (2009) *ibid* pp.49-50
- ¹⁵ I first encountered these works in 2007 at the Ikon Gallery, Birmingham.
- ¹⁶ Kubisch, C. (2006) Invisible Cities: An Interview with Christina Kubisch. *Cabinet Magazine* [Internet] no.21, Spring 2006. Available from: <<http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/21/cox.php>> [Accessed 22 January 2008]
- ¹⁷ *ibid*
- ¹⁸ Schafer, R Murray. (1973) op. cit. p.35
- ¹⁹ Of course, the other aspect of this piece is the *revealing* of hidden sounds. (i.e. the ‘making plain’ rather than the listening). Exposing secret currents in the city. On ‘stage’ this is done using telephone pick up coils, and the results become part of the language of live electronic music. In Kubisch’s walks, the listener is more like a dowser, but whose special knowledge remains oscillating between their ears.
- ²⁰ Schulz, B. (1934/1992) *The Street Of Crocodiles*. Translated from the Polish by Celina Wieniewska. London: Penguin. p.88
- ²¹ Janet Cardiff (1999) *The Missing Voice (Case Study B)*. UK, Whitechapel [CD] Some also available from: <http://www.cardiffmiller.com/artworks/walks/missing_voice.html> [Accessed 31 July 2014]
- ²² LaBelle, B. (2007) *Background Noise: Perspectives On Sound Art*, New York: Continuum. p.226
- ²³ Carlson, M. (2006) Looking, Listening, and Remembering: Ways to Walk New York after 9/11. *Theatre Journal* [Internet] October 2006 vol.58 (3) pp.395-416. Available from: <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25069868>> [Accessed 31 July 14]
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- ²⁵ *ibid*
- ²⁶ *ibid* p.138
- ²⁷ Birringer, J. (2008) *Performance, Technology & Science*. New York, PAJ Publications. p.xxii
In Nicklin, H. (2013) *ibid* p.50
- ²⁸ Nicklin, H. (2013) *ibid*
- ²⁹ Coyne, R. (2010) op. cit. p.xxiv

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- ³² Coyne, R. (2010) op. cit. p.89
- ³³ ibid pp.179-181
- ³⁴ ibid p.89
- ³⁵ Bertrand, S. (2008) From Domestic to Aesthetic: Art in Everyday Life. In: Blauer Hase eds. *Furniture Music*. Venice: Blauer Hase. p.31
- ³⁶ Coyne, R. (2010) op. cit. p.91
- ³⁷ For example, the compact disc versions of minimal techno recordings by Ricardo Villalobos, where tracks are mixed together into a gradually shifting whole, or the hour-plus improvisations by Australian trio The Necks, who gradually add notes to phrases and patterns, creating incremental changes that develop into a constantly evolving stream of music.
- ³⁸ Attali, J. (1974) *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. Translated from the French by the University of Minnesota. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. p.132
- ³⁹ ibid
- ⁴⁰ ibid p.101.
- ⁴¹ ibid [italics in original]
- ⁴² ibid p.45
- ⁴³ Bijsterveld, K. & Jacobs, A. (2009) op. cit. p.41
- ⁴⁴ Coyne, R. (2010) op. cit. pp.180-181
- ⁴⁵ ibid p.181
- ⁴⁶ Available from: <<http://www.raqsmediacollective.net>> [Accessed 26 July 2014]
- ⁴⁷ Raqs Media Collective interviewed by Blauer Hase and Andrea Morbio. In: Blauer Hase, eds. (2008) *Furniture Music*. Venice: Blauer Hase. p.46
- ⁴⁸ ibid p.47
- ⁴⁹ Katz, B. (2002) *Mastering Audio: The Art and the Science*. Burlington MA: Focal Press. p.43
- ⁵⁰ Goodman, S. (2012) *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press. p.xiii-xiv.
- ⁵¹ Sarah von Sonsbeeck (2009) *Letter to my neighbours*. [Internet]
Available from: <<http://www.sarahvansonsbeeck.com/letter.html>> [Accessed 21 July 2014]
- ⁵² See: Pole (2008) 1, 2, 3. Germany: ~scape. [3xCD] for excellent examples of crackles, pops and dub processes.
- ⁵³ Tetuzi Akiyama, Erik Carlsson, Toshimaru Nakamura, Henrik Olsson. (2009) *In Search of Wild Tulips*. Sweden: Bombax Bombax [CD].
- ⁵⁴ Using the term ‘pure sound’ here is slightly misleading – the wash of sound I receive from the loudspeaker is the result of feedback from Nakamura’s equipment, sound that is generated as a result of the output of his mixing desk being fed into the input of the same system. “Imagine that you are setting up a microphone, amplifier and speakers in an auditorium. You are worried about the squeal of sonic feedback. If the microphone picks up a loud enough noise, the amplified sound from the speakers will feed back into the microphone in an endless, ever louder loop. On the other hand, if the sound is small enough, it will just die away to nothing. To model this feedback with numbers, you might take a starting number, multiply it by itself, multiple the result by itself, and son on. You would discover that large numbers lead quickly to infinity: 10, 100, 10, 000....But small numbers lead to zero: 1/2, 1/4, 1/16...”
- Gleick, J. (1987) *Chaos*. London: Cardinal. pp.223-226
- Nakamura’s ‘no-input’ mixing desk, often routed through effects processors to harness this effect – produces ebbs and swells of sound. Sound that we hear, whether from a violin or electronically generated means, is described by mathematics as a sum of sine waves at various frequencies – the sine wave is held to be the ‘purest’ sound. The human ear, with its elastic membrane inside the cochlea, is also a factor: “If an incoming sound can be represented as a

sum of certain sine waves, then the corresponding points on the basilar membrane will vibrate, and that will be translated into a stimulus sent to the brain". Benson, D J. (2007) *Music: A Mathematical Offering*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.2

⁵⁵ Walking late at night, when bats were hunting, I could feel clicks, like little electrical jolts, at the point where my neck joins my skull. I have never been able to verify that this was directly caused by the bats wheeling above me, and more recently, I haven't felt it at all – whether due to my deteriorating hearing, changing environments, or misidentified it in the first place, I don't know.

⁵⁶ Placing speakers 'incorrectly' can cause patterns of interference – cancellation of sound waves that lead to 'dead spots' of sound, or sound waves reinforcing each other causing spikes of sound. This effect can be used creatively, for example playing two copies of the *WOW* record at the same time, Carsten Nicolai's *invertone* (2007):

"*invertone* is an experimental installation that is based on the phenomenon that results from the subtraction of inverted sound waves. In the installation room, which is coated with white sound absorbing acoustic foam, a white noise sound is emitted from the two speakers. All over the room the sound is evenly present except at the centre point right in the middle between the speakers. Here the waveforms face themselves directly and thereby (ideally) erase each other totally."

[Internet] Available from <<http://www.carstennicolai.de/?c=works&w=invertone>> [Accessed 7 April 2012]

"So if there's a perfect absorption, this kind of theoretical moment is not a space, it's a membrane. When you stand between the speakers you go from one side to the other, and it's like someone turns your head, or you are moving from one room into another room."

Nicolai, C. in Young, R. (2010) Unstable Molecule. *Wire* no.316, p.38

⁵⁷ Of course, moving your listening position – your head – provides more information on the location of sounds in space. The brain compares information between ears to help position sounds. In fact, this may be one reason why it is hard to physically locate Nakamura's tones. One of the ways the brain calculates the location of a sound by examining the different intensities of sound between left and right ears. This is called the Interaural Intensity Difference (or IID). Because high frequencies have shorter wavelengths than low frequencies, they may be blocked by the 'shadow' of the head, and their intensity on reaching the other ears is lessened, making it harder for the brain to determine the direction of origin.

To locate higher frequencies, the brain uses the difference in *time* between sounds arriving at the ears, but both these methods only present the brain with a range of possible locations – there are areas of spatial perception that neither method can pinpoint with 100% accuracy: this area is known as the cone of confusion.

Blake, R. & Sekular, R. (2006) *Perception*. 5th edition New York: McGraw-Hill. pp.412-415.

⁵⁸ Morley, P. (2003) *Words and Music*. London: Bloomsbury.

Though actually I still find *Words and Music* pretty thrilling. Any book that starts with quotes from Alvin Lucier AND Kylie Minogue is alright with me.

⁵⁹ LaBelle, B. (2010) op. cit. pp.141-161

⁶⁰ *ibid* p.155

⁶¹ For example the *Ambika P3* project – resonating a concrete bunker beneath Baker Street, London. Available from:

<<http://www.architecturefoundation.org.uk/programme/2012/sounding-space/sounding-space-emptyset>>

⁶² *Earthsaker* (2000) – the lowest, loudest sounds I have ever experienced.

⁶³ Goodman, S. (2012) op. cit. p.79

⁶⁴ *ibid*

⁶⁵ *ibid* p.9

⁶⁶ *ibid* p.184

⁶⁷ Phillipson, H. (2012) *NOT AN ESSAY*. London: Pinned In The Margins.

⁶⁸ *ibid* Intro [no page number].

⁶⁹ *ibid* p.53

⁷⁰ *ibid* p.45

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- ⁷¹ Marcus, B. (2012) *The Flame Alphabet*. London: Granta. p.157
- ⁷² Lisson Gallery. February – March 2011.
- ⁷³ Birkett, R. (2011) The Audio-Visual Contract. In: Mirza, H. *Movement 1*. London: Lisson Gallery. p.13
- ⁷⁴ *Underdone Overdone Paintings* (1998)
- ⁷⁵ Mirza, H. (2011) *ibid*. p.73
- ⁷⁶ Toop, D. (2013) Trap Set. In: Mirza, H. *|||||*. Bristol: Spike Island. p.35
- ⁷⁷ *ibid*
- ⁷⁸ Frick, J. & Johnson, S. “Tricks and Treats” on Coney Island. (1982) *The Drama Review* [Internet] vol. 26 (1) pp.132-136. Available from: <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1145449>> [Accessed 31 July 2014]
- ⁷⁹ Etchells, T. Royal Shakespeare Company (2012) *Be Stone No More | myShakespeare | Royal Shakespeare Company* [Internet] Available from: <<http://myshakespeare.rsc.org.uk/gallery/be-stone-no-more-a-tabletop-shakespeare-by-tim-etchells/>> [Accessed 20 December 2012]
- ⁸⁰ *ibid*
- ⁸¹ Schrimshaw, W. (2013) Non-cochlear sound: On affect and exteriority. In: Thompson, M. & Biddle, I. eds. (2013) *Sound Music Affect: Theorizing sonic experience*. London: Bloomsbury. p.41
- ⁸² Attali, J. (1974/1985) *op. cit.* p.133
- ⁸³ Sinclair, I. (1996) Customising Biography. *London Review of Books*. [Internet] vol.18 (4) p.16 Available from: <<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v18/n04/iain-sinclair/customising-biography>> [Accessed 4 October 2013]
- ⁸⁴ *ibid*
- ⁸⁵ As it was when this study was originally written – July 2012
- ⁸⁶ Benedict Drew (2009) *A Folding Table* [DL]
- ⁸⁷ Luke Abbott (2010) *Holkham Drones* UK: Border Community. [LP]
- ⁸⁸ Riviere, S. (2012) *Fives*. Unpublished commission
- ⁸⁹ In 1963, Bruce Lacey performed *Show Me The Way To Go Home* on the spokes of a bicycle during *An Evening Of British Rubbish* at the Comedy Theatre in London.
- ⁹⁰ Gray, P. (2004) D. David Tudor in the Late 1980s: Understanding a Secret Voice. *Leonardo Music Journal* [Internet] vol.14 pp.41-47 Available from: <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1513504>> [Accessed 29 July 2014]
- ⁹¹ Bowers, J. (2006) Towards a Creative Research Practice: Combining Empirical Studies, Reflective Practice and Musical Design. Creative Process Symposium, Music, Technology and Innovation Research Centre, De Montfort University, 18 October 2006. Quoted in: Richards, J. (2008) Getting the Hands Dirty. *Leonardo Music Journal*. [Internet] vol.18 pp.25-31 Available from: <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25578112>> [Accessed 29 July 2014]
- ⁹² Richards, J. (2008) *ibid*
- ⁹³ Hogg, B. (2009) *Sound Objects, Found Objects – Free Improvisation and Electroacoustics*. [Internet] Available from: <http://www.bennethogg.co.uk/?page_id=30> [Accessed 16 February 2012]
- ⁹⁴ Migone suggests Aaron Williamson’s term “the bodily” is might be more appropriate. “[I]t must be recognized that the danger inherent in any deployment of the term “the body” is one of hypostasis: which body, whose and in what ways can it, as a term, be thought constant through critical usage? Perhaps... we should speak of “the bodily”; a collection of parts that, being infinite as a composite and abstract category, allows a plural, ever-evolving register that expands rather than closes definition.”
- Williamson, A. (2003) The Body. In: Heathfield, A. ed. *Live Culture*. London: Tate Publishing. 2003, p.56 Cited in Migone, C. (2012) *op. cit.* p.237 n18.
- ⁹⁵ Martin Creed (2000) *Work No. 232 the whole world + the work = the whole world*
- ⁹⁶ Hall, E. T. (1990) *The Hidden Dimension*. New York: Anchor Books. pp.116-125. Reprint of 1966 edition. Cited in: Henriksen, F.E. (2002) *Space in Electroacoustic Music: Composition, Performance and Perception of Musical Space*. [Internet] PhD thesis, City University. p.113 Available from: <<http://uk.bl.ethos.270611>> [Accessed: 31 July 2014]
- ⁹⁷ Hall, E. T. (1990) *ibid*. pp.111-112. In: Henriksen, F.E. (2002) *ibid*

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- ⁹⁸ This is, of course, conjecture. A survey of electroacoustic composers who work with, for example, sound diffusion, and who also quote Hall's proxemics would be interesting.
- ⁹⁹ Waters, S. (2007) *Performance Ecosystems: Ecological Approaches to Musical Interaction*. [internet] EMS: Electroacoustic Music Studies Network – DeMontfort/Leicester. Available from: <<http://www.ems-network.org/spip.php?article278>> [Accessed 30 July 2014]
- ¹⁰⁰ Schaeffer, P (1966) *Traité Des Objets Musicaux*. Seuil, Paris. p.269. In: Chion, M. (1983/2009) *Guide Des Objets Sonores: Pierre Schaeffer et la recherche musicale. Guide To Sound Objects: Pierre Schaeffer and Musical Research*. Translated from the French by John Dack and Christine North. [Internet] p.16 Available from: <<http://www.ears.dmu.ac.uk/IMG/pdf/Chion-guide/GuidePreface.pdf>> [Accessed 28 September 2011]
- ¹⁰¹ Richards, J. (2008) op. cit.
- ¹⁰² Gritten, A. (2006). Drift. In: Gritten, A. & King, E. eds. (2006) *Music and Gesture*. Ashgate: London. p.104
- ¹⁰³ Rand, J. (1993) Differences. In: *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Summer, 1993). pp.58-71 Cited in: Gritten, A. (2006) *ibid* p.106.
- ¹⁰⁴ Gritten, A. (2006) *ibid* p.108
- ¹⁰⁵ *ibid* p.116
- ¹⁰⁶ Bachelard, G. (1958) *The Poetics of Space*. Translated from the French by Maia Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press. pp.219-220
- ¹⁰⁷ *ibid*
- ¹⁰⁸ *ibid* p.218
- ¹⁰⁹ Michaux, H. *L'espace aux ombres*. Quoted in: Bachelard, G. (1958) *ibid*. p.216.
- ¹¹⁰ Bachelard, G. (1958) *ibid* p.220
- ¹¹¹ *ibid* p.218

Chapter Three

The cart investigating the horse

Where I attempt to: describe how I have done what I've done / propose the beginnings of an unmethod through speculative misreading / explain reductio ad absurdum / talk about John Cage's mesostics and expand writing-through as a project wide strategy / summarise William S. Burroughs' cut ups and fold ins / write about how I wanted to avoid writing about John Cage / "When I am working, it is quite clear that I know nothing"

The theoretical, written part of this study has attempted two things; firstly, to unfix the discourse around listening and the sound object by drawing lines across different histories, by unmarking the territory¹ and by tipping its hat at the contradictions, mis-readings and paradoxes that arise through this approach. Secondly, to sketch an *unsound object*, built on small moments of space and an *unlistening* of sound and in a contradictory spirit to the first point, a proposal to collate these wanderings, alongside the conditions enabled by *intimate space*, into a collection of possible approaches to creative sound practice and performance; the beginnings of an unsound toolkit, an unsound method, that might be taken forwards to future projects, both theoretical and practical.

The works accompanying this study are the results of a practice undergoing a similar unfixing, and rather than illustrate specific points in the written argument, can perhaps be better seen as operating in parallel to some of the methodological approaches detailed below. The trajectory of the practical works (from sound performances and installations to specifically test ideas in the early research, towards less defined works drawing on disparate histories of concrete poetry, performance art and writing as practice,) suggests that this *unfixing* is an on-going project, one that along with the theoretical sketching of the *unsound object* will continue to unravel.

How have I done this?

The project comes into focus through a number of strategies; notional leaps and mis-readings, a 'writing through' of the material (both the theoretical sections and the practical works), and the beginnings of an *unmethod* that is proposed as a dialogue with the *unsound object*.

One approach is the application of a speculative, creative misreading of the territory. As an undisciplined research method, taking phrases like sound object, dematerialisation, small space, musical gesture, yearning at *face value*, then writing through the consequences, has produced both connections and unfixings that would not have emerged had these areas been rigorously defined at the outset. This approach operates at some wavering point between throwing every waking thought, incisive *and* banal, at the problem and seeing what sticks, and drawing on the *reductio ad absurdum* method from mathematics. This aims to prove that statement "T" is true by assuming

the opposite, ‘not T’ is true. A statement and its negation deduced by this method can then be measured against the *axioms* of the system. John Losee: “If two contradictory statements can be deduced in this way, and if the axioms of the system are true, then ‘T’ must be true as well.”² Of course, this is far from a perfect analogy – what are the *axioms* of this (or indeed any) research? *Let sounds be themselves* might be a starting point, but as we have seen, this is not always easy. So what is the appropriateness of using such a misreading?

The misreading, misdirection, uncertainties in *method* that exist in the study are there to unfix the rules of the enquiry. I’m always happier working with hunches, leaps and guesses than with existing definitions, and misreading and leapfrogging a number of specifics is the study’s way of allowing the territory to emerge through writing, through practical works, through happy accident (the way the study approaches context for these arguments, where links and works are suggested by the enquiry rather than as a pre-known territory, reflects this).

Two examples. At the start of his thoughtful book *Understanding the Art of Sound Organization*,³ Leigh Landy presents an overview of ‘the classification debate’. Here he discusses the merits or otherwise of including a hyphen in the term electroacoustic, whether sound art is a subset of sonic art or the various possibilities of the term *electronica* (thankfully for all concerned, a definition of *folktronica* is not attempted). The classification debate is approached in Landy’s work specifically as part of an attempt to increase access to sound-based music, and broaden its appreciation, and the book itself is a fine chorus of voices unpicking the finer points of acousmatic music.

And yet, it is an approach that I find unhelpful for this project, and more often than not I have deliberately slipped past classifications/definitions at first, to approach the subject from unexpected angles provided by working through the misreading. For example, the *unsound object* itself stems from a *what if* moment: “*What if Migone’s unsound could be extended to a version of Schaeffer’s sound object?*” – a question that arose at first solely because of the face value in the pairing of the words *unsound* and *sound*. I followed this question in Chapter One towards the sketching of the *unsound object* that this project proposes, but it was only at that point that I felt able to take back bearings on, for example, Steve Goodman’s concept of *unsound*. In this method, the idea of the cart investigating the horse is perfectly acceptable, leading as it does to new unfixed narratives.

A second example; there is always the risk that by excessively fixing terms and codifying the frame of the debate, the radical potential of the ideas themselves is undermined. Salomé Voegelin shows how by fixing sound objects to the page with new visual codes and symbols (in *Traité des Objets Musicaux*),⁴ Schaeffer “brings the bracketed sound back into a structural context,”⁵ that of text, of language, on the

page. By attempting to create a new notation for sound objects summoned by reduced listening, new *visual* references become attached to listening. Furthermore, fixing the term *experimental* (even within the cloud of vectors drawn from Cage and Nyman proposed in the introduction to this project) risks stripping it of what writer eldritch Priest calls “its status as an existential appliance.”⁶ Priest, quoting Susan Stewart, shows how it can become a mere catch-all category to “store any mysterious gaps in our system of order.”⁷

A speculative method will always begin by saying *what if* rather than *this is*. This method will no doubt often end up with more questions than answers; but by misreading, by making associative jumps (some based on similar sounding words alone), by embracing the possibility of failure (both failure in a practical, day-to-day sense, and in the way Priest approaches it as a “sidestepping of assertion”⁸), I have arrived at an *unsound object* that is still reluctant to be pinned down.

These speculative misreadings are part of a wider approach to method that includes a *deferral of resolution* to produce new texts – either in the written theory or the practice. A desire to unpick, to open up, is a common thread of the written component; a detailed analysis of developing ideas that still allows for jumps across borders (for example the jump that starts to use William Gibson to make connections beyond Richard Coyne’s twelve categories of tuning when discussing place and space in Chapter Two).

Writing through.

Much of how this method approaches *unpicking* takes the form of ‘writing through’ the practice and surrounding texts. On the one hand, ‘writing through’ explicitly references John Cage’s practice of *writing through* which results in the mesostics of his later writing.⁹ On the other, I’ve come to adopt a form of ‘writing through’ as a wider technique to open up existing sections of text and practice. One of the outcomes of this method is new practical work: new performances, new text pieces; an alternative view of this method might simply be described as ‘writing-as-practice’ – texts are produced instead of, or alongside, live performances. This idea of ‘writing through’ comes from a deliberate desire to make work – and by work here I mean writing, performing, listening, reporting – that is open ended and unfixed.

The written, theoretical text produced by this method is still often *uncertain* knowledge, sliding around like the prose-remixes of Jeff Noon (see later in this chapter). As such it feeds happily into my practical works, but the connections it makes lead the written project to low-riders in LA, ‘table-core’ gestures in improvised music, Walter Murch and even to a book on Nordic ‘Larp’ (which admittedly did not make it into the final draft). These results, of a research method that ‘writes through’

ideas, form a constellation of jumping-off points that allow multiple approaches to the *unsound object*.

My decision to ‘write through’, to attempt to open up through writing, making, failing, listening, stems from three sources. Firstly; Jacques Attali, describing music as “an instrument of understanding,”¹⁰ writes of his intention not only to write “*about* music, but to theorize *through* music.”¹¹ In the case of these latter chapters, theorizing through direct reporting of the practical work, through the pulling apart of experiences and of texts. Secondly, the ethnographically informed “participant-observational study” of John Bowers in his thesis *Improvising Machines: Ethnographically Informed Design For Improvised Electro-Acoustic Music*.¹² The thesis places Bowers’ experience of performing improvised electro-acoustic music at the centre of the argument, in order to “exhibit the everyday embodied means by which flesh and blood performers engage with their machines in the production of music.”¹³ Thirdly, the gradual accrual of meaning through repetition and collage present in the writing of Daniela Cascella; the kaleidoscopic voices of *En Abîme* best reflect a sound discourse that is unfixed and non-territorial.¹⁴

The unsound comes as much from literature and the ‘visual arts’ as it does from loudspeakers – Samuel Becket’s “skull buzzing,”¹⁵ the silences that David Toop identifies in his reading of paintings by Nicolaes Maes in *Sinister Resonance*,¹⁶ the silence of the black page in *Tristram Shandy*, the language borne disease in Ben Marcus’ *The Flame Alphabet*. The unsound reaches from the page towards the *intimate space* as much as it does from the tape player sealed in concrete. Writing through, as this project encounters it, is my undisciplined attempt to find new tools.¹⁷

Why focus on Cage’s mesostics in particular? It is perhaps not enough to say merely that I find them beautiful, hilarious, thoughtful, or that they form a useful starting point to talk about pulling texts apart (though these things are true). Encountered on the page, Cage’s mesostics at first resist meaning – they jar vision with the seemingly unruly mass of capitalization, they sprawl at broken angles, sometimes ungainly right-justified, often winging this way or that way either side of a vertical descent of capitals, following the rule “A given letter capitalized does not occur between it and the preceding capitalized letter.”¹⁸

For example these final lines from *Writing through the Cantos* (1983):

tEn light blaZed behind ciRce with leopArd’s by mount’s edge
over broom-Plant yaO whUder ich maei lidhaN flowers are blessed
aquilEia auZel said that biRd meAning
Planes liOns jUmPs scorpioNs give light waDsworth in
town housE in¹⁹

Here Cage’s method of *writing through* texts, in this case the *Cantos* of Ezra Pound,

produces a new text, by means of what Dworkin and Goldsmith describe as a “radical reduction.”²⁰ New texts are created that resist casual assignation of meaning; at least until they are read aloud, until they are performed.

Marjorie Perloff, tracing the evolution of the Cagean mesostic from early attempts in the 1970s in the form of notes and letters to friends, through the writing through of Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake* and Pound’s *Cantos*, to the ‘autoku’ pieces like *What You Say...* (1986), highlights the importance of Cage’s antipathy towards syntax in his journey to make the mesostics *musical*, and identifies the moment that they *become* predominantly musical as when they are “actualized in performance.”²¹

Perloff’s reading of the spaces in the text as correlating to the ‘silence’, or pauses, in a musical performance is detailed and thorough, hinting at the ‘verbal space’ of the essay’s title, though she is keen to draw out the differences between Cage’s mesostics, and the concrete poetry of, for example, the Brazilian Noigandres group.²² This group also used the *Cantos* as inspiration, but allowed the visual image to dominate²³ and viewed the concrete poem as “an object in and by itself not an interpreter of exterior objects and/or more or less subjective feelings.”²⁴ That is, perhaps, a reduced object.

Unmethod, cut-ups, parasites.

I am going to focus in this section, on the status of writing through as *method*, or *unmethod*. As Cage states, “All I know about method, is that when I am not working I sometimes think I know something, but when I am working, it is quite clear that I know nothing.”²⁵

Opening Ming-Qian Ma’s chapter on Cage’s mesostics,²⁶ this quote has echoes of Christof Migone’s highlighting of Cage’s “I have nothing to say and I am saying it”. Drawing attention to this simultaneously nothing/something nature running through Cage’s method (or *unmethod*), Migone draws on J.L. Austen’s conception of the *noisy* sentence²⁷ (this seems particularly appropriate with Cage, and parallels can be drawn with how Jacques Attali frames noise as interruption of codes and power structures²⁸). Drawing on these connections, Craig Dworkin and Kenneth Goldsmith describe Cage’s method (or *unmethod*) as “parasitic.”²⁹ An image of a co-dependence, symbiosis, that serves best as an extended metaphor – both a way in to the syntactic disruptions of Cage’s mesostics, but also as a way to draw wider methodological (or *unmethodological*) connections.

For example, the cut-up and fold-in methods of William S. Burroughs and Byron Gysin (where in the fold-in technique, a page is folded across the adjacent one, and the resulting juxtaposition read out, performed, forming new sentences), produce new texts where “when you cut into the present, the future leaks out.”³⁰ These methods had allegedly prophetic outcomes, a capacity to anticipate future events. While a “leak” conjures imagery that is perhaps more aligned with disease and rupture than

the parasitic, the tactic itself remains part of a wider continuum of writing through texts as practical activity. Creating method by deferring method. Or, creating meaning by deferring meaning.

I'm proposing that 'writing through' (as a technique), would also be an apt description of Burroughs' tape experiments; designed as they were to disrupt, to agitate, to provoke, to describe a new objective reality.³¹ Burroughs' tape cut-ups, both imaginary and actual, proposed to splice recordings from (for example) stutters and stammers, sex tapes and disapproving voices – as a “deadly assassination technique,”³² as a way to spread rumours, to unsettle, to cause riots by playing recordings of civil unrest. A technique that draws on the world 'as is' to re-shape *place*. For Burroughs, playing these spliced recordings back *on location* was as key to their success as disruptive actions, as well as acting as agents of time displacement; “I have frequently observed this operation: make recordings and take pictures of some location you wish to discommode or destroy, now play recordings back and take more pictures, will result in accidents, fires, removals.”³³

Returning to the 'parasitic' method, we can draw immediate parallels with Burroughs' 'word virus' – for Burroughs, the written word, the text, is a *virus* that “makes the spoken word possible”³⁴ – that creates the conditions for performance, for the performative sentences of language, of transformative *potential*. The word virus *is* potential – potential for violence, action, for sound. The gap that makes possible. The word virus dissolves verbs, logic operators, Either/Or; “The whole concept of OR will be deleted from the language and replaced by juxtaposition, by AND”. Not Either/Or (“It is always you OR the virus”)³⁵ but *both*.

Christopher Land identifies Burroughs' cut-ups as the break between internal monologue and exterior stimulus – by “giving space for change and reorganization through forms immanent within the material composition of language” – the cut-up allows for “undecidability, a momentary stutter.”³⁶ A disruption. For Migone, the stutter is a “staccato rhythm which radically interferes” with flow of normal speech – “an active and generative agent” that disrupts the relationships between isolated individuals and communities.³⁷ For Roland Barthes, the *stammer* is “annulation-by-addition”³⁸ – is trying to unsay what has been said by attempting to nullify it – “no...I didn't...what I actually...you know...”. “Neither *in* language or *outside* it.”³⁹ (or rather than neither; *both?*).

I'm proposing that Burroughs' cut-ups and fold-ins, tape tactics and ideas of a *word virus* are all radical destabilising tools to create potential. This potential creates the opportunity for writing through to be *performed*.

The punch-line to my favourite shaggy dog story goes “Don't be daft, dogs don't smoke.” The punch-line to one of my favourite Stewart Lee routines is where his mum says “Have you been sick?”⁴⁰ For Burroughs, a 'routine' is also just that – an extended skit that works through ideas in a fragmented, semi-improvised fashion:

“Routines are completely spontaneous and proceed from whatever fragmentary knowledge you have. In fact a routine is by nature fragmentary, inaccurate.”⁴¹

In his introduction to the 1985 edition of *Queer*, Burroughs describes the character William Lee’s routines as “a frantic attention-getting format”⁴² – neatly characterised by Oliver Harris as aesthetic performances that are intended to “make things happen.”⁴³ Highlighting the interplay between the written routine, the spoken routine, and the *read* routine (that is, the routine as experienced by us the reader), Harris points that we “might better hear it as writing,” and the routine *on the page* becomes “a technology of voice to disarm, seduce, and fascinate – the reader.”⁴⁴ Or the listener, the audience, he might have added; the routine begins from a point of *inaccuracy*, or *unauthority*. This is paradoxically where the strength of the routine lies; as a method of creating *potential*.

Locating this potential within the idea of “writing through” begins to build an array of techniques that can be brought to bear on performance writing, or performative lectures, fragments of practical work. And while Christopher Land uses a basic version of the cut-up technique on a selection of academic writing at the end of his paper *Apomorphine Silence*,⁴⁵ we must remember Burroughs himself on his own routines:

“You don't study Zen and then write a scholarly routine for Chrissakes! [...] There is no such thing as an exhaustive routine, nor does the scholarly-type mind run to routines.”⁴⁶

That is – they are tools for the field, for opening new gaps, new objective realities in the power structures of language; not for academics (even “undisciplined ones”⁴⁷). Alas, we must try to rope some of this together. I’ve alluded that these methods – *writing through* and within this, Burroughs’ cut-ups and tape tactics – might be part of an *unmethod*. What might this entail in relation to this project, the *unsound object*? The *unsound object* is one way of describing a collection of actions, or a collection of *possible* actions and behaviours, or a cloud of possible actions, behaviours and contradictions. The *unsound object* that exists both as an unreliable sound object at the moment of listening *and* as an imagined sound on the page might need a collection of different techniques to interrogate it – an *unmethod* – that this whole project could be a first draft of.

Perhaps it is as simple as accepting the fugitive nature of sound as its most interesting characteristic – the difficulty, the near-impossibility of fixing the discourse – and what Migone, quoting Peggy Phelan, describes as a “mapless topography, an expansive territory.”⁴⁸ As simple as accepting music outside of sound, *as well as* the *unsound* running through both.

For Migone, the strands of his investigation – the *unsound*, *taciturnablism*, *stutterance* – exist between “the implicit loss of essence in the coming to form, but also for the

fetishization of the formless in being subjected to this loss.”⁴⁹ That is, his method is aware of its own fallibility; its own complicity in attempting to fix the unfixable whilst simultaneously celebrating that unfixable-ness.

This is what I am proposing as an *unmethod*. Rather than a collection of techniques (contradictory or not), it might best operate as an impurity, or a *measurement* of impurity; “this methodological approach contains 10.4% unmethod per chapter.” Not as a negation of existing strategies, or as a means of patching cracks in approach to the research, but as an unsettling of those strategies; a way to allow for bleed, for overlap, for waves *and* particles.

Unreading Cage.

It is fairly hard to write an argument on sound, music, noise, *listening*, without talking about John Cage, even if one only talks about him from a historical (rather than theoretical) standpoint. Even Migone’s *Sonic Somatic*, an attempt to pluralise a history of sound art, begins (as does my first Chapter) with Cage’s experience in the anechoic chamber. Migone is of course canny enough to realise this, and his framing of ‘Cage as cage’ reflects this. Identifying *I have nothing to say and I am saying it* as Cage as both “caged and cager with respect to his own thinking-speaking circuitry,”⁵⁰ Migone uses this condition to show the tension between in-itselfness and an insistence on talking and transmitting; this is the state that the third voice, Cage’s interrogation of his own experience, leads us out of. This exchange, also the start point for an *unsound object* that oscillates between positions, both inside and outside, is why Cage, filtered through Migone and Douglas Kahn, is still important and appropriate to this project.

Cage’s mesostics (see earlier in this Chapter) are important to this project’s framing of *writing through*, offering both an approach to writing and practice that informs my methodology as well as offering a parallel to the concrete poetry of Dom Sylvester Houédard (see *seventeen paragraphs on frog pond plop* in Chapter Four).⁵¹ Though in an example of misreading (see earlier in this Chapter), I was already using *writing through* as a phrase to describe the list-making and speculative writing I was producing in the middle period of research. An example perhaps of ‘anticipatory plagiarism’, as described by ‘pataphysics, or simply another misuse of terminology that joins up eventually.

Furthermore, whilst describing this technique as ‘writing through’, Cage also proposes “making” as a more inclusive term for this activity⁵² - one that would include breathing, listening, use of a computer, in the activity: “so one would ‘make’ a text partly by writing, partly by breathing, and partly by listening, don’t you think?”⁵³ This inclusiveness also suggests the question – is there writing outside of writing? An unwriting? How might this square (to take another leap, appropriate in this case at least in part because of Cage’s *Song Books*, which drew on texts by, amongst others,

Henry David Thoreau) with Henry Golemba's 'Unreading' of Thoreau's *Walden*?⁵⁴ In this essay, Golemba points to the openness in Thoreau's writing that allows for readers, in a process of "looking through words" to approach "a perpetual process of interpretation and translation of possible meaning."⁵⁵ Unreading, un-saying. Using the prefix 'un' throughout this project tilts at a number of possible definitions, but might Golemba's summarising of language (via Horace Bushnell) be a start point to framing the 'un' within this project? "Only through paradox can language approach an absolute truth."⁵⁶ While it should be clear that the scope of this project is not to search for the *absolute*, the idea of *some* sort of meaning arising through the embrace of paradox is attractive.

Is it acceptable to 'cherry-pick' (as I have done) from Cage, if Cage and his works are not the specific focus of the project? Cage himself admits to 'dipping' into books – Wittgenstein, James Gleick's book *Chaos*; describing this activity as "brushing the source text" – itself a borrowing from Marshall McLuhan.⁵⁷

"When I am working, it is quite clear that I know nothing."⁵⁸ Process reveals less and less fixed material, and more and more questions. Following the process "blindly"⁵⁹, as Sol LeWitt suggests, will produce more ideas and questions of course, but these might be expected to multiply exponentially if we abandon the fixed goal, the idea that what will be produced at the end of the process is necessarily *art*. Attali identifies the alienation born of usage: "the moment labor has a goal, an aim... [then] the producer becomes a stranger to what he produces,"⁶⁰ but some spirit of his idea of composition as goal-less play could nevertheless fruitfully be brought to bear on 'experimental' processes.

- ¹ Migone, C. (2012) *Sonic Somatic: Performances of the Unsound Body*. Berlin: Errant Bodies Press. p.3
- ² Losee, J. (1972) *A Historical Introduction to the Philosophy of Science*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.24
- ³ Landy, L. (2007) *Understanding the Art of Sound Organization* Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- ⁴ For example >< to represent a 'hollow' sound.
- ⁵ Voegelin, S. (2011) *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art*. New York: Continuum. p.35
- ⁶ Priest, e. (2013) *Boring Formless Nonsense: Experimental Music and the Aesthetics of Failure*. New York: Bloomsbury. p.17
- ⁷ Stewart, S. (1979) *Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press. p.49 In: Priest, e. (2013) *ibid* p.17
- ⁸ Priest, e. (2013) *op. cit.* p.3
- ⁹ Cage, J. (1993) *Composition in Retrospect*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Exact Change.
- ¹⁰ Attali, J. (1974/1985) *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* Translated from the French by the University of Minnesota. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. p.4
- ¹¹ *ibid* p.4
- ¹² Bowers, J. (2002) *Improvising Machines: Ethnographically Informed Design For Improvised Electro-Acoustic Music*. [Internet] PhD thesis, School of Music, University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK. Centre for User-Oriented IT-Design, Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Sweden. Available from: <<http://cid.nada.kth.se/pdf/CID-195.pdf>> [Accessed 6 January 2007]
- ¹³ *ibid* p.44
- ¹⁴ Cascella, D. (2012) *En Abîme: Listening, Reading, Writing*. Alresford: Zero Books.
- ¹⁵ Migone, C. (2012) *op. cit.* p.14
- "...what?..the buzzing?..yes..all the time the buzzing...so-called...in the ears...though of course actually...not in the ears at all...in the skull...dull roar in the skull." Beckett, S. (1984) *Not I* In: *The Collected Shorter Plays*, New York: Grove Press. p.218
- ¹⁶ Toop, D. (2010) *Sinister Resonance: The Mediumship of the Listener* New York: Continuum.
- ¹⁷ Attali, J. (1974/1985) *op. cit.* p.133 For Attali, the only good researchers are the "undisciplined ones. The ones who refuse to answer new questions using only pre-given tools".
- ¹⁸ Cage, J. (1973) *M: Writings '67-'72*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press. p.1
- ¹⁹ Cage, J. (1983) *X: Writings '79-'82*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press. pp.109-116
- Cited in: Dworkin, C. & Goldsmith, K. eds. (2011) *Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. p.135
- ²⁰ *ibid* p.129
- ²¹ Perloff, M. (1997). The Music of Verbal Space. John Cage's "What You Say...". In: Morris, A. ed. *Sound States: Innovative Poetics and Acoustical Technologies*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. p.133
- ²² Who translated and distributed Cage's written work. Perloff, M. (1997) p.132
- "Renouncing the struggle for 'absolute', Concrete Poetry remains in the magnetic field of perennial relativity. Chronomicro-metering of hazard. Control. Cybernetics. The poem as a mechanism regulating itself: feed-back. Faster communication (problems of functionality and structure implied) endows the poem with a positive value and guides its own making. Concrete Poetry: total responsibility before language. Thorough realism. Against a poetry of expression, subjective and hedonistic. To create precise problems and to solve them in terms of sensible language. A general art of the word. The poem-product: useful object"
- Campos, H. & A. Pignattari, D. (1958) *Plano Piloto Para Poesia Concreta*.
- Cited in: Gattass, L. (2014) Digital Humanities in Praxis: Contextualizing the Brazilian Electronic Literature Collection. *Berfrois*. [internet] Available from: <<http://www.berfrois.com/2014/06/did-concrete-poetry-cause-brazilian-electronic-poetry/>> [Accessed 20 June 2014]
- ²³ Perloff, M. (1997) *op. cit.* p.132
- ²⁴ de Campos, A., de Campos, H. & Pignattari, D. (2007) *Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry*. In: de Campos, H. (2007) *Novas: Selected Writings*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. p.218

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- ²⁵ Cage, J. (1961) op. cit. p.126
- ²⁶ Ma, Ming-Qian. (2008) *Poetry as Re-Reading: American Avant-Garde Poetry and the Poetics of Counter-Method*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. p.112
- ²⁷ Migone, C. (2012) op. cit. p.8
- ²⁸ Attali, J. (1974/1985) op. cit. p.33
- ²⁹ Dworkin, C & Goldsmith, K. eds. (2011) op. cit. p.129
- ³⁰ Burroughs, W. S. (1986) 'Origin and Theory of the Tape Cut-Ups' from *Break Through In The Grey Room*. Germany, Sub Rosa [CD/LP]. [from lecture given at Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa Institute, April 20, 1976]
- ³¹ Burroughs, W. S. (1970) *The Electronic Revolution*. [Internet] West Germany: Expanded Media Editions. p.7 Available from:
<http://www.ubu.com/historical/burroughs/electronic_revolution.pdf>
[Accessed 14 July 2014]
- ³² ibid p.8
- ³³ ibid p.10
- ³⁴ ibid p.5
- ³⁵ ibid p.34
- ³⁶ Land, C. (2005). Apomorphine Silence: Cutting Up Burroughs' Theory of Language and Control. *Ephemera: Theory & Politics in Organization* [Internet] vol.5 (3) p.462
Available from: <<http://www.ephemerajournal.org/sites/default/files/5-3land.pdf>>
[Accessed 14 July 2014]
- ³⁷ Migone, C. (2012) op. cit. p.119
- ³⁸ Barthes, R. (1989) *The Rustle Of Language*. Translated from the French by Richard Howard. Berkeley: University of California Press. p.76
- ³⁹ ibid
- ⁴⁰ Lee, S. (2010) *How I Escaped My Certain Fate: The Life and Deaths of a Stand-Up Comedian*. London: Faber. p.219
- ⁴¹ Letter to Allen Ginsberg, Tangiers, 13 December 1954 from: Burroughs, W S. & Ginsberg, A. (1982) *Letters to Allen Ginsberg 1953 – 1957*. New York: Full Court Press. p.78
- ⁴² Burroughs, W. S. (1985) *Queer*. New York: Viking. p.xv. Cited in:
Harris, O. (1999) Can You See A Virus? The Queer Cold War of William Burroughs. *Journal of American Studies*. [Internet] vol.33 (2) pp.243-266. Available from:
<<http://www.keele.ac.uk/media/keeleuniversity/fachumsocsci/sclhumss/americanstudies/staffprofiledocuments/oliverharris/jasarticle.pdf>> [Accessed 14 July 2014]
- ⁴³ ibid p.253
- ⁴⁴ ibid p.265
- ⁴⁵ Land, C. (2005) op. cit.
- ⁴⁶ Burroughs, W. S. (1982) op. cit. p.78
- ⁴⁷ Attali, J. (1974/1985) op. cit. p.133
- ⁴⁸ Migone, C. (2012) op. cit. p.237
- ⁴⁹ ibid p.235
- ⁵⁰ ibid p.8
- ⁵¹ "During 1945 I realised the typewriter's control of verticals and horizontals, balancing its mechanism for release from its own imposed grid, (and) offered possibilities that suggested (I was in India at the time) the grading of Islamic calligraphy from cursive (naskhi) writing through cufic to the abstract formal arabesque, that 'wise modulation between being and not being'." DSH (1979) *Cratylus: The English Artist and The Word*. [Internet] London: The British Council. Available from: <<http://collection.britishcouncil.org/collection/artist/5/17691>>
[Accessed 26 November 2012]
- ⁵² Cage, J. (1996) Words. In: Retallack, J (in conversation with John Cage). *Musicage: Cage Muses On Words: Art Music*. Hanover: University Press of New England/Wesleyan University Press. p.68
- ⁵³ ibid
- ⁵⁴ Golemba, H. (1988) Unreading Thoreau. *American Literature*. [Internet] vol.60 (3) pp.385-410
Available from: <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2926956>> [Accessed 29 August 2014]

⁵⁵ *ibid* p.398

⁵⁶ *ibid* p.392

⁵⁷ Cage, J. (1996) In: Retallack, J. *op. cit.* p.51

⁵⁸ Cage, J. (1961) *op. cit.* p.126

⁵⁹ The 28th of Sol LeWitt's *Sentences on Conceptual Art.*

In: Lippard, L. (1973) *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object.* Berkeley: University of California Press. p.76

⁶⁰ Attali, J. (1974/1985) *op. cit.* p.134

Chapter Four

Writing about practice.

This chapter is a collection of writing around the practical works accompanying the main body of text. These works, collected in the Portfolio following this chapter, were created during the period of the research project, and overlap the text with varying degrees of success, relevance, patience. There are three ‘major’ pieces – *5 actions / 5 texts / 5 songs, frog pond plop overture and phonata in three movements*: a realisation of a score by Dom Sylvester Houédard (or DSH) and *A Young Person’s Guide To Musique Concrète*. In addition, there are two ‘minor’ pieces – *Research Environment* and *Phones in the first hundred pages of Zero History*. These could be seen as half practical work, half methodological experiment.

The approach to the major pieces reflects the project’s strategy of *writing-through*. Each piece, existing first as a documented event, is initially written-through as a matter-of-fact, researcher-at-the-centre-of-the-investigation. The second pass at each project draws further links with the written project and a wider critical context. Finally, each piece is presented as a ‘new version’ – a photograph of objects with a text score; this is examined in detail in the *Introduction to Portfolio* section that ends this chapter.

Success, relevance, patience. Sometimes these threads line up, and sometimes they don’t. I can draw connections between these processes, and this chapter will attempt to articulate those threads; but the only way to measure how successful these are seems to be if the words remain on the page; subjectivity prevails.

5 actions / 5 texts / 5 songs

Part 1

5 actions / 5 texts / 5 songs.
Eastern Pavilions, Testbed1
Battersea
21 October 2011

5 actions / 5 texts / 5 songs

For any number of performers and objects

Action #1

On. Off.

Action #2

Breathe in.

Breath out.

Action #3

Take a photograph.

Action #4

Record. Play back.

Action #5

Sing.

“Good evening. The title of this piece is 5 actions / 5 texts / 5 songs. There are two parts, there’s a musical interlude, there’s a review of *Speculative Solution* by Florian Hecker and there’s also text drawn from Sam Riviere’s *81 Austerities* poetry series. And with that in mind, could I have two numbers between one and eighty-one? Eight, and seventeen. Okay.”

A little context. This piece was the result of being asked to perform ‘something’ at a night of performance and sound organized by Eastern Pavilions – a project representing twelve visual arts organizations in the Eastern region - to be held at a warehouse space in Battersea.¹ I had been working towards the idea of making ‘modular’ performances; adding or subtracting ‘modules’ of performance, music, or actions to make larger or smaller pieces; and this offer seemed like a good opportunity to try out some of these modules.

The concept of modules that I was using at this came directly from my readings of

James Saunders' #[unassigned] (2000-9) series of compositions, and his subsequent *divisions that could be autonomous but that comprise the whole* (2009 onwards). Of #[unassigned], where 'pages' of notated actions may be played by different groupings of instruments alongside other pages, Saunders has said:

“There is no definitive score or version of the piece as all display different possibilities within the boundaries of the project. I am essentially writing one piece which is always different. The #[unassigned] project aims to explore how a change of context or synchronization affects the way we perceive events, and how we derive meaning from this.”²

The other historical source for recombining modules I was drawing on at this time comes from the Scratch Orchestra. Convened by composer Cornelius Cardew in 1969, as a musical collective they drew on a multitude of composition techniques and methods for creating programmes of works. One method was to build up a list of “particles” - extracts from “Popular Classics” that might consist of “a page of score, a page or more of the part for one instrument or voice, a page of an arrangement, a thematic analysis, a gramophone record, etc.”³

5 actions / 5 texts / 5 songs was made additively – I worked on individual actions/modules, gradually building up a library or pool, to allow for the production of many different versions of the piece. As it was, for this performance date, I didn't have enough time to produce enough actions that would allow this – in fact, I had just enough activity to last the fifteen minutes I had suggested as running time to the organizers.

However, I was able to introduce texts from outside the modules, and instigate a (pseudo-)random process for selecting them. Using eighty-one 'self-criticisms' from poet Sam Riviere's *81 Austerities*⁴ series of poems as potential raw material, I had a pool of text that I could ask the audience to select by choosing two numbers between one and eighty-one. Again, the idea being that each performance would eventually draw from a completely different text each time it was presented.

Throughout the text that follows, I will signpost the various actions and sections of the work by placing the titles of these actions and sections in *italics* – this should serve to break up the text, and give a sense of the structure as it unfolded.

“*Okay*”

I haven't planned a spoken introduction – to me they always seem a bit too much like the artist is announcing “ok, important stuff happening now”. This is not important stuff. But there are people watching, people not watching, people talking, fetching beers, and I do need to get some numbers from someone. And I do need it to be clear that I have asked for them. So. Begin.

Action one: On. Off.

Clicking a megaphone on. Then off again. Do not speak into the megaphone. This is purposefully a quiet sound, but it already feels like its getting lost in the warehouse space, which is much larger than I had anticipated. I try to turn up the volume on the megaphone (does this work if you don't speak?). After a few clicks, I notice that rather than being drowned out by crowd noise, the tiny sound starts to make people hush – I can sense ears straining a little harder – mine certainly are.⁵ This, I think to myself, might work after all.

Action two: breathe in. Breathe out.

I reach for my harmonica. Take a few seconds to draw breath, and breathe out, slowly. A single protracted breath into a harmonica doesn't produce one note, it summons whole wavering chords, that ebb in time with pushing the air out of my lungs. Changing your mouth shape acts as a filter for these notes – if you were able to breath circularly, you could emphasise certain frequencies, shift the pace of the cycles you produce – this direct, bodily control over the sound is one of the reasons I've chosen this instrument, one I cannot under 'normal' circumstances play – but I'm hoping that these brief fluctuations in tone that I can affect (though I cannot even approach circular breathing), are first of all, audible 'out there', and that people recognise that these variations are coming from my mouth position.

The connection between what my body is doing, by now straining slightly to expel the last of the air in my lungs, and the wavering tones I'm producing is one of the ways in which the small sound world I am trying to create with this piece, is *intimate*. I breath in – the chord changes, I can keep it fairly steady if I want, but extra pressure from my lungs starts to produce blue notes, the tones produced under and around the main note that 'harp' players in country and blues bands use to get to those extra pentatonic parts.

After a few more repetitions of this action, I put the harmonica down, and pick up my Polaroid camera. Opening the shutter, I hold it close to my ear, checking I can hear the gentle fizz of the flash warming up.

Action three: take a picture.

Snap. Flash. Whirr. I've framed the audience in the picture and taken a Polaroid of them. Of course, I'm using fairly unstable Impossible Project film stock, so the resulting rectangle of rapidly changing blue produced by the camera has to go straight underneath my arm. After drawing attention inwards, to the closeness of the harmonica, this little jolt throws attention, certainly mine, back to the spectator, the fact of the audience.

Action four, part one.

I reach down, and press record on the Dictaphone. A small unassuming action. I'm not even sure this gesture is registered as important.

First song.

One line, repeated three times – first simply out loud, then through a large cardboard tube, then finally through the megaphone: “*Number 8. The titles remain enigmatic.*” Each repeat of the line from Sam’s text sounds different, has a different character and volume. Each line travels an unknown distance, marks a certain limit to the influence of the sound. Spoken through the long cardboard tube seems to focus and project the sound more than simply speaking it – the sound of my voice travelling through the tube develops an extra reverberation that colours the sound, changes it. Spoken through the megaphone, though just as apparently directional, seems to locate the sound’s point of origin more at me, as a result of my activity. The sound is distorted, amplified yet reduced in clarity – the use of a megaphone as voice transformer rather than as voice thrower. Of course, this is all from the perspective of my ears – I know that what I’m hearing is unlikely to be quite the same as what the audience hears – years of performing tell me that using sound, and especially any form of electronics, however primitive, removes layers of control over the experience (both of the audience and performer).

I like repeating this sentence, however. I like how the sound changes but the language stays the same. I like how repeating this text in my own voice, live, in front of an audience will change every time I perform it.

Musical interlude.

“Now a musical interlude.” I announce. I think I tend to self-narrate when I’m nervous in front of an audience, even when I think it’s going well. I don’t like being ‘the performer’, I quite like things that just happen, so I’m going to comment on what I’m doing while I’m doing it. I don’t think this is explaining, just maybe commentary. Anyway.

I slot the first tape into the player, which makes a satisfying clunk. I hope people remember how the action of putting on a tape feels. The music starts – a spur of the moment purchase of *Passages* by Ravi Shankar and Philip Glass. A release I didn’t know existed, or had any real idea of what it might sound like until about a week before this performance. Everyone listens quietly as I play about forty five seconds. Which feels considerably longer, in fact. The act of inserting a chunk of someone else’s time into the middle of this piece, while I kneel quietly listening, *does* draw attention to what listening can be – an absence of performative action (though I know that by sitting, however quietly, in front of an audience, I am still ‘the performer’). No

one starts talking though, which I'm grateful for. They also chuckle when I say "for your information, Philip Glass and Ravi Shankar", which I'm also grateful for.

Second song.

This is the first part of the piece that could go really wrong, quite quickly – digital technology, microphones, feedback. Using the sampler function on my Korg Kaoss Pad 2 (a piece of equipment that allows me to loop small sections of sound and feed them, as well as input from a microphone, through various filters and delays, manipulating parameters with a touchpad.), I use my mic to record two words – "good" and "ok" – both words drawn from Sam's texts. The second word is recorded using a vocoder effect, that adds extra, robotic versions of the word to the sample. Alternating between the two samples (the Kaoss Pad will only play one at a time. Infuriating limitation, but also good to work with limitations), I start to sing the two phrases over the top, gradually adding more robotic, pitch correcting effects to my voice. Two things – I'm not really a singer, I don't have a versatile voice, but I can hold a simple note or two – I think the audience is going to realise that I'm no virtuoso pretty soon, and second – if you use pitch-correction effects (like modern pop records do) without giving them the 'correct' key, they spew out all sorts of random, or close to random notes. This disrupts any sense that this might be a proper song, and more a collection of noises that happens to use the voice as its starting point.

There are moments in this first section where I stop almost completely, and just play the "good" sample alone, these breathing points re-focus my attention – with this sort of technology (whether digital or analogue), its *inexhaustibility* means that it is easy to just 'let things run', to create something that repeats and repeats with no additional force applied. Making sure I break this opportunity at the start means I have to *think* about what happens next, rather than react to any existing set of decisions (e.g. loops I've already started. Of course, the break is also a decision, an action, but it means that I'm starting from quiet, rather than activity).

Adding voice and megaphone to the song introduces another sound as well as another sound *source*. And singing more fragments of text moves the song to its next section.

I'm listening to how the different layers are starting to interact, and starting to get feedback from the megaphone, and triggering the third sound source, a loop of text that I've spliced live on another recorder saying "compulsive narrative," and I'm worrying that the piece sounds messy, that I can't distinguish exactly what is going on, but it's probably too late to stop and say, "Sorry I'll do that bit again, will you bear with me a second?" so I keep singing, and start adding a delay to my voice.

This sound really starts to run out of control (as delay is wont to do), but by cutting back on the sampled layer on the Kaoss Pad, the piece snaps back into control

– the delayed sounds, endlessly regenerating, on the edge of properly feeding-back, have quite a different tone to the voice parts (particularly those coming from the second recorder, which have no effects on at all) – this has the effect of separating the sounds a little, making them momentarily more distinct. This means I can listen more closely to what is happening again, and start to play the second tape.

The trills and arcs of Chopin’s piano sonatas spill around the edge of the loops, which I fade out as I gradually start to feed the output of the tape player through the delay, which causes a headsplitting loop of continuous feedback to flow from the amplifier. Up to this point on the performance, the sounds and actions I’ve made have been located quite obviously in space – an *intimate space* I’ve tried to connect to my small actions, to my personal space.

But as I fade down the piano music and start to shape the waves of feedback coming from the amp by manipulating the position of the microphone and tweaking the parameters of the delay, the sound starts to become independent of its source, starts to *become itself*, located everywhere. This happens only briefly – my temptation is to let it run, to let it be (despite my misgivings earlier) – and soon I have to move onto the next section of the piece. But for a short period, the sound of the ringing feedback, self-generating at this point – a product of a system necessarily located in more than one space (feedback like this needs a speaker, a microphone and some modulation, at varying distances to generate complexity) – this sound liberates itself from location and cause and effect. It becomes simultaneously everywhere and nowhere (or *from* nowhere).

“As songs go, that was definitely louder than when I rehearsed it.”

Review.

Another section with potential for disaster – I plan to ‘review’ Florian Hecker’s new album⁶ by pouring the ball bearings that came with the cd into a series of porcelain coffee mugs. The idea is to comment on an artwork using the artwork itself, and to re-focus ears (again, both mine and the audiences’) with small, precise, locational sounds. The ball bearings make thin, pinging sounds that are at different pitches depending on the cup they are poured into – they bounce at different rates, creating tiny poly-rhythms (there is also a coded (stupid?) joke here referencing the ‘Bucephalus’s Bouncing Ball’ effect, often used to describe (and create) the accelerated sequences in modern electronic music - for example Aphex Twin). This action, pouring cups of ball bearings into other cups, is more than slightly ridiculous, drawing more chuckles from the audience.

Third song.

One line, repeated three times “*Number 17: nicely sinister.*”

Returning to this action marks the start of the bookending phase of the piece – repeating earlier actions. When the action is repeated, hopefully the intervening activity changes the reception of that action, meaning the audience will listen differently. This also marks a return to familiar territory (though the text is different), and as the performer, I know that these final actions have worked earlier.

Action four, part two.

At this point I reach down, and rewind the Dictaphone that has been recording all this time. Playing back what has gone before (while the final actions are performed) highlights the amount of time that has elapsed (I have to wait a while to rewind towards the start of the tape, and have to hold the player close to my ear again to check that it has recorded at all – again, re-emphasising the small sound world I have tried to create). It also highlights, to my mind, the difference between reproducibility and repeatability – while the actions and gestures are repeatable by me, the performer, it is the technological objects that do the reproducing.

Action three: take a picture.

Snap. Flash. Whirr. At the end of this piece, I'll have two similar Polaroids, about ten minutes apart. I like that the work is generating its own documentation, or at least its own sense of activity having occurred, as it goes along (see also repeated actions).

Action two: breathe in. Breathe out.

Playing the harmonica again – again attempting to focus on an intimate space, having to play against the recording of the performance instead means that sound detail is lost. Again, the breathing in and out of the harmonica marks time, and identifies itself as creating structure by punctuating the tinny noise coming from the Dictaphone.

Action one: On. Off.

Clicking a megaphone on. Then off again. Do not speak into the megaphone. Repeating this final action, I gradually fade out the recording. The click of the megaphone, at first drowned out completely, slowly emerges as the only sound. This quiet clicking brings the attention back to a simple action one final time, a final focus of listening before I say “thanks very much” and the piece ends.

Part 2

After Battersea, the piece evolved further – the more freeform parts of the piece (including the Chopin tape) moved into two distinct ‘song’ sections, each performing two lines of text; the audience was presented with the chance to pick a random number that selected a cassette tape from which a small extract was played as an interlude to the piece; most importantly, instead of the eighty-one lines from Sam Riviere’s *81 Austerities* book, I commissioned Sam to write one hundred and twenty lines of five words each – this text formed a new pool to draw from for the fifth action (the repeating of one line three times).

This version of the piece was performed in Norwich, Colchester and at SPILL Festival 2012 in Ipswich, seven times in a row. Performing it over this period marked its transformation from something propositional to something more codified. It continued to contain content picked by random numbers from the audience; the new ‘song’ sections continued to be improvised (within certain time limits and structures); but by drawing on the same pool of text, objects, tapes and actions, *5 actions...* became something very close to *repertoire*.

Of course, some of the reason this happened is linked to the economics of emerging live art⁷ practices (the performance festivals in Norwich and Ipswich fell under the umbrella of live art) – despite its *liveness* being the main strategy, the piece must be repeated to gain maximum audience, maximum exposure (so you can perform at the *next* festival). Another reason is that the random factors do not really provide enough variation – after all, the piece is still structured round certain events. The random element changes some of the content from performance to performance – sometimes more, sometimes less (the introduction of line 92: “This is so fucking dry,” a number being chosen that selects thirty seconds of *Metal Machine Music*); these choices have the potential to change the tone, the register of the piece, but not the structure. Some openness within some fixedness.

Despite my earlier worries (see Chapter Three), turning again to Cage helps to frame some of these concerns. In *Indeterminacy*, from the three 1958 lectures *Composition as Process*, Cage outlines examples of pieces of music which contain varying degrees of indeterminacy – whether as part of their performance or their composition. For example, Cage’s own *Music of Changes*, though using chance operations in its composition/pre-performance is *not* “indeterminate with respect to performance.” The structure – rests, note lengths, amplitudes – all arise from chance, but become fixed on the page to be performed.⁸

So, in this spirit, *5 actions...* certainly contains chance operations, but they are carefully proscribed within a fixed framework (the structure of the piece). The chance operations exist for a moment *in front of the audience*; they reveal the mechanics of the piece, highlight to some extent the agency of the audience; but these operations do not shift the lattice of the actions, and this is the reason that the piece eventually tends towards fixedness. Why is pointing to Cage relevant? Because *Indeterminacy*, the lecture, is still a useful tool for describing how process – whether chance procedures, or improvisation, or moments of *disacoumatization* - can nest within (or without) structure.

A closer look at James Saunders' conception of a modular music further reveals the shortcomings of my realisation of *5 actions...* as an open-ended piece. For Saunders, a modular music would mean the possibility of extending an open ended, "continuously extensible" method to every aspect of a piece – composition, but also performance in the broadest sense. Saunders' proposal for modular music is highly practical, pragmatic; allowing for flexibility and efficiency.

"The ability to respond efficiently to individual performance situations is one of the great advantages of a modular approach. Constructing versions for unusual ensembles can be achieved more speedily than if the piece was entirely new."⁹

While praise for a method that includes terms deliberately lifted from product design, from industry ("efficiency"), might seem at odds with this project's insistence on openness and unfixed positions, it is of interest here not just because of its influence on the original version of *5 actions...* but because of how it deals with the specific economic worries above, namely "do I have time to make a new piece from scratch every time I get a booking?"

Saunders distinguishes between open and closed modular systems. Closed systems have a finite number of arrangements and the limiting factor is often the number of modules;¹⁰ though even this may produce a relatively high number of possibilities or combinations. He cites Raymond Queneau's *One Hundred Thousand Billion Poems* (1961) as an example of a closed modular system that nevertheless produces a high number of possible combinations (one hundred thousand billion).¹¹ Queneau's poem also contains no feedback loops; no system that allows for multiple *temporal* routes through the same work – no chance of looping through sections, no choices that produce endless deferrals of what Saunders calls the *termination point*.

Saunders' insistence on the importance of the *interface* between modules - how modules do or don't join together, allowing for degrees of openness or closed-ness – is highlighted by looking at open modular pieces. For example, Saunders identifies the work of Dan Flavin as not having "a standardized way of relating to each other between constructions" – the works do not have a "common interface,"¹²

"So with closed modularity, there are a limited number of structures that can be made as a result of having a limited number of modules *and* a limiting interface between them. With open modularity on the other hand there are an unlimited number of

possible structures due either to the lack of a limiting interface between modules, or the number of modules theoretically available.”¹³

For open modular works, the possibility of repetitions, feedback loops, multiple readings, all contribute to openness of encounter. While books like the *Choose Your Own Adventure* or *Fighting Fantasy series* (*You are in a maze. If you want to go left, turn to page 68. If you want to go right, turn to page 24.* Saunders also offers Queneau’s *Un Conte A Votre Façon – A Story As You Like It* – 1967 as another example) offer choices, and multiple paths through a system (a multiple-*directed* narrative) they offer only one ‘correct’ termination point.¹⁴ On the other hand, in open modular works, the presence of feedback “increases the number of readings, potentially to the point where termination is a choice of the reader, rather than being enforced by the author.”¹⁵ And while I personally gravitate more towards Saunders’ referencing of Marc Saporta than his enthusiasm for hypertext fiction, the emphasis on feedback, loops, branches, contours and tangles provides a new vocabulary for unpicking the structures within ‘composed’ pieces like *5 actions*...

5 actions... is a closed modular piece; it always lasts between about thirteen and seventeen minutes, it always draws from a finite pool – whether eighty-one or one hundred and twenty-five lines of text; two or five cassette tapes – and has existed in versions of this form over more than ten performances. However, it would be simple to apply the method of generating random numbers from an audience to the whole structure – shuffling actions and interludes – and this could be extended to include the duration (number of modules) of the piece – either random each time, or adaptable to the length of the allocated performance time. The length of the performance would become simply another *variable*.

One advantage of seeing artworks (performances, texts, music, sculpture etc.) as a collection of variables, as Adam Harper does in *Infinite Music*,¹⁶ is that not only can every module, every moment in a piece have (almost) infinite potential – theoretically unshackled from (for example) genre, Western scales, context, music/non-music; but also that modules could be freely combined – overlapping, occurring simultaneously. John Cage’s *Song Books* (1970) is an example of this – any of the texts can be combined with other examples of indeterminate music from Cage’s repertoire.

A half-remembered aside. I performed Cage’s *Solo for Voice 17* (from *Song Books*) at STEW Gallery in Norwich sometime in 2012. The main instruction – to sing the text (extracts about telegraph wires from Henry David Thoreau’s *Journal*) and “use electronics to so transform the voice that it resembles singing wires” – I performed by singing into a guitar pedal that blurred the words with sustain, and pitch-shifted the singing to create *multiple* voices. At the same time, other interpretations of songs continued in the space – I remember the instruction for *Solo for Voice 55* - “Leave the stage and return by means of wheels (e.g. skates, small auto)” – being performed

enthusiastically. There was overlap between the different ‘songs’, though only two happened at any given moment; a list of ‘more theatrical’ and ‘more musical’ songs had been drawn up beforehand, the order of songs was determined by chance at the start of the evening in front of the audience, and as the individual lengths of each song varied, a healthy sense of shifting territory prevailed. The nine or so artists involved interpreted each song with different degrees of faithfulness to the score, which added to the variety. There is of course a persuasive argument for interpreting Cage pieces strictly. In describing his interpretations of Cage’s works (including *Song Books*), William Brooks has said, “Observe the score; do nothing that is inconsistent with it, and seek to realise all nuances of notation”¹⁷ and that actions should not be ‘chosen’ because they are “funny, or beautiful, or unexpected.”¹⁸ I am, as ever, in two minds about this, especially the ‘funny’ part of the line above. There is a difference between ‘playing Cage for laughs’ (theatrically rustling pages in *4’33”* for example¹⁹) and laughing out loud with surprise or joy at the sight of two artists roller-skating off stage while feedback rolls between speakers.²⁰ There is always a chance that too strict a reading of Cage’s piece ends up as a fetishization or at least an overly-romanticised version of the past.²¹ I have wandered from the point. It is the opportunity for *combinations*, overlaps, serendipity, that offers new possibilities.

Saunders describes this simultaneous activity as adding a contrapuntal element to the way modules interface with each other and adds “the possibility of unplanned coincidences and their resonant meaning outside of music.”²² The idea of things occurring ‘outside of music’ finds its twin in Harper’s “*music beyond sound*”²³ – where things like roller-skates, humour, context, staging, are all “non-sonic variables,” but variables that make up the work nonetheless. That Saunders draws parallels between literature, music, object art and manufacturing in his *Modular Music* essay not only suggests fertile territory for his own work (as well as my own plunderings for *5 actions...*), but also points to a method that could sit, if not outside, then at least in parallel to more ‘conventional’ structures.

This in turn suggests that *5 actions...* might still have a life beyond its current status as (retired) repertoire. The final chapter in this project presents *5 actions...* and a number of other pieces as ‘new’ versions that might begin to draw on these ideas, as well as the *unsound object* and *intimate space*.

frog pond plop

part 1

Seventeen paragraphs on *frog pond plop*

1

I was asked by Nicola Simpson to perform Dom Sylvester Houédard's soundpoem *frog pond plop* for the South London Gallery event she was organising with Occasional Papers – *DSH and The Cosmic Typewriter*.²⁴ Despite having attended the gallery show Nicola curated in the NUCA Gallery,²⁵ I was not familiar with one of DSH's most famous pieces – a concrete/typewriter art take on Matsuo Basho's seventeenth century haiku.

2

I am interested in concrete poetry, I am interested in text works. I am interested in the space the voice creates. I am interested in the voice leaving the body. I am interested in the separation of voice and language. I am interested in the separation of sound and meaning.

3

I have not heard much concrete poetry read out loud.

4

I have heard [other] poetry read out loud, performed. At its worst, it is a man shouting. Even the more interesting works often suffer from a particular kind of 'poetry voice' – a voice that slightly labours the pauses, line breaks, inflections. I wanted to avoid 'poetry voice' – something I saw as a possible stylistic trap for someone who has not read much rhythmic verse out loud before.

5

frog pond plop is a series of syllables, repeated, evenly spaced that suggests rhythm. It features overlaps, repetition, the hint of varying voices – that is, first voice, second voice, *third voice*. So the temptation is to read it like this, like a typewriter, like a tickertape-machine.

6

I decide to approach *frog pond plop* just as that; an approach, an attempt, a pre-reading. A public acknowledgement of my unsuitability for the task. An imaginary version. An *un*reading.

7

An imagined version. Nicola tells me there is no evidence that *frog pond plop* was ever actually performed, and what purports to be a recording of it in the British Library is a mislabelled, misidentified recording of another DSH piece. This means there is a certain responsibility in performing this piece, but also a certain freedom – especially if it is presented as a version, an attempt, speculative.

8

One approach might be aligned with David Toop's reading of paintings by Nicolaes Maes in *Sinister Resonance* – "With scientific detachment, they experiment with the possibility and impossibility of bringing sound to life through a mute medium; with humanistic engagement they locate the significance of sound and silence within human events, specific places and the world of objects."²⁶

The *possibility* and *impossibility*. The potential transformation of the muted surface, the muted page, into sound, implied or explicit.

9

I decide that suggestions of the sounds of DSH's syllables can be made with other sounds – the sound of a match striking might suggest the percussive rasp of the *fu* syllable; the sound of a small wooden box slamming shut might hint at the snap of the *ka*; the tail of the hoot of a blown shell suggest the *wa*, and so on.

So the sounds of small objects create a cloud of suggestions, of possibilities, that point to the seventeen syllables of DSH's soundpoem.

10

Strike match. Blow harmonica. Tear paper. Drop ping-pong ball. Slam box. Flick book pages. Take polaroid. Blow shell. Drink water. Roll ball bearing. Start Dictaphone. Crumple cellophane. Flip coin. Open cola can. Ring phone. Stop Dictaphone. Write text.

11

As a nod to the instruction/suggestion/description in the score; 'x syllables on tape', and as a counter to the open process unfolding in the performance, I also recorded a overlapping/rhythmic/spoken version of the piece – one that was much closer to a straight reading of *frog pond plop*. This was designed to cut in to the actions being presented, to undermine the process, to problematize the version. Towards the end of the performance, as soon as this recording starts, I move to the microphone (traditional space of the electric live poet) and hold my breath for the length of the recorded version (about a minute and a half).

12

This amplified intake of breath suggests a sound over the following seconds – in the space of the performer’s absence of action, the inner voice counting *one, two, three, four*.

13

So this version of *frog pond plop* contains:

an imagined series of syllable sounds,
a series of actual small sounds and gestures,
a deliberate undercutting of existing strategies,
and the spectacle of performance.

14

Performing it at the South London Gallery also had specific *practical* problems of presentation – the decision by the organizers to present performances in the round meant I was always not facing portions of the audience. How the performer/artist chooses to present themselves to an audience, while often necessarily a compromise, affects the space that the work creates. I like to perform at arms length from an audience, I like to be able to maintain a certain amount of eye contact. The *practicalities* of the evening’s performance set up meant compromises were negotiated minutes before performances started.

15

This is the difference between imagining a work and performing a work. This is often where *newness* can be discovered, if newness is something we are interested in.

16

Imaginary, open, contradictory, playful, unfinished, uncertain.

17

frog pond plop

frog pond plop

part 2

Here's what I actually read out at the start of the performance:

*"This is a reading of Frog Pond Plop by Dom Sylvester Houédard
an overture and phonata in three movements*

for syllables on tape

for voice

for actions

for objects

for the feel of the moment

for when MIND transforms to ACHE²⁷

for when ACHE transforms to RIOT

for when RIOT transforms to SHOT

for when the moment has balance

for seventeen syllables

(for Basbo)

for words I've never read out loud before

for syllables I have never tried to pronounce

for rhythms I am not comfortable with

to prepare

to introduce

to overture,

I'll present five sound actions

and seventeen syllable sounds.

Use the sound of the stone falling to hear the sound of the room

Use the strike of the match to locate the vowels

Use the crunch of the sand to imagine walking to the microphone

Use the crackle of the cassette to imagine your voice on tape

Use the rhythms of the spheres to set the pace of the reading."

So immediately, I'm setting myself up for failure, at least, that's what I'm thinking as I'm intoning these words into the microphone. I'm standing in the middle of a crowd, full of people who knew DSH, about to attempt to playfully 'unread' one of his most well known scores, and I'm *intoning*. I'm trying to keep my voice clear, but it's getting close to *poetry voice*, and I'm aware of it. Best press on. I've got to this point by deciding I need to pre-empt, to bookend, to set-up what I'm doing. I never normally do anything this pointed, this considered, but it seems important to get in the line "*for words I've never read out loud before*".

Introduction as both abstract and apology. The important part of the full DSH quote (see endnote 27), (at least as regards *this* performance), is not just the feel of the moment, but the line "...what is presented is *never quite* the objects or the word..."²⁸ Performance, live art, *unsound object*, is never fully this or that, is never one or the other – it is *both*, and it is *neither*.

The stone fits in my hand. If I make my hand into a claw, or a fist shape, the stone fills this gap. The stone dropping, a simple action, comes from an earlier version of my reading the piece: "Hold a stone. Which syllables sound, when it falls?" It points

towards the silent gasp, between the moment of release and impact. The gap between performer and audience is filled by this gasp, this moment of between-ness, emptiness.

“The last of the cherry blossom...when it’s perfect, it falls. And then of course once it hits the ground it gets all mushed up. So it’s only *absolutely* perfect when it’s falling through the air, this way and that, for the briefest time.”²⁹

While the stone is falling, it has *potential*. The whole performance has potential. The moment *oscillates* between action and result. An uncounted number of possibilities briefly exist. The stone hits the floor and breaks in two, loudly.

A glass of ball bearings, poured onto the table. A glass of marbles, poured onto the table. A glass of ping-pong balls, poured onto the table. They scatter, bouncing vertically, horizontally, skipping all over the place, disappearing under the table, disappearing under the feet of the audience.

The various sized balls are there for two reasons – first, as an *ear primer* for the audience – an announcement that says *this is what to expect, this is what we’ll be listening to, listen, the balls have different sounds, because they are made of different materials, are different sizes, have different mass*. They also point again, however obliquely, to the splatter rhythms of a certain period of electronic music. As Rob Young notes,

“The most celebrated operation in IDM circles is the ‘Bucephalus’s Bouncing Ball’ effect – an algorithm used by the likes of Autechre and Aphex Twin that speeds up a pulse as if it were an object bouncing on a table, subject to the force of gravity.”³⁰

Of course, this ‘effect’ is now a sonic cliché, a well known signifier that yes, you are listening to *laptop music*; but the reference makes me smile – the absurdity of recreating a digital *tic*, with glasses full of balls, while trying to conjure up imagined syllable sounds of a piece that was possibly never meant to be performed, existing only as a *typewritten* score, is not lost on me.

A candle is lit.

A candle is lit – another marker. The action of lighting a candle in performance signifies ritual – *might* signify ritual. For Evan Eisenberg,

“Doesn’t an art event, such as a concert, have a ritual value that depends on its uniqueness? Strictly speaking, ‘event’ is not a ritual category at all, precisely because it does imply uniqueness. To have ritual value an ‘event’ must *recur*. In other words, it must not be an historical event at all, but an instance of something timeless.”³¹

So perhaps this version of *frog pond plop* is not a ritual. Not *always* a ritual. Art critic

Adam Mendelsohn writes:

“underpinning re-enactment art is the implication that the activity of making art itself...is...a kind of historical re-enactment an activity that preserves heritage through *ritualized* behavior”.³²

Talking about this piece as a *re-enactment* might seem misleading – as mentioned earlier, Nicola Simpson is not sure this piece ever *was* performed at all. But as performance re-enactment (itself a specific area of study within live art/performance

studies) questions notions, or more specifically, *problems* of “authenticity,” as well as documentation, it seems an appropriate lens through which to approach this piece. Certainly there are elements of the form, as well as the actions, I have used to recreate/unread DSH’s piece that draw from what Mendelsohn would call a *heritage of ritualized behaviour*. Many of these actions, drawn from my developing vocabulary of live art strategies, would be familiar to a live art audience; the lighting of candles, the careful selection of objects, the stylised gestures in bringing them close to microphones; as well as to audiences familiar with some strands of improvised music (for example the object based explorations of the Bohman Brothers), and beyond.³³

Philip Auslander, in his essay on the performativity of performance documentation, draws attention to the difficulty of performing a re-enactment from its documentation – in the end, the attempt often performs the documentation, the *photo*, not the original performance.³⁴ In many ways, thinking about recreating a performance from its documentation is the opposite of performing a piece for (possibly) the first time, from a score. Auslander outlines how in ‘traditional’ documentation of performances (and he is talking mainly about photography, rather than sound documentation at this point), the live event both precedes and authorizes its subsequent documentation.³⁵

However, he goes on to show that the relationship is often not as simple as this. The function of documentation in performance and live art is often to record “the artist’s work,” rather than the situation generated by the act of performing to an *audience. Works* rather than *events*.³⁶

“The act of documenting an event as a performance is what constitutes it as such. Documentation does not simply generate image/statements that describe an autonomous performance and state that it occurred: it produces an event as a performance...”³⁷

This has problems for how we might think about the importance of an audience in not just the reception, but also the construction of a live work. Auslander is talking primarily about how performance works might ‘live on’, how to critically approach works that have not been ‘seen’; he is talking about assuming responsibility for a *future* audience, not the initial, live one. This, in fact (says Auslander) removes the need for the initial audience to *be there at all*.³⁸

So to questions of authenticity; if the audience does not need to be at the source, and the performance is formed through the reception of documentation:

“It may well be that our sense of presence, power, and authenticity of these pieces derives not from treating the document as an indexical access point to a past event but from perceiving the document itself as a performance that directly reflects an artist’s aesthetic project or sensibility and for which we are the present audience.”³⁹

How might this relate to this manifestation of *frog pond plop*? First of all, I generally disagree with Auslander’s assumptions about the live act. The uncertainty and unpredictability of liveness – the stone that breaks in two unexpectedly for example –

needs expectation, risk, the possibility of failure, to create situations. *5 actions...* and my version of *frog pond plop* have video documentation, a couple of still photographs, and the Polaroids produced *during* the performance to act as a record. These are, yes, what I use to send to programmers to convince them to book me. But in the main, I see these as adverts, as memory aids. They are authorised by the ‘actual’ performance, but not the other way round. The role of the audience in creating *5 actions...* (the ‘numbers-from-a-hat-routine’) and the presence of the audience in the instant photographs fix the live moment much less *thoroughly* than if I was creating deliberately iconic/canonical versions of the work through photo documentation.

But, I am performing a piece that might have existed in the past, and in attempting to frame as ritual, as if it *has* existed and has been performed before. There is an absence of (historical) documentation to *authorise* the performance. To reframe Auslander’s argument, that it doesn’t even matter if pieces we know through documentation alone (he uses Chris Burdon’s *Shoot* (1971) and Yves Klein’s *Le Saut dans la Vide* (*Leap into the Void*) (1960) as examples) *actually occurred at all*.⁴⁰ In light of this absence, then it doesn’t matter that this re-enactment *is* a re-enactment, or a first version – it exists in the live moment, at the moment of reception, the moment of hearing.

In insisting on this reading of my version of *frog pond plop*, I’ll draw tentative parallels with the way Schaeffer imagines the sound object – as independent from source, and from signal. Obviously the piece itself is asking for connections to be made between object sounds and the syllables of the score (and Basho’s poem), so there is not a full *bracketing* to allow for reduced listening, not to mention the one-off, liveness of the sounds and actions; nevertheless the connection as suggested, that the work is completed by the audience at the moment of reception, leans away from Auslander’s conception of a performative documentation.

To what extent is my version of *frog pond plop* a misreading? It takes several liberties with the score, specifically with the interpretation of simultaneity and voices. One of the ways Dom Sylvester Houédard approached soundpoems and their simultaneity was (via Apollinaire) “seeing a poem all in one go like a poster which is a visual herald.”⁴¹ Soundpoems might be read by two or more voices, or like Henri Chopin, processed on tape (“up to 57 layers deep”).⁴²

As there are seventeen syllables, Simpson suggests that the *frog pond plop* soundpoem might be performed by up to 17 voices as a “synchronic verbal portrait,”⁴³ but that the sonic equivalent of seeing the soundpoem “all in one go” presents problems, namely the impossibility of the *Obrenblick* – the blink of the ear that captures everything - sound, space, silence, rhythm, at once. We could compare

this to Marjorie Perloff's insistence that John Cage's mesostics must be performed to fully realise their poetic density, their full sonic potential.⁴⁴

So *frog pond plop overture and phonata in three movements* must be performed over time to be realised. Houédard, in drawing a concrete lineage from cave paintings to modern soundpoems, calls for "any concrete medium to be looked at as well as *through*,"⁴⁵ but it is the *through* that is helpful here; the method of working through, reading through, writing through; the freedom of the reader to "provide his own mid-gum syntax"⁴⁶ that gives the poet (or in this case, the performer) freedom too.

"Concrete is mobile [...] shares space-time special-kinetic concern of all forward-moving art."⁴⁷ As Houédard, in 1963, sees the forward propulsive-ness of concrete poetry in the collapsing barriers of art forms, in preparing this version of *frog pond plop*, I found forward momentum in spilling marbles all over a gallery floor, in linking objects momentarily to unfamiliar syllables, in photographing the audience, in holding my breath. Propositional connections between the score and the actions.

A Young Person's Guide to Musique Concrète.

This performance, for objects and an audience of three, seated around a small square table, represents a number of points in my still developing practice. It is a piece where my interests in small audiences, *intimate space*, sounding objects, performance lectures and live art fully overlap in one place, but it is also more *fixed* than the preceding two pieces (*5 actions...* and *frog pond plop*), and more fixed than the propositional text pieces that follow it. It uses more stylised gestures than the previous pieces, but is also chatty, informal, and has jokes about The Beatles.

I'm going to summarize, rather than unpick in detail, this late piece. There is video documentation of a performance of *A Young Person's Guide...* at Cambridge Junction on the DVD, but a blow by blow account of every single step will repeat some ground covered earlier. As the audience enter, one of a selection of *musique concrète* and electro-acoustic records play on a turntable, the audience seat themselves, and are guided through a number of sections of text and gestures. Sounds are played, both by me and by the audience. Over the course of the piece, I play *Revolution 9* from *The Beatles*, I play a selection from Pierre Schaeffer's *Trièdre fertile* (1975), and audience members can play with Buddha Machines and a Korg Monotron in creating a final, noisy section of group play. As the audience leave, I play another record. In Glasgow I performed this eight times in a row, in Cambridge eight times in a row, in Norwich, three times in a row.

I'd like to quote in full three of the texts presented during the piece, to position where the practice sits at this time, and show how a fixed piece can still point towards the wider concerns of the project.

1. [spoken while a wash of sound, produced by timestretching and reversing a recording of a bell, rises in volume from a small speaker that is very slowly moved towards the audience at eye level]

This is a bell

This is the sound of a bell

This is a speaker playing the sound of a bell

This is a speaker playing a sound

This is a speaker playing a sound that is long

This is a speaker playing a sound that is long, and slow

This sound is long and slow and grainy

This sound is long, slow, grainy and increasing in volume

This sound is long slow, grainy, increasing in volume with a slow attack

This sound is beginning to overlap with the sound of my voice

This sound is beginning to overlap with the sound of my voice and drown out my words

This sound is drowning out my words

This sound is drowning out my words and perhaps you cannot hear exactly what I am saying anymore

This sound is stopping you from hearing exactly what I am saying

This sound is making my words sound just like sounds

This sound and this sound are making a new sound

By the last few lines, the words are almost completely obliterated. The text draws attention to its own process; “This sound is drowning out my words.” The text aims to dissolve context by switching from describing the sound as staring somewhere, to describing the *characteristics* of the sound – grainy, slow, long. A one-off, performative attempt to frame *reduction* as a re-hearing. Schaeffer’s full *reduced listening* relies on reproduction, repetition.⁴⁸ This early text was often (self) sabotaged by the sound not always being set loud enough, or by mistiming on my part, stopping before the last line is reached. But it is an attempt, a tilt, a (failed) experiment that hints, that points towards the sound object.

2.

*If you repeat a word enough times
it can lose its meaning
Can dissolve into tongue twisters, rhythms,
sounds of spit and lips.
A cheap trick, fun game, serious point,
human tape-loop, malfunctioning, spluttering.
Does it help?
Does it help if the word is repeat?
Repeat repeat repeat repeat repeat repeat repeat repeat
repeat repeat repeat repeat repeat repeat repeat repeat...*

A deliberately comical attempt to wrestle with the *object voice*. The repetition attempts both to unshackle the sound from the meaning, and to pull focus away from ‘just’ focusing on the length, shape, texture of the sound. The play between the meaning of repeating *repeat* and the errors and changes in sound and structure that are introduced if you actually attempt this exercise for any length of time (soon your line becomes this: *repeat repeat rEpeat REpeaT re - Peat repeatrepeaT Repeat*) emphasises this oscillation between two poles.

At a presentation in the early stages of this project,⁴⁹ I repeated the word *background* a number of times (in the ‘score’ for the presentation it was twenty-seven times, but I may have pushed it a bit longer). The ‘d’ in background tends to disappear and reappear over time; over-emphasising the ‘d’ turns it into a ‘duh’ sound. Here, the oscillation is between attempting to emphasise sound itself, moving sound into the background, away from attention, as an everyday object, as part of the furniture, and drawing attention to the act by speaking into a microphone to a room of my peers. The presentation also started at point ten (of ten), with the word *uncertainty* on screen, and proceeded to work backwards to point one with “Hello” and the title of the project. “A cheap trick, fun game, serious point”, I am always ready to undermine myself.

3. [spoken after I had played about thirty seconds of a raggedy loop from a red Buddha machine, complete with flashing emanating Buddha LCD on the front]

I don't know about meaning
I don't know what this piece really means
I don't know about meaning
I don't know if repeating it helps
I don't know about meaning
I don't know about repetition
I don't know about meaning
I don't know if I mean this
I don't know about meaning
I don't know if repetition is joy
I don't know about meaning
I don't know if repetition is boring
I don't know about meaning
I don't know about uncertainty
I don't know about indeterminacy
I don't know about serialism
I don't know about improvisation
I don't know about mindfulness
I don't know about the no-mind
I don't know about meaning

I think this whole project has skirted around tackling meaning. My frame of reference has never been stable in this area, I have only looked for ways to keep the argument fluid, happy to oscillate. Is this what this paragraph in *A Young Person's Guide...* is saying? This paragraph, by drawing attention to its not-knowing, announces its knowledge; its plan to “unsay” that knowledge; pointing again to Henry Golemba’s reading of Thoreau. Meaning (even in denying it is meaning) arises from paradox, or at least, “a perpetual process of interpretation and translation of possible meaning.”⁵⁰

For Joan Retallack, Cage’s work “brings material and experience together in a mode of enactment rather than ‘aboutness’.”⁵¹ And in Retallack’s aligning of Wittgenstein’s notion of *meaning as use* (and the listener/receiver’s enacting (creating) of meaning)⁵² with Cage’s practice, we have a way of approaching the position of this paragraph from *A Young Person's Guide...*

The entanglement of the project with poetry and scourcery.⁵³

An introduction to *Research Environment* and *Phones in the first hundred pages of Zero History*

This is an introduction to the two final pieces of practice in the project. These are proposals for performances, and also sit within the methodology for the whole project. They also exist in the same way as the three previous performances in that they form part of the Portfolio of new versions.

I would never describe the writing I produce as part of the performances that make up this project as poetry; not even within the scope offered by Cage defending his work (specifically his lectures) as a “need for poetry.”⁵⁴ But working with Sam Riviere on generating texts for *5 actions...* brought overlaps in areas of activity, and I wrote a summary of *5 actions...* and *frog pond plop* for Electronic Voice Phenomena – a project initiated by poetry publisher Penned In The Margins and “experimental literature and new media”⁵⁵ producers Mercy.

The summary was an attempt to engage with the form and structure of the text Sam had given me – clusters of five word lines. I never felt the piece quite lived up to its promise; as I said, I am not a poet. I’ve included the last two ‘verses’ below, as they began to point to something more interesting, and lead eventually towards the text piece *Research Environment*.

Extracts from 5 actions (EVP version):

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“There are only bodies and. Languages” but there is also. The voice whether on lips. Or without a visible source. The voice – sound or unsound. Escaping from fixity or not. The voice is always present. Just as the five actions. Piece starts to break up. I was asked to perform.

A typewritten sound poem by. Concrète poet Dom Sylvester Houédard. A series of repeated syllables. “Forty syllables for magnetic tape”. A fixed written graphic work. With no instructions for interpretation. Rather than try to repeat. Every syllable in perfect rhythm. Instead I imagined the sounds. As objects and as actions.

Potential and real and imagined. These simple actions recall syllables. Phonemes and mouth sounds as. Matches are struck stones dropped. Ball bearings bounced sand scrunched.

500

The voice is always present. But as halfway between sound. And imagined or remembered sound. The gap between the audience. The performer and the object. The voice is an object. That is imagined and felt. That is open not fixed. Not fixed by wax and shellac. But instead freed by it.

Removed from the body by. Both technology and the imagination. By the internet teasing apart. Fixed texts and old routines. By the spoken word being. As close and as distant. As words on tape or. The rattling of Victorian tableware. Spirit presences emerging from swirling. Chemicals onto silver papers and.

Disappearing in the bright sunlight. Because even photographs and even. Phonographs are not fixed points. The voice is present and. There’s work to be done.

As a summary, as a record, it is *unreliable*, fragmented. As an ideas generator, pointing to possible steps forwards, it was useful. “The voice is always present”. The text (the good parts of it, anyway) exist in a space between full practical works (whether ‘performed’ or not) and the endlessly self-repeating world of *actual PhD activity* as practiced in institutions; a cycle of milestones, monitoring forms and Microsoft PowerPoint. *Research Environment* emerged from the entanglement with poetry and the need to present to MA students at Norwich University of the Arts.

Throughout the course of writing this project, I have produced a number of presentations – one that went backwards (and repeated *background* twenty seven times), one where the only slide was ‘To Be Ignored Throughout’, several where the drinking of a glass of water was scripted (a nod to Robert Morris’ *21.3* (1964) – a performance lecture where he re-reads (through lip-syncing) a lecture by art historian Erwin Panofsky), several which included ‘distracting’ sounds (one hid a cassette of low volume drones in the audience). These are, yes, deliberately provocative actions, but that was not why they were produced. Though at the time I insisted that the surrounding material for a PhD (particularly a practice-based one) should mirror, should embody, the form and ethos *of the project itself*, what these performance presentations represented was a *working through* of the material.

The original version, the version as ‘performed’ to the students, was delivered at a desk, with two fm3 Buddha Machines quietly burbling either side of me. Opening with an Alvin Lucier quote was a tip of the hat to the idea that I am writing a PhD on sound, a nod to the idea of space, a private joke to myself about repetition.

*I am sitting in a room, different from the one you are in now.
I am surrounded by the physical objects that I use to write my research project – pen, paper, computer,
three bookshelves of material, stereo.
These things are tangible; I can reach most of them from my chair at my desk.
I type, I scribble, I use a Mitsubishi pen, I use a Microsoft word processing program, I listen to music
most of the time when I work.
This is my research environment.*

*I am sitting in a room, different from the one you are in now.
This is my research environment. There is a gale blowing outside, but I have sealed myself in. The cats
are asleep on the bed in the next room, quiet at last. Downstairs the old fridge is humming, but I am
isolated upstairs from its little tune. I am listening to an album by the Australian trio Amplifier
Machine. Soft drones and hammered piano notes, spiral downwards, swell upwards.
I am familiar here, in the space I have made for myself; this room, these sounds.*

*This is my research environment, here, this paragraph.
I am familiar with these sounds, this room, this particular album.
It drifts, at its own pace; these players listening to each other carefully, making washes of sound
coalesce, before moving to the next passage, slowly.
This paragraph lives in the space of this listening, my listening, my familiarity with its peaks and
troughs.*

This paragraph is an album by the Australian trio Amplifier Machine. This is my research environment. I am writing my experience, but telling it to you now. I am letting these sentences fit in the time it takes for me to listen to this section of the album. I can't remember hearing this album for the first time. It is familiar as this room, but it doesn't distract me. After three years, I find it hard to write in silence.

I am writing my experience, but telling it to you now. After three years, I find it hard to write any other way. Writing here, in presentations, in research projects, is supposed to work a certain way. The only way I can get anywhere, is like this, through layers, through inhabiting the process. It is as familiar as this room, but it doesn't distract me.

After three years, I find it hard to write in silence. I've always liked writing and music that drifts, that circles round itself, that is unresolved, open, unfinished. If I am writing about spaces and environments created by listening, by oscillating states of attention and non-attention, then the writing – this writing, on the page - has to not just reflect that, but has to be that, too.

Again, not poetry. But, because of the existing entanglement with areas of 'the world of poetry', I have attempted to reframe this presentation within a poetic structure – the sestina. (why a sestina? There's a particular Joe Dunthorne poem *Sestina for My Friends*⁵⁶ that I enjoy reading, and as a form new to me, seemed as good as any to try out). This is the frayed end of the unsound project; after the relative fixedness of *A Young Person's Guide*..., this is an attempt to move some practical thoughts on sound, on unsound, back onto the page – where repetition, rhythm start to *suggest* again, rather than demonstrate. As an experiment that aims for poetry, we must again consider this a failure at this stage. It is not elegant. But the play between the shifting end of line rhymes suggests reading out loud, suggests a sound structure. The voice is always present, and this is one (re)starting point.

Research Environment (2014)

I am surrounded by the physical objects that I use to write my research project
pen, paper, computer, three bookshelves of material,
aging stereo. These things are tangible; I can reach them from my chair at my desk.
I type, I scribble, I use a Mitsubishi pen, I use a word processing program, I listen
to music most of the time when I work.
This is my research environment.

I have sealed myself in this environment,
because there is a gale blowing, distracting me from the project
of trying to make these paragraphs work;
how these paragraphs are at once shaped by the material
and shifting away from it, listen
to the cats are purring sleeping under my desk;

Sleepy at last, though I can't work away from this desk
anymore than I can work a silent environment,
which is why today, I need to listen
to this album by Amplifier Machine, a project
of three improvising musicians, whose material;
soft drones and hammered piano notes, makes work

Possible, pleasurable even; attempting to work
through these paragraphs, seated at my desk,
this music spirals downwards and swells upwards; material
to fit around, to become part of the environment;
of papers, computer - three players listening to how they project
sounds between each other, how they listen

To each other's patterns, how I listen
to the overlapping stands of work
that as part of the way my project
are starting to spill beyond the limits of this desk
this pile of papers, this environment,
how the shaping of this material

Is beginning to have material
consequences, not only the way I listen
to music or sounds which permeate my research environment
that I have shaped for this to work
at all, and my desk
is being to fragment, the way this project

is also fragmenting; the constantly dissolving material of a project
of thoughts from - listen - books slipping off my desk
a never-ending self-perpetuating environment of work.

A brief note on scourcery. A final joke, perhaps, but a wonderful word Joan Retallack uses to describe both Duchamp's and Cage's "transfiguration of the sources at hand."⁵⁷ I find the "at hand" part of this definition immensely satisfying, echoing the "at arms length" from my practical work and writing, but also in its matter-of-factness; like Tom Philips deciding to use the first book he could find for threepence as the basis for the project that would become *A Humument*,⁵⁸ or like me reaching for the current William Gibson novel I was reading at the time (see next section).

Retallack puts Cage beyond Duchampian irony; history (ideas, texts, artefacts, *culture*) means neither distancing fascination (irony), nor distancing respect (reverence). Instead "a visionary pragmatics undertaking a constructive recycling and reorienting [...] which invites us to enjoy new forms of attention."⁵⁹ Not adding anything new to the world (in this case), just drawing attention to what is there.

Performance notes for:

Phones in the first hundred pages of Zero History

Earlier, I talked about Iain Sinclair breaking up his copy of Peter Ackroyd's *Blake*, taking it out into the landscape; in Sinclair's case, a 'walking through' of practice. The 'writing through' of Cage's mesostics is another part of a wider technique of breaking apart texts, examining them using something else; a walk across London, a name - Ezra Pound for example; even the assembling of a PhD thesis could be seen, with very optimistic spectacles, to be part of a breaking apart, a dissolving, a reassembling. A filtering through particular conditions.⁶⁰

One possible variation of this method I investigated produced a list, extracted from the William Gibson novel *Zero History*,⁶¹ of all the instances in the first hundred pages where a phone was used. I intended to use this as a test or filter for the twelve categories suggested by Richard Coyne (intervention, calibration, wedge etc.⁶²), and tease apart notions of pervasiveness - how this might be reflected in or *through* other works to widen the field a little.

First, why this novel? I have a fondness for the three late period Gibson novels;⁶³ part thriller, part brand conscious realism, part dreamlike period pieces (the period being 2002 - 2010), and they also pinpoint for me a particular strand of loneliness; the solitary figure hunched over the laptop, the iPhone screen; that I thought might be appropriate to overlap with Coyne's unpicking of pervasive devices.

One precedent I always come back to is Jeff Noon's *Cobralingus*⁶⁴ - both the book itself, and the 'dubs' that appear throughout *Needle In The Groove*.⁶⁵ Discussing his "fluid fiction" where (in *Cobralingus*) texts are combined, exploded, fragmented, Noon explicitly references the shifting layers, fluid structures, and liquidity of electronic music - particularly techno and dub music; the 'rhythms' page of *Needle...* points to Autechre, King Tubby, Pole, Plastikman - and proposes a "dub fiction" where words lose solidity, become "stretched, broken, melted, drugged, mutated, forced into submission, set free."⁶⁶

In *Cobralingus*, 'sample' texts are fed through "filter gates" - processes like *ghost edit*, *explode*, *decay*, *drug* and tellingly, *release virus*.⁶⁷ These are all, as *Cobralingus* points out, *fictional* processes;⁶⁸ mapping the non-linear methods of modular synthesis, Oblique Strategies; "a conflation of self-regenerative recording systems."⁶⁹ Texts by Thomas De Quincey are spliced with chemical symbols, runic names, bits of *Frankenstein*, DNA sequences;⁷⁰ the end result - a sprawling hand-shaped locked groove of letters; ACTGAATCG. The texts Noon selects are pushed in and out of shape, locking into meter and out again, atomised across the page.

Combining the verse of Emily Dickinson with names of musical instruments, body parts, fragmenting processes, leads Noon to:

Well known the voice
Well known where voices start
Well known, well cried, well tuned:
Unknown the heart.

(Extract from *Scarlet Experiment Song*)⁷¹

On the physical page, there is a stopping point, but of course this process could continue indefinitely; an endless remix, an endless regurgitating of texts. No finished, fixed meaning, but a series of possible versions, possible meanings.

The fluidity of Noon's dub fictions finds its twin in the "hands-on transformation of sounds" in dub-influenced techno and other electronic musics. "Dub was a virus that spread like wildfire across much of the electronic music of the 90s"⁷² writes Rob Young in his sleeve-notes to the reissues of the first three Pole albums – a position echoed by Steve Goodman's sketching of a "dub-virology" (for example Underground Resistance's music creating a space of "occulted vibrational battle of cosmic proportions"⁷³) – of bass music as all consuming, producing a "contagious diagram"⁷⁴ that bleeds between genres, and mediums. Which is a useful way to point back to Burroughs and Gysin's cut-up method as a *version* of this contagious diagram.

Returning to Coyne and Gibson, how would a fluid method of generating text work for playing Coyne's generally positive, transformative reading of how pervasive media devices shape our environments and enable innovation, against Gibson's more paranoid concerns (*Zero History* is of course, a spy story on one level)? Might we find a new *version* of this dialogue?

The limitations of this proposed technique became clear fairly early in the process. For example, in unpicking 'tags' and 'taps', Coyne draws on Michel Serres' reading of *parasitism* as "an allegory for the social relationship between host and guest" as a way to frame the shifting positions between device and user, brand and object, even #hashtags and content.⁷⁵ The inter-changeability of host and guest already suggests a fluidity to the process, and I became concerned that the method would add nothing to either my understanding of the tuning of space, or my intention to widen the field with regards to notions of *intimate space*.

The widespread harvesting of metadata by the NSA and GCHQ and other internet traffic exposed by the Edward Snowden leaks in 2013⁷⁶ render attempts to 're-paranoia' the Coyne text using *Zero History* as moot. What to do with a line like this "But since this is England, really, you aren't to consider any phone secure."⁷⁷ Both texts now seemed to be equally seeped in anxiety and uncertainty, and I quietly retired the idea of using this method to generate critical openings.

The pull of the Gibson list continued, however. Reading it out loud produces a little constellation of anxiety and uncertainty – a similar effect to presenting research presentations backwards (see *Research Environment* section) – an unshackling of context produces something new, a space where language “*makes things happen*.”⁷⁸ This is particularly the case when the text is shuffled a little; for example, alphabetising the (non-spoken) quotes removes even more of the sense of original narrative, and the text becomes both less and more interesting. Less interesting, because the language itself, at the sentence level, is unremarkable (deliberately so, I would venture); “She kept a picture of this shower on the iPhone”⁷⁹ – no longer serving the narrative it is, in the end, a little *boring*. More interesting, because we now have material that suggest a *performance*.

A proposal for performing Zero History.

1.

Two versions of text to choose from:

- a. Sentences ‘as is’ in first one hundred pages (**A.**)
- b. Shuffled sentences; trimmed and alphabetised. (**B.**)

2.

To be read aloud.

3.

Interference.

Throughout reading, allow a phone to ring; constantly or intermittently, offstage.

As the dacha burns in Andrei Tarkovsky’s *The Sacrifice* (1986), and as the family rushes back towards their home, a phone begins to ring. The extra layer of panic this brings to the scene⁸⁰ is nerve jangling to say the least – the phone is not ‘seen’ (this all takes place during the long tracking shot of the burning dacha and as Alexander is beginning to be removed in the ambulance), it has “gone elsewhere,” like the ever present but unseen swallows that punctuate the film.⁸¹

Allowing a phone to ring during this reading aims to destabilise the reader and the audience. Not so much ‘against-theatre-convention’ but as a nagging sense of *unfinishedness*. Or to evoke the “feeling of urgency, intolerableness, coercion”⁸² that one of the narrators in Italo Calvino’s *If on a winter’s night a traveller feels*.

A. Phones in the first hundred pages of Zero History

The room phone began to ring.

Another phone ringing, in another room.

Somewhere nearby, Oliver Sleight would be watching a Milgrim-cursor on a website, on the screen of his Neo phone, identical to Milgrim's own.

Sleight, back in Myrtle Beach, had tapped coordinates from the pregnant girl's note into his phone, which now rested on his lap.

She kept a picture of this shower on the iPhone.

Purse, iPhone, key with its tassel.

"Wasn't the NSA or someone tapping your phone, reading your e-mail?"

Milgrim's Neo phone was another example of Sleight's obsession with security or, as Milgrim supposed, control.

When he'd complained about this, Sleight explained that it gave potential attackers only a thirty-second window to get in and read the phone, and that admin privileges were in any case out of the question.

The Neo, Milgrim gathered, was less a phone than a sort of tabula rasa, one which Sleight could field-update, without Milgrim's knowledge or consent, installing or deleting applications as he saw fit.

She got out her iPhone and Googled "Gabriel Hounds."

Hollis put the iPhone down and accepted the bag.

Rausch, his translucently short black hair looking like something sprayed from a nozzle, was waiting for them in front of Blue Ant, the driver having phoned ahead as they'd crept along through the traffic on Beak Street.

But then the phone in Jacob's right hand had played the opening chords of "Box 1 of 1," one of her least favorite Curfew songs.

"In the lobby," he'd said into the phone.

He was turning down the bed when the Neo rang, emulating the mechanical bell on an old telephone.

"Leave the phone in your room tomorrow," Sleight said.

"Mr. Inchmale phoned, minutes ago, to alert us."

The U.K. plug-adaptor was larger than the phone's charger.

He had that now as the woman dipped into her purse, brought up a matte silver phone, opened it, and furrowed her brow.

Milgrim was looking straight into the infinitely deep black pupil that was the phone's camera.

She put the bag and its mysterious contents on the dresser and picked up the phone, French, early twentieth century.

“He had me leave my phone in the room, charging and turned on.”

“Those phones are an Oliver project.”

“But since this is England, really, you aren’t to consider any phone secure.”

“A phone.”

“I kept the money and the phone.”

“You started phoning.”

“Whose phone was that?”

“A black plastic unit, roughly twice the size of the phone?”

“I wanted to know who had her phone.”

“Why did you keep phoning back?”

“We’ll phone you.”

Hollis’s iPhone rang as they were nearing Oxford Street.

“Milgrim,” she said, remembering his name, which Bigend had been unwilling to use over the phone.

“Aldous,” said Aldous, to his iPhone.

Remembering Bigend’s advice about telephones, he didn’t ask where the image had been found, or how.

“More or less,” said Bigend, and hung up, Milgrim returning the iPhone to Aldous’s large, waiting, beautifully manicured hand.

“Fitzroy,” Clammy said, on her iPhone.

“ ‘Kay,” said Clammy, and was gone, the iPhone suddenly inert, empty.

“Do you have a phone number?”

B. Phones in Zero History (Edit)

Another phone ringing, in another room.

As the woman dipped into her purse, brought up a matte silver phone, opened it, and furrowed her brow.

But then the phone in Jacob's right hand had played the opening chords.

He was turning down the bed when the Neo rang, emulating the mechanical bell on an old telephone.

Hollis put the iPhone down and accepted the bag.

Hollis's iPhone rang as they were nearing Oxford Street.

Looking straight into the infinitely deep black pupil that was the phone's camera.

Milgrim's Neo phone was another example of Sleight's obsession with security.

Purse, iPhone, key with its tassel.

Driver having phoned ahead as they'd crept along through the traffic on Beak Street.

Remembering Bigend's advice about telephones, he didn't ask where the image had been found, or how.

She got out her iPhone.

She kept a picture of this shower on the iPhone.

She put the bag and its mysterious contents on the dresser and picked up the phone.

Sleight, back in Myrtle Beach, had tapped coordinates from the pregnant girl's note into his phone, which now rested on his lap.

Sleight explained that it gave potential attackers only a thirty-second window to get in and read the phone.

Somewhere nearby, Oliver Sleight would be watching a Milgrim-cursor on a website, on the screen of his Neo phone, identical to Milgrim's own.

The Neo, Milgrim gathered, was less a phone than a sort of tabula rasa.

The room phone began to ring.

[Brief note on version B. Taking out dialogue, alphabetising the remains; an attempt to make the piece less 'conversational'; to take an extra step away from the source material; to make it more 'readable' in a practical performance sense.]

¹ <http://www.easternpavilions.org/pages/events_archive.html>

² Saunders, J. (2005) What are you doing with your music? In: Marley, B. & Wastell, M. eds. *Blocks of Consciousness and the Unbroken Continuum*. London: Sound323. p.254

³ Cardew, C. (1972) Scratch Orchestra: Draft Constitution. In: Cox, C. & Warner, D. eds. (2004) *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*. New York: Continuum. p.235

The appendix to the Draft Constitution lists example 'Popular Classics' as Beethoven, *Pastoral Symphony*, Rachmaninov, *Second Piano Concerto*, Cage, *Piano Concert*, Schoenberg, *Pierrot Lunaire* and so on – though any work “familiar to several members” was eligible. *ibid* p.237

⁴ In 2011, Sam was documenting these poems on a website - <<http://austerities.tumblr.com>>

The eighty one poems eventually appeared as his first collection: Riviere, S. (2012) *81 Austerities* London: Faber & Faber.

⁵ “I want to listen to quiet sounds that strain my hearing and experience the pressure of it materiality” Voegelin, S. (2011) *Listening To Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art*. New York: Continuum. p.86

⁶ Florian Hecker (2010) *Speculative Solution* Germany: editions mego [CD]. The CD comes in a box with five ball bearings, and a booklet with essays (in French and English) by Robin Mackay, Quentin Meillassoux and Elie Ayache on, amongst other things, hyper-chaos, radical-contingency, and extro-science fiction. The music is spurts, jolts, textures – a psychoacoustic experiment happening in your living room, on your hi-fi.

⁷ Extracts from a definition of Live Art from The Live Art Development Agency website:

“Live Art is a research engine, driven by artists who are working across forms, contexts and spaces to open up new artistic models, new languages for the representation of ideas and identities, and new strategies for intervening in the public sphere.

Influenced at one extreme by late 20th century Performance Art methodologies (where fine artists, in a rejection of objects and markets, turned to their body as the site and material of their practice) and at the other by enquiries where artists broke the traditions of the circumstance and expectations of theatre, a diverse range of practitioners in the 21st century (from those working in dance, film and video, to performance writing, socio-political activism and the emerging languages of the digital age) continue to be excited by the possibilities of the 'event' or 'experience' of art that is live”

Available from: <<http://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/about/what-is-live-art/>>

[Accessed 2 September 2014]

⁸ Though, Cage’s instructions to the piece include the note: “It will be found in many places that the notation is irrational; in such instances the performer is to employ his own discretion.”

John Cage Instructions for Music Of Changes (1951). [Internet] Available from:

<<http://www.blockmuseum.northwestern.edu/picturesofmusic/pages/cage/changeinst.html>>

[Accessed 2 September 14]

⁹ Saunders, J. (2008) Modular Music. *Perspectives of New Music*. [Internet] vol.46 (1) pp.152-193

Available from: <<http://researchspace.bathspa.ac.uk/930/>> [Accessed 5 May 2013]

¹⁰ *ibid* pp.156-157

¹¹ *ibid* p.160

¹² *ibid* pp.158-159

¹³ *ibid*

¹⁴ *ibid* pp.160-161

¹⁵ *ibid* p.167

¹⁶ Harper, A. (2011) *Infinite Music: Imagining the Next Millennium of Human Music Making*. Alresford: Zero Books.

¹⁷ William Brooks quoted in: Saunders, J. & Lely, J. eds. (2012) *Word Events: Perspectives on Verbal Notation*. New York: Continuum. p.147

¹⁸ *ibid* p.144

¹⁹ England, P. (2004) John Cage Uncaged. *Wire*. no.241, p.81

²⁰ Stewart Lee, writing about Derek Bailey in the *Wire*: “Something great music shares with great comedy is the capacity to surprise, to take us out of ourselves and engender a joyous – and not necessarily mean spirited or cynical – laughter.”

Lee, S. (2005) Epiphanies. *Wire*. no.256, p.106

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- ²¹ For example there is a group of musicians who perform Cage pieces (amongst others) using period analogue equipment to deliver “authentic performances of classic electronic music”. The problems of using “authentic” as a reliable descriptor for art works is the subject for another (crosser) study than this one.
- ²² Saunders, J. (2008) op. cit. p.171
- ²³ Harper, A. (2011) op. cit. p.31
- ²⁴ Dom Sylvester Houédard and others. (2012) *Dom Sylvester Houédard and the Cosmic Typewriter*. London, South London Gallery. 2nd December 2012.
- ²⁵ Dom Sylvester Houédard (2010) *FrogPondPlop; The Yoga of Concrete Poetry* Norwich: NUCA Gallery. 23 September 2010 – 16 October 2010.
- ²⁶ Toop, D. (2010) *Sinister Resonance: The Mediumship of the Listener*. New York: Continuum. p.75
- ²⁷ A version of “In each case what is presented is never quite the objects or the word but the *feel* of the moment when MIND e.g. transforms to ACHE or RIOT to SHOT - though the moment itself is enhanced when the feel is supported, as here, by a semantic balance.” DSH (1979) *Cratylus: The English Artist and The Word*. [Internet] London: The British Council. Available from: <<http://collection.britishcouncil.org/collection/artist/5/17691>> [Accessed 26 November 2012]
- ²⁸ *ibid*
- ²⁹ Mitchell, D. (1999) *Ghostwritten* London: Hodder & Stoughton. p.60
- ³⁰ Young, R. (2002) Worship the Glitch. In: Young, R. ed. (2002) *Undercurrents: the hidden wiring of modern music*. New York: Continuum. p.53
- ³¹ Eisenberg, E. (1987) *The Recording Angel* London: Picador. p.41 [my italics]
- ³² Mendelsohn, A. (2006) Be Here Now, *Art Monthly*. October 2006 no.300 pp.13 – 16 Cited in: Jones, A. The Now and the Has Been: Paradoxes of Live Art in History (2012) In: Jones, A. & Heathfield, A. eds. *Perform Repeat Record: Live Art In History*. Bristol: Intellect. p.16 [my italics]
- ³³ For example, John Richards referencing Kabuki theatre in tabletop electronic gestures (see Chapter Two).
- ³⁴ Auslander, P. (2012) The Performativity of Performance Documentation. In: Jones, A. & Heathfield, A. eds. *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*. Bristol, Chicago: Intellect. pp.47-58
- ³⁵ Auslander, P. (2012) *ibid* p.47
- ³⁶ *ibid* pp.54-55
- ³⁷ *ibid* p.53
- ³⁸ *ibid* p.55
- ³⁹ *ibid* p.57
- ⁴⁰ *ibid* p.55
- ⁴¹ DSH (2012) introductionancestryandchronology. In: Simpson, N. ed. (2012) *Notes from the Cosmic Typewriter*. London: Occasional Papers. p.167 [originally from Writers Forum Poets Fifteen, September 1965]
- ⁴² *ibid* p.167
- ⁴³ Simpson, N. (2012) Intro to DSH: frog pond plop overture and phonata in three movements In: Simpson, N. (2012) *ibid* p.107
- ⁴⁴ Perloff, M. (1997). The Music of Verbal Space. John Cage’s “What You Say...”. In: Morris, A. ed. *Sound States: Innovative Poetics and Acoustical Technologies*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. pp.132-133
- ⁴⁵ DSH (2012) Concrete Poetry & Ian Hamilton Finlay. In: Simpson, N. (2012) *ibid* p.157
- ⁴⁶ *ibid* p.159
- ⁴⁷ *ibid* p.160
- ⁴⁸ Chion, M. (1983/2009) *Guide Des Objets Sonores: Pierre Schaeffer et la recherche musicale. Guide To Sound Objects: Pierre Schaeffer and Musical Research*. Translated from the French by John Dack and Christine North. [Internet] pp.11 – 12. Available from: <<http://www.ears.dmu.ac.uk/IMG/pdf/Chion-guide/GuidePreface.pdf>> [Accessed 28 September 2011]
- ⁴⁹ At University of the Arts, London. 17 February 2012.

- ⁵⁰ Golemba, H. (1988) Unreading Thoreau. *American Literature*. [Internet] vol.60 (3) p.398 Available from: <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2926956>> [Accessed 29 August 2014]
- ⁵¹ Retallack, J. (1996) *Musicage: Cage Muses On Words Art Music*. Hanover: University Press of New England/Wesleyan University Press. p.xxvii
- ⁵² *ibid* pp.67-68
- ⁵³ [sic] see Retallack, J. (1996) *op. cit.* p.xxxii
- ⁵⁴ Cage, J. (1961) *Silence: Lectures and Writings*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press. p.x
- ⁵⁵ Mercy: Language and Media Arts (2014) Who We Are. [Internet] Available from: <<http://mercyonline.co.uk/who-we-are/what-we-believe>> [Accessed 31 March 2015]
- ⁵⁶ Dunthorne, J. (2010) Sestina for My Friends. In: Dunthorne, J. (2010) *Faber New Poets 5*. London: Faber & Faber. pp.6-7
- ⁵⁷ Retallack, J. (1996) *op. cit.* p.xxxii
- ⁵⁸ Philips, T. (1980/1997) Notes on *A Humument*. In: Philips, T. *A Humument: A Treated Victorian Novel*. Second edition. London: Thames & Hudson. [unnumbered page]
- ⁵⁹ Retallack, J. (1996) *op. cit.* p.xxxii
- ⁶⁰ Research questions, for example.
- ⁶¹ Gibson, W. (2010) *Zero History*. London: Penguin.
- ⁶² Coyne, R. (2010) *The Tuning of Place: Social Spaces and Pervasive Digital Media*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press
- ⁶³ *Pattern Recognition* (2003), *Spook Country* (2007), *Zero History* (2010). London: Penguin.
- ⁶⁴ Noon, J. (2001a) *Cobralingus*. Hove: Codex Books.
- ⁶⁵ Noon, J. (1999) *Needle In The Groove*. Transworld: London.
- ⁶⁶ Noon, J. (2001b) How to make a modern novel. *Guardian*. 10 January 2001. [Internet] Available from: <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/jan/10/fiction.film>> [Accessed 4 August 2014]
- ⁶⁷ Noon, J. (2001a) *op. cit.* pp.13-15
- ⁶⁸ Though Noon's website points to an "online cut-up engine" – courtesy of the Lazarus Corporation. Available from: <<http://archive.lazaruscorporation.co.uk/cutup/textinput.php>>
- ⁶⁹ Bracewell, M. (2001a) The Metamorphiction of Jeff Noon. Foreword: *Cobralingus*. *ibid* p.5
- ⁷⁰ Noon, J. (2001) Bridal Suite Production. *ibid* pp.35-44
- ⁷¹ *ibid* p.91
- ⁷² Young, R. (2008) Sleeve-notes to: Pole (2008) *1, 2, 3*. Germany: ~scape. [3xCD]
- ⁷³ Goodman, S. (2010) *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press. p.159
- ⁷⁴ *ibid* p.160
- ⁷⁵ Coyne, R. (2010) *The Tuning of Place: Social Spaces and Pervasive Digital Media*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press. pp.134-136
- ⁷⁶ MacAskill, E., Borger, J., Hopkins, N., Davies, N., & Ball, J. (2013) GCHQ taps fibre-optic cables for secret access to world's communications. *Guardian*. 21 June 2013. [Internet] Available from: <<http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/jun/21/gchq-cables-secret-world-communications-nsa>> [Accessed 5 August 2014]
- ⁷⁷ Gibson, W. (2010) *op. cit.* p.66
- ⁷⁸ Etchells, T. Royal Shakespeare Company (2012) *Be Stone No More | myShakespeare | Royal Shakespeare Company* [Internet] Available from: <<http://myshakespeare.rsc.org.uk/gallery/be-stone-no-more-a-tabletop-shakespeare-by-tim-etchells/>> [Accessed 20 December 2012]
- ⁷⁹ Gibson, W. (2010) *op. cit.* p.16
- ⁸⁰ Svensson, O. (2001) On Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice*. In: Sider, L. Freeman, D. Sider, J. eds. (2003) *Soundscape: The School of Sound Lectures 1998 – 2001*. London: Wallflower. p.117
- ⁸¹ Chion, M. (1994) *Audio-Vision*. Translated from the French by Claudia Gorbman. New York: Columbia University Press. p.124
- ⁸² Calvino, I. (1981) *If on a winter's night a traveller*. London: Picador. p.106

Introduction to Portfolio

The practical works which appear in the Portfolio represent the latest version of each piece, but perhaps not the final one. They exist at a point in their development somewhere between the fixed and un-fixed, where they can regain their potential. After being performed, after going through ‘repertoire’ versions, after being unpicked by the ‘writing through’ present in Chapter Three, these pieces are saying “where shall we go next?”

Each piece exists as a pairing of one image, and one page of text, bearing a short score. In fact, the score is deliberately the most stripped back version of each I have arrived at (so far), simply as an attempt towards encouraging openness again. This pairing is a deliberate nod to *Six Years*-period conceptual art,¹ but the reduced nature of the words/scores arises in part from my reading of Manfred Werder’s text scores, particularly *2005/1*.

This barely there text score comprises of six words – three in German, three in English; *ort*, *zeit*, *klänge*, place, time, sounds.² Within this grouping, as with Cage’s *4’33”*, there are worlds of possibility. These are carefully considered words, and the relationship between the two languages adds to the play of possibility – for composer and writer John Lely, the lack of the definitive article in the English section “may suggest broader philosophical meanings,”³ and Werder himself highlights the importance of leaving out (for example) the ‘Die’ from *zeit* – without it, “its signification and style is much more floating.”⁴ Lely goes on to say:

“the brackets around the words ‘klänge/sounds’, along with the slight spatial separation from the other words in either group, are intended to signify that while time and place are determined, any sounds that occur might or might not be intentional; intended sounds are optional and there will certainly be sounds occurring in the environment anyway.”⁵

I’m pursuing this point because it illustrates the openness and malleability of text scores in general; how extra commentary can frame the piece to a lesser or greater degree. For example, Werder’s comments on indeterminacy and scores in *Word Events* “Indeterminacy happens as intrinsic unavailability of world [...] language oscillates between power and unavailability. A score reflects this structure”⁶ allows us to see these text scores (like *2005/1*) as part of a continuum of interpretation – often a start point, yes, but mid-point too (for example after a piece has been performed, actualised, a number of times there may be codification, revision, publication, sharing); as well as end point; all layers (context, realisation, commentary) stripped away until we’re left with these haiku-like points.

A further layer in the interpretation of any score is the performer’s own realisation notes – the scrawled pencil arcs of phrasing on piano notation, a list of patch points in a notebook alongside stop-watch timings, a commentary on the process. These notes exist beforehand, for the performer, but also afterwards; a *trace of decisions taken*.

For example, David Tudor's performance notes Cage's *Variations II* add an extra dimension to our understanding of this piece; on the one hand unpicking the choices made in translating Cage's lines on the pages of the score into notation that Tudor considered playable – notes that define timbre, frequency, amplitude etc. On the other hand, Tudor's performance notes, distilled into 'nomographs'; square grids of dots and spaces, represent very particular transcription of Cage's scores. A transcription based on measuring lines that leads to a system of 'simple/complex' switches that Tudor uses to perform the piece.⁷ *A trace of decisions taken.*

In 2013, the Sheffield-based label Another Timbre commissioned a number of realisations of *2005/1* (with the additional extra-score instruction that realisations should not last longer than 15 minutes). Approaches and outcomes vary; degrees of intentional and non-intentional sounds; most of the accompanying text is closer to programme or liner notes than performance notes – Matt Davis finds the score almost "too open", Lee Patterson worries about the "validity" of his realisation, Anett Németh wonders whether her version "even truly remains a piece by Manfred Werder."⁸ It is (as one might expect), quite heavily weighted towards field recording of one sort or another, and while some are more 'successful' than others, all are compelling.

The accompanying text that leans closest to 'performance notes as new layer of score' is that by Patrick Farmer. Farmer's audio realisation of *2005/1* is a low rumble of percussion – a kettle drum, perhaps – a textured, less-dynamic twin of a James Tenney piece, perhaps. But the accompanying text is an extra fold in the process – flashes of images and sounds in fragmented sentences; containing the lines "much and much the ever evolving sameness" and "(a man angered by another man's sneezing)."⁹

This text, hinting at other texts, paintings (Wallace Stevens, Philip Guston), sounds, could be text-as-score-as *unsound object*. Its use of brackets mirror the brackets in Werder's score, but moves beyond simple echoing (and moves beyond the audio realisation) by encouraging new *readings* – not a technical process based programme note, but a new work that, while still pointing to Werder's score, asks us to think of it as *both* realistic and held in the imagination only.

This is what I am aiming for with the 'reduced' text score versions of the practical work. Text that prompts both a backward look to earlier version, *and* opens the original score to radical re-versioning. This then is the aim; this is the final question of the research project. Can the *unsound object* – and the associated methods – be used to re-version, re-make, these pieces?

¹ Lippard, L. (1973) *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

² The (typo)graphical arrangement of this score can be seen in: Lely, J. & Saunders, J. eds. (2012) *Word Events: Perspectives on Verbal Notation*. New York: Continuum. p.377
Also available from: <[http://www.anothertimbre.com/werder2005\(1\).html](http://www.anothertimbre.com/werder2005(1).html)>
[Accessed 12 September 2014]

³ Lely, J. Commentary: 2005/1 In: Lely, J. & Saunders, J. (2012) *ibid* p.382

⁴ Werder, M. (2012) *ibid* p.383

⁵ Lely, J. (2012) *ibid* p.383

⁶ Werder, M. (2012) *ibid* p.381

⁷ Pritchett, J. (2004) David Tudor as Composer/Performer in Cage's Variations II. *Leonardo music Journal*. [Internet] vol.14 p.13

Available from: < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1513500>> [Accessed 15 September 2014]

⁸ Quotes from Matt Davis, Lee Patterson and Anett Németh taken from their pages on the Another Timbre/2005/1 website. [Internet] Available from:

<[http://www.anothertimbre.com/werder2005\(1\).html](http://www.anothertimbre.com/werder2005(1).html)>

[Accessed 15 September 2014]

⁹ Farmer, P. (2013) 2005(1) Available from:

<<http://www.anothertimbre.com/farmer2005.html>>

[Accessed 15 September 2014]

Portfolio
John Boursnell
2014

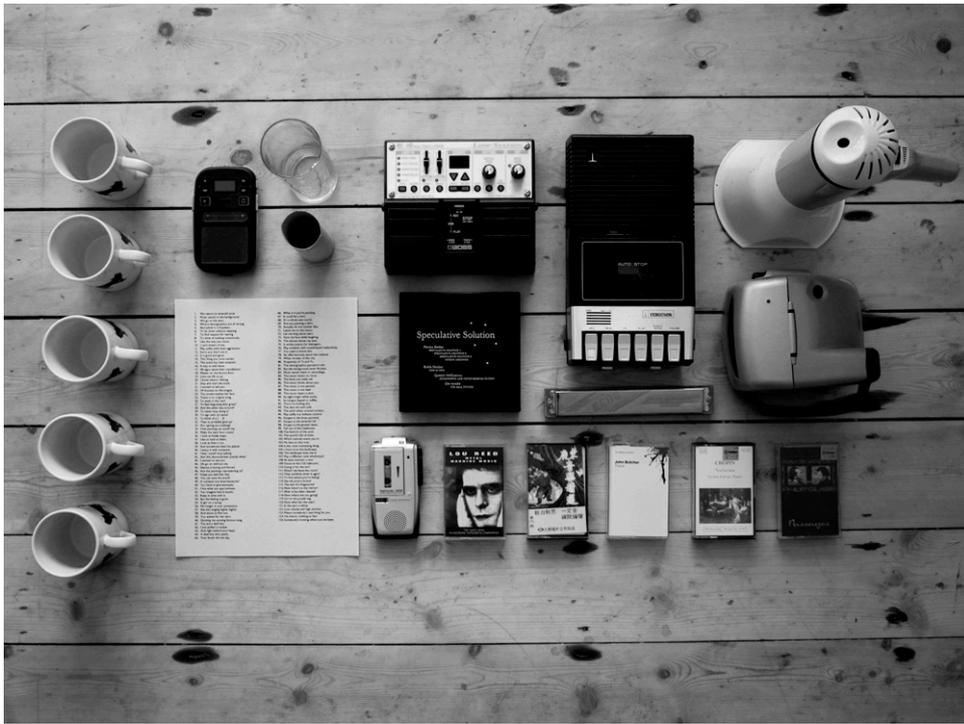
5 actions / 5 texts / 5 songs

frog pond plop

A Young Person's Guide to...

Research Environment

Phones in the first hundred pages of Zero History



5 actions / 5 texts / 5 songs

[5 actions]

[5 texts]

[5 songs]



frog pond plop

[seventeen syllables]



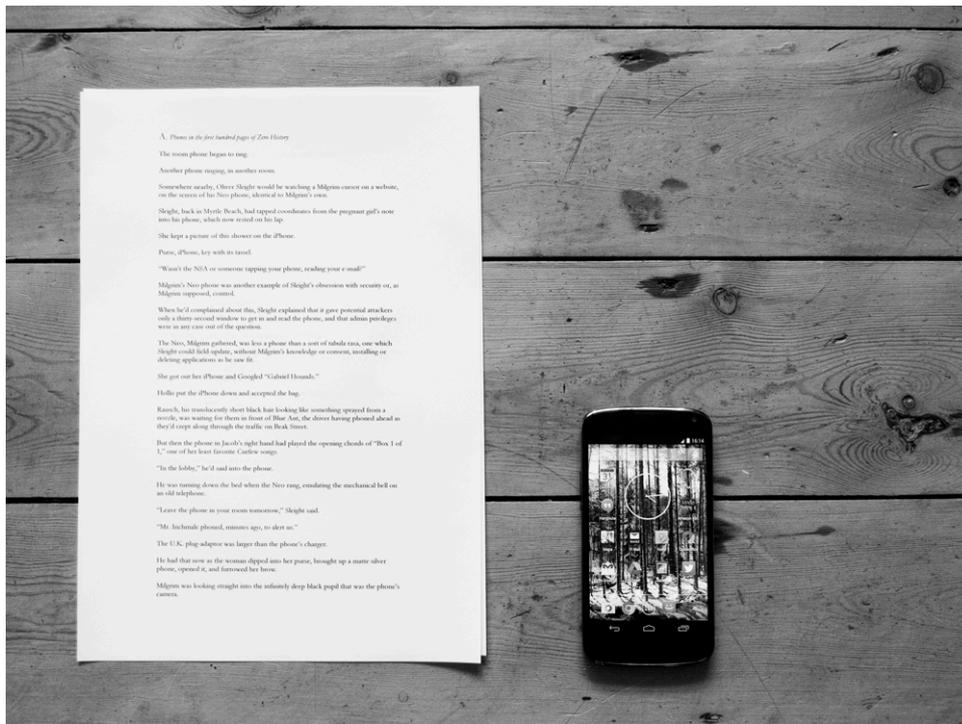
A Young Person's Guide...

- [to musique concrète]
- [to the orchestra]
- [to discipline]
- [to John Fahey]
- [to Marxism]
- [to knowing]



Research Environment

[to be read aloud]



Phones in the first hundred pages of Zero History

[to be read aloud]

[interference]

Conclusion/A Starting Point.

This project, *the unsound object and intimate space*, has proposed that thinking and writing about sound, music, performance and space is often many things at once. The project, by taking Christof Migone's notion of *unsound* into new areas (using it to open up the sound object proposed by Pierre Schaeffer for example), and proposing *intimate space* as transitory "small moments of space," has opened up the process of writing about sound, and performing with sound (at least with regards to my own practice) to multiple, simultaneous readings.

These simultaneous readings are made possible by the project's drawing on multiple histories, a pluralisation also suggested by Migone; but rather than producing *histories*, the project has produced the *unsound object* as a collection of methods, of processes, of details that allow more interesting questions to be asked when we encounter listening and performance.

An *unsound object* that oscillates, an *intimate space* made up of 'small moments'; these framings describe a new territory where music outside of sound, sound inside of writing, space as imagination and space as method can overlap fruitfully.

These conclusions could only be reached through the way the project was constructed; by combining strands of thought from different disciplines, by interweaving contextual examples with the argument (rather than separating them into a traditional contextual review), by detouring through exploratory writing (for example the account of listening to *A Folding Table* that appears in Chapter Two). The conclusion of the project remains as *unfixed* as the framework that produced it.

There are limitations to this approach of course; with many positions overlapping, there is the possibility of losing focus, of the eventual outcome being obscured. I believe the project has mostly avoided this, by keeping the chapters relatively specialised, despite some overlap. One approach to an unfixed method would have been to run all the texts together in a continuous block; while this would have been appropriate to the spirit of the project, I believe the framework as it stands has served the project well, reining in (most of) the urge to produce purely freeform texts.

One of the aims for this project was to create a 'toolkit' that could be used in the creation of new work. I've already written that the *unsound object* could be seen as a collection of methods; is the idea of a toolkit just a useful way to arrange these collections, a super set of methods and approaches? A way to tally up all the variables of this particular system?

The methodology of a project tells the story of how we got here, to a nominal conclusion. The accumulated methods used by the project, evolving as part of the process, are the tools that made this possible – for example the reading of Pierre Schaeffer's sound object as method (see Chapter One), the encounter with writing

through as a way of generating questions (see Chapter Three) – but I think a toolkit could be something a little different.

In César Aira’s short novel *An Episode in the Life of a Landscape Painter*, the painter Rugendas suggests that if the stories we tell to explain our history and culture were removed, their absence could be better filled by a set of stylistic tools that would allow significant events and experiences to be made anew “with the innocent spontaneity of action.”¹ In this way, “art is more useful than discourse.”² Where Rugendas’ toolkit is focused on an authentic repetition of actions (bringing to mind Eisenberg’s ideas of ritual), a toolkit emerging from the *unsound object* and *intimate space* would perhaps focus on *not* recreating the end point of the process (“the PhD”), and on resisting repetition.

One step from unsound method to unsound toolkit might be to remove some of the specifics of the method (*unsound* as collection of writing through, music outside of sound, an open approach to sound objects as method etc.) to open up the whole system to the *n*th degree. So instead of purely music outside of sound, a toolkit could propose a voice outside of meaning (as per Dolar), text outside of language and so on. All these reversals and separations would become part of an ever-expanding way to approach creative actions, tending towards the infinite variables described by Adam Harper in *Infinite Music*.³

However this has the potential to bring us back in a circular fashion to the problem of codifying systems identified by Salomé Voegelin – the undermining of radical potential (see Chapter Three)⁴ – and the suggestion of an infinite serialism, and its suggestion of total control of all possible variables.

So for a toolkit to be workable in the spirit of the project, it must go beyond a collection of methods, beyond recreation of actions and beyond repetition, whilst encouraging the short circuits, errors, failures and contradictions that would allow it to fall happily short of the “pedantic automaton”⁵ that a position of infinite serialism might come to represent. This in-between-ness seems appropriate within the scope the project *as it stands*, but the test of whether the proposed toolkit remains relevant comes with the creation of new work.

The project has proposed *the unsound object* and *intimate space*; and as a starting point, a toolkit that takes the next step will lead to brand new works that celebrate their *uncertainty*, their ability to draw connections between live art, sound art, and the new strands of conceptual literature that draw from OuLiPo and concrete poetry as much as the appropriation techniques suggested by a wobbly line from Marcel Duchamp to Kenneth Goldsmith.

These new works will refuse to be just one thing. The practical pieces accompanying the written text were created alongside it, testing ideas, informing areas of the research; gesture, writing through, ritual. In the introduction to this project, I

wrote that I was always uncertain whether the practical pieces were live art, or sound art, or live literature. Now, although I've touched briefly on some of the economic necessities for fixing pieces as repertoire, and out of necessity to the project must briefly fix some of these outcomes as portfolio pieces, as to conclusions, I am still uncertain.

The *unsound object* will change how I listen, of that I am sure. It will change how I make work, how I write. I hope it will start more discussions than it ends; the aim has always been to open up possibilities, rather than pin them down in neat categories. I've also always considered *intimate space* to be an ideal to be aimed at, but in framing it as a collection of overlapping states, I suggest that it might be approached more as a catalyst for *unsound approaches*. A catalyst to produce both focus *and* uncertainty.

The *unsound object* and *intimate space* are unfixed points. They are open conversations. They are clouds of possibilities. Collections of moments that, despite their appearance here on the page, resist codification.

¹ Aira, C. (2000) *An Episode in the Life of a Landscape Painter*. Translated by Andrews, C. London: Penguin. p.26

² *ibid*

³ Harper, A. (2011) *Infinite Music: Imagining the Next Millennium of Human Music Making*. Alresford: Zero Books.

⁴ Voegelin, S. (2011) *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art*. New York: Continuum. p.35

⁵ Aira, C. (2000) *op. cit.* p.43 In this section, Rugendas is talking about the physiognomic procedure, the “universal knowledge machine”, which he has previously not questioned. The parallels seemed appropriate here.

DVD track-list.

1.
5 actions / 5 texts / 5 songs
21 October 2011
Eastern Pavilions
Battersea
[camera: Holly Rumble]

2.
5 actions / 5 texts / 5 songs
1 November 2012
SPILL Festival
Ipswich
[camera: John Bournnell & Holly Rumble]

3.
frog pond plop
2 December 2012
DSH and the Cosmic Typewriter
South London Gallery
London
[camera: Tom Simmons & Josh Carver]

4.
A Young Person's Guide to Musique Concrète
4 May 2013
Sampled Festival
Cambridge Junction
Cambridge
[camera: John Bournnell & Holly Rumble]

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