

WHAT USE IS MUSIC IN AN OCEAN OF SOUND?

Towards an object-orientated arts practice

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Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work.

Name: Austin Sherlaw-Johnson

Signature:

Date: 23/01/18

Abstract

What Use is Music in an Ocean of Sound? is a reflective statement upon a body of artistic work created over approximately five years. This work, which I will refer to as "object-orientated", was specifically carried out to find out how I might fill artistic spaces with art objects that do not rely upon expanded notions of art or music nor upon explanations as to their meaning undertaken after the fact of the moment of encounter with them. My drive to create these objects was fuelled by a reaction against the work of other practitioners that I felt did not fulfil these criteria and lacked the self-awareness required to appreciate the cultural context within which it is produced. The title of this thesis is metaphorical and refers to the idea that cultural production is no use if it is not distinct from that which surrounds it. My practice is an attempt to produce objects that are self-consciously and self-reliantly distinct. It is no use for anything other than that.

Preface

Although the main title of this thesis contains the word music, what is presented here is in fact a transition away from a use of solely musical means towards the adoption of a variety of artistic methods in an attempt to create what is described in the thesis's subtitle: an object-orientated arts practice. My use of the term "object-orientated", borrowed from the concept of "object-orientated programming" (OOP) as used in the field of computing¹, is not intended to have much deeper significance other than I feel it describes my desire to produce clearly defined art objects. My use of the term is deliberately shallow: this is in common with the rest of my practice, which, as with OOP, makes use of self-contained functions and blocks of pre-existing data rather than procedural logic. At the outset of my PhD I began by restricting myself to creating objects using only the materials of musical composition, partly because my background was largely in music and partly because I feel an important part of my process is limiting myself to the use of only certain, clearly defined materials. Materials that, in a sense, already pre-exist, as is the case with the symbols of notated music. As will be further described below, in time I came to widen my practice to include many different materials and modes of production such as video, installation and performance art. It is a fundamental principle of my practice, learned from the history of over a century of contemporary, or modern, or avant-garde art, that an art object is anything that is presented as art and an art context is anywhere anything is presented as an art object.

A further fundamental principle is what I term the "moment of encounter": this is when the art object is apprehended by a person other than the creator of that object. Because my practice is object-orientated this point is of central importance and I often focus upon it to the exclusion of anything that comes before it (the thoughts and processes of the artist) and anything that comes after (the thoughts, if any, of the person apprehending the object). The objects I produce strive to draw attention to nothing but themselves and do not rely upon anything that is not of the object itself. I feel that this approach is necessary as I require that my objects attempt to stand apart from their wider cultural context: what is characterised in my title as the "ocean of sound". What at first might seem to be an inward turning process is, in fact, the opposite as it presents

¹ [wikipedia.org/wiki/Object-oriented_programming](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Object-oriented_programming) (accessed 12/17).

objects that steadfastly refuse to rely on what I term as "expanded notions of art": following on from the notion that anything can be art, it is a very commonly encountered assumption that the objects of art or music can expand beyond their defining context. This, I would contend, is deluded as the wider cultural context, the "ocean of sound" in the case of music, cares nothing at all, by its very nature, what other sound, musical or otherwise, is added to it. An object-orientated practice does not believe that its objects can escape such a fate, they do not claim to be "pure" art forms, only that by clearly limiting their overt functioning to the moment of encounter one can at least limit the inevitable absorption and dilution that results from immersion. One could envisage producing objects that solely function as something against which you stub your toe or snag your clothing. Of course, I am not claiming that an artist should literally only produce physical objects, as has already been stated, anything can be presented as an art object, including nothing (as it so often is). According to an object-orientated approach nothing is nothing but a negative object.

The statement that "nothing is nothing but a negative object" is an example of what I call the "superficial reading of art objects": so many and varied are the objects that are chosen to be presented as art objects, as are the reasons given for why they have been chosen and their interpretation, that it is useful to have a tool that focuses solely upon the moment of encounter. In the light of this object-orientated approach it is entirely possible to refer to art objects as being "wrongly situated" or "weak", these judgements are made solely in accordance with the superficial reading of art objects as it is applied at the moment of encounter. An object that is wrongly situated is one where the focus is away from the moment of encounter, commonly in the thought processes of the artist, or the relations between the artist and performer (if there is one) or in an attempt to manipulate the audience's reaction to the work. For me the power of objects that are wrongly situated is that they make clear to me the need for objects that are "clearly defined". This is hopefully elucidated in the many examples of other artists' work I use throughout this thesis: mine is largely a reactive process, hence the need for what might seem at times to be rather blunt criticism. Objects that are clearly defined exist as such largely in reaction to objects that are wrongly situated.

The chapters in this thesis are not ordered in such a way as to give a chronological view of my practice, instead descriptions of my work and the works of others are grouped together in chapters that concentrate upon the concepts outlined above. As in my practice, what I am employing here can be seen as an object-orientated approach in which various components can be taken and "plugged in" in any number of different combinations to provide different juxtapositions and trajectories. A chronological trajectory is presented in the portfolio that accompanies this thesis. I stress here, and it is entirely consistent with my method, that these concepts should function as tools that are quick and easy to use rather than they should withstand rigorous philosophical scrutiny. That objects are produced as a result of my process is what is important. My outcomes are objects not thoughts.

My first chapter, *Running South in as Straight a Line as Possible*, begins with the "ocean of sound" and introduces the concept of the moment of encounter and how work can be wrongly situated in accordance with it. My second chapter is split into two parts and focuses further on the moment of encounter and various attempts I have made to produce clearly defined work that occupies it. The first part, *Running is Better than Walking*, focuses mainly upon the physical relation with the audience; the second, *What You See is What You Get*, focuses mainly upon the intention and expectations of the artist (and their audience). The third chapter, *Filling (and Emptying) Musical Spaces*, is the first that deals with matters specifically musical: in this case my relationship with the notated score and its object status. The fourth chapter is also split into two parts: the first, *On the Superficial Reading of Art Objects*, introduces the concept; the second, *Exhibiting Boxes*, uses minimalist art and piano destruction as case-studies with which to investigate the concept and its implications further. The fifth, *Making Sounds Happen is More Important than Careful Listening*, is my second musical chapter and in it I give an overview of how I first developed an object-orientated approach in my musical compositions. The two parts of the sixth chapter, *Little or No Input* and *What Use is Art if it is No Different from life?*, look at object-orientated ways of doing little or nothing in the name of art and the doing of anything. The seventh chapter, *A Short Ride in a Fast Machine*, hurtles towards the conclusion while considering what I see as the wider cultural context for my work.

CHAPTER 1: Running South in as Straight a Line as Possible

Description of Work: Running South in as Straight a Line as Possible

The performer sits with his back to the audience facing a large television screen. Using a games console and a suitable game, the performer, playing as a character in the chosen game, runs as far as possible in a southerly direction in as straight a line as possible. When performed as part of the of Art of Culture of conference in 2014², I played as the character Franklin Clinton from Grand Theft Auto V³, using his safehouse in the Vinewood Hills as the starting point and "dying" approximately four minutes later when hit by a car on the Del Perro Freeway. The only accompanying text given to the audience was the title: Running South in as Straight a Line as Possible and my name: Austin Sherlaw-Johnson.

I begin this reflective statement with the description of a work that may seem to have very little to do with its title. The title *What use is Music in an Ocean of Sound?* refers to David Toop's influential monograph *Ocean of Sound* of 1995 in the *Prologue* of which the author makes various pronouncements about sound and music:

"What follows is a collection of diverse views, thoughts, experiences. They trace an expansiveness, an opening out of music...examining some of the ways in which music has reflected the world back to itself and to its listeners."

"The sound object, represented most dramatically by the romantic symphonies of the nineteenth century, has been fractured and remade into a shifting, open lattice on which new ideas can hang, or through which they can pass and interweave..."

"This past hundred years of expansiveness in music...has been preparing us for the electronic ocean of the next century. As the world has moved towards becoming an information ocean, so music has become immersive. Listeners float in that ocean..." (Toop, 1995, pp. xi-xiii)

² *of art of culture of: A dialogue on truths and imagination*. Conference, Oxford 2014.

³ *Grand Theft Auto V*. Video game, Rockstar Games, 2013.

As will be demonstrated by the analysis of various case-studies throughout this essay, the belief in expansiveness that Toop's text exemplifies is not only central to much of the avant-garde and experimental traditions of music, and associated tendencies towards sound or sonic art⁴, but is also the rationale behind many modern and contemporary art practices. In music the use of improvisation, indeterminacy, extended techniques, silence, minimalism, complexity, electronics and multi-media all point towards the idea that music (and sound) still have a life beyond what has already been thought, felt or said. As will also be further explored in this essay, I would argue that one important reason why these techniques became so prevalent is that they are needed to simply fill a void: empty space in empty concert halls. This void was left after the demise, or near demise, of what might be termed the Classical Music Project. The loss of confidence and lack of relevance that was suddenly felt by classical musicians as the last century ended is evidenced by the appearance of many books that took a defensive stance: *Who Needs Classical Music?* (Johnson, 2002), *Classical Music, Why Bother?* (Fineberg, 2006), *Why Classical Music Still Matters* (Kramer, 2007). According to Alex Ross, the composer György Ligeti, shortly before his death in 2006, felt no one needed it:

"In his last years (Ligeti) was haunted by the feeling...that he had outlived the age in which music mattered...(that) classical composition is being sustained past its date of expiration." (Ross, 2009, p. 562)

Based on personal experience of over a decade's worth of work produced since Toop's book was published, I came seriously to doubt the expansive claims that are so often made for work that relied on the techniques listed above. Instead I found that what was being inadvertently spoken of was the limitations of such possibilities. The work's desire to escape distracts from its inability to do so. Central to this is the idea that in its attempts to uncover new territories this sort of work is deferred away from the point of encounter with another, and this point of encounter is necessarily where it needs to be if it is to work as work at all. David Toop continues with his maritime analogies in a

⁴ Take, for example, Brandon LaBelle's assertion that what he believes to be the "ultimate contribution of sound art: to make the audible the very promise to deliver the unknowable" (LaBelle, 2010, p. xviii) or Christian Marclay: "I think it is sound's nature to be free and uncontrollable and to go through the cracks and to go places where it's not supposed to go." (quoted in Licht, 2007, p. 11)

recent book on free improvisation: *Into the Maelstrom: Music, Improvisation and the Dream of Freedom*, in it he gives an account of a performance by the musician Sachiko M:

"Sachiko M sits on a theatre stage alone...She begins in silence, a silence intermittently pinpricked by high tones, small clicks, some abrasive electronic bursts...Soon there are sections of the crowd given over to shouting, booing and whistling. Sachiko continues, seemingly unperturbed. The sounds she produces are not too loud or disturbing in themselves yet they seem to propose something too unsettling for this crowd, something about form, the way sounds can articulate time in order to penetrate the body, connect the body more closely with its environment, most of all force the body to listen without ears or memory." (Toop, 2016, pp. 7-8)

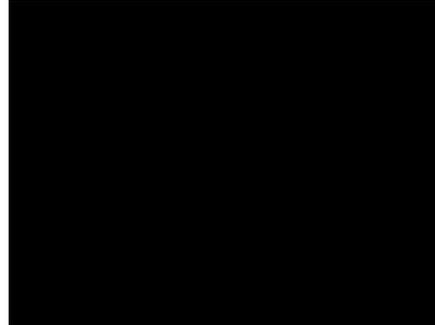


Figure 1: Sachiko M.

Toop's assumption here is that the silence, "high tones" etc. are something more than how they are perceived by an ignorant and insensitive audience. There is no suggestion that, at the moment of encounter, the lack is in the materials themselves rather than in the audience.

An example of deferral away from the moment of encounter, which, superficially at least, has some equivalence with my *Running South in as Straight a Line as Possible*, is Jennifer Walshe's *This is Why People O.D. on Pills/And Jump from the Golden Gate Bridge* of 2004. The following is taken from the (text) score (fig.2):

"This piece is performed by 1-10 performers performing on any instruments (including voice). Each performer prepares and practices their own individual 'path' according to the directions given below. The piece consists of the performance of this/these paths." (Sauer, 2009, p. 269)

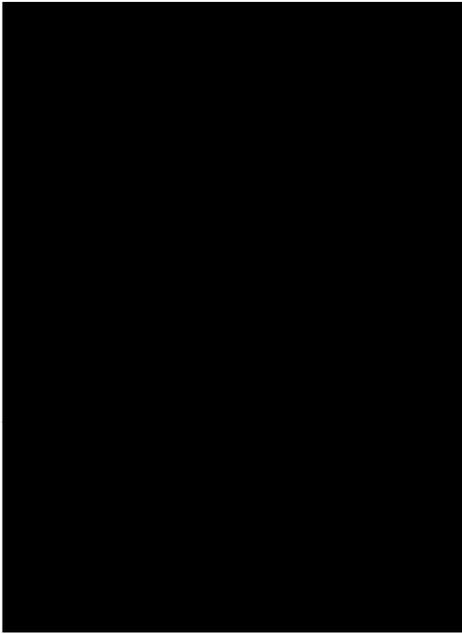


Figure 2: Jennifer Walshe: *This is Why People O.D. on Drugs/And Jump from the Golden Gate Bridge*.

The directions are that each performer "learn to skateboard" and describe, at length, how they are to do this correctly in order to perform the piece. When it comes to the actual performance the performers are instructed to:

"choose a pitch on your instrument. Skate your imagined path on this pitch...Pay attention to every minute detail, the micro-cartography of the path you are skating...Reveal and inhabit new spaces, smooth new lines." (ibid.)

Quite apart from what can be interpreted as a thinly disguised attempt to gain some sort of relevance with its references to pop culture⁵, what is obvious here is that, if the score is enacted, almost all of the work takes place before the moment of encounter and has little to do with the result and any meaning it may, or may not have. I would argue that the strongest moment of encounter for work such as *This is Why People OD on Pills* is when it is encountered as a score. This could be as a performer, leading to its ultimately irrelevant outcome⁶, or simply as a person who encounters it as an art/musical object, where it speaks of its status as such an object. It is the point where it is most clear what the composer of music has done, or suggested to be done, or deliberately failed to do, in order to fill some space with some musical art.

I embarked upon my PhD determined to make work that wouldn't rely upon expansive notions of art. At first I attempted to achieve this by only composing music that was clear in its use and presentation of materials: this meant restricting myself to writing traditionally notated music to be conventionally played on traditional instruments within traditional contexts. It soon became apparent, however, that what interested me in such

⁵ The title of Walshe's score is taken from the lyrics of a song by The Handsome Family: www.metrolyrics.com/weightless-again-lyrics-handsome-family.html (accessed 12/17).

⁶ One doesn't even have to hear the piece to know this: according to this superficial reading the strong interaction is between the score and its beholder.

work was not the musical outcomes but the action of filling what would be an otherwise empty space, an action that could easily be undertaken in different art contexts using a range of different media and materials. As has been well documented, there has been considerable cross-over between experimental music and the visual arts⁷, and perhaps because of this, this transition felt entirely natural and unsurprising to me.



Figure 3: Robert Barry: *Closed Gallery Redux*.

Modern and contemporary art has, of course, wanted to expand beyond its limits for decades, often exhibiting very little or nothing in the process. Lucy Lippard's preface to the 1990s reissue of her classic *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object* is entitled *Escape Attempts*, this is how it ends:

"Conceptualists indicated that the most exciting 'art' might still be buried in social energies not yet recognized as art. The process of expanding the boundaries didn't stop with Conceptual art. These energies are still out there, waiting for artists to plug into them, potential fuel for the expansion of what 'art' can mean. The escape was temporary. Art was recaptured and sent back to the white cell, but parole is always a possibility." (Lippard, 1997, p. xxii)

Earlier in the same preface Lippard lists various "escape attempts":

"(Robert) Barry rejected the closed claustrophobic spaces of the gallery system by closing the gallery for one of his shows. (Daniel) Buren sealed off the entrance to a gallery space in Milan with his trademark white-and-one-color striped fabric, 'opening' and 'closing' the show in one move. In Argentina Graciela

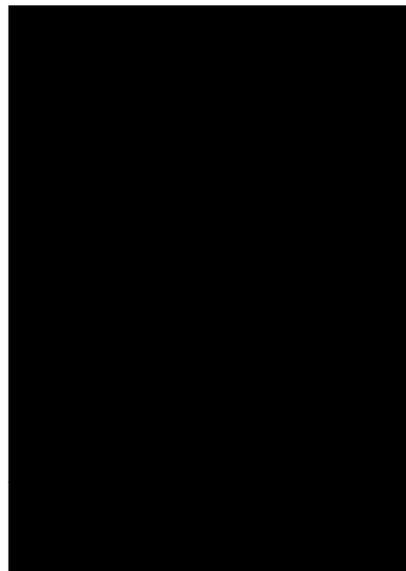
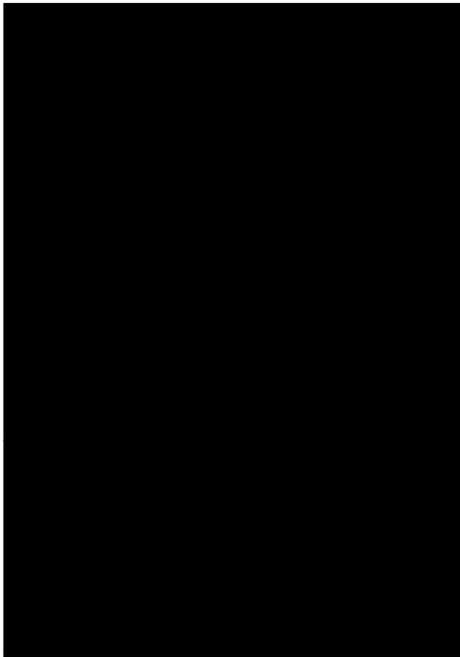


Figure 4: Daniel Buren at the Apollinaire Gallery in Milan in 1968.

⁷ See, for example, David Ryan's *'We have Eyes as well as Ears...': Experimental Music and the Visual Arts* (Ryan, 2009).

Carnevale welcomed opening visitors to a totally empty room; the door was hermetically sealed without them knowing it...After more than an hour, the 'prisoners' broke the glass window and escaped." (Lippard, 1997, p. xx)

It is my contention in this thesis that the idea of escape is illusory. As the landscape artist Robert Smithson is quoted as saying:



"There's no exit, no road to utopia, no great beyond in terms of exhibition space" and "All legitimate art deals with limits. Fraudulent art feels that it has no limits. The trick is to locate those elusive limits...You are always running against those limits..." (quoted in Ursprung, 2013, p. 175)

Running South in as Straight a Line as Possible is a confined virtual representation of a highly physical action clearly presented as an art object. It uses a medium that is immersive and possibly mundane, and yet states that it is nothing if not an art object clearly distinct from

Figure 5: Graciela Carnevale: *Acción del Encierro*.

everyday life. It is deliberately provocative and was conceived to provide a contrast to other work that was presented alongside it⁸. It is carried out despite its environment and ends in almost certain virtual death. Rarely did I ever reach the ocean⁹.

Running South can be seen as a metaphor for the writing of this thesis: I connect various descriptions of my work in a headlong dash, oblivious of the vehicles that cut across my path, deviating from my course only to run around, or clamber over, the looming edifices that surround me and, if need be, roughly pushing my fellow pedestrians aside as I go.

⁸ Improvising poets, social sculpture, field recording, etc.

⁹ When using *GTAV* as the game in *Running South* one is almost always "killed" when hit by a fast moving vehicle. Other possible "deaths" include falling from a high building or being shot if you upset fellow residents by running into them or trespassing on private property. If one survives however it is possible to reach the ocean that surrounds the south side of the virtual city of Los Santos.

CHAPTER 2, Part 1: Running is Better than Walking

Description of Work: **4 Bells**

A number of performers play four widely distributed desk bells according to a notated score. Ideally the bells should be placed so that any audience has to stand within the area defined by the bells. The performers should run.

Description of Work: **Bells on Stairs**

A number of performers walk around a crowded space ringing handbells every few steps according to a predetermined pattern.

I find it revealing to compare work of mine that has involved running or walking with the act of walking as it is incorporated into in modern and contemporary art and music. It is possible to imagine many ways and come up with many examples of how this simple act can be used as the material for art¹⁰, and the historical reasons behind this phenomenon would make an interesting discussion in its own right. However, I would argue that, according to an object-orientated approach, no matter how illuminating an experience it is felt to be by those participating in it, or how intriguing it might be on the page as a written concept, walking as art often falls flat. As it almost always takes place away from the moment of encounter it is therefore almost always wrongly situated. The moment of encounter referring here to the moment someone not participating in the walk encounters it as work, any claims that participating in the work is the work having passed. Thus, the psychogeographical action of the *dérive*, which consists of an unplanned journey through an urban landscape, makes for a weak art object as it relies upon a subjective, insular activity undertaken outside of an art context. First theorised by Guy Debord in 1956, and described by him as "a mode of experimental behaviour (Debord, 1958)", a *dérive* might well be an entirely enticing activity for any artist, or anyone else who takes an interest in their surroundings, but, I would contend, it is merely practicing for art, not an arts practice.

¹⁰ See, for example, Karen O'Rourke's *Walking and Mapping: Artists as Cartographers* (O'Rourke, 2013) or John Levack Drever's *Soundwalking: Aural Excursions into the Everyday* (Drever, 2009).



Figure 6: Richard Long: Watershed.

The work of celebrated practitioner Richard Long (Long, 1991) (Long, 2002) exists only as what he exhibits, either in the landscape or in an art gallery¹¹. The walking is not the work. And, similarly, mere documentation of a walk isn't enough. Another famous walking artist, Hamish Fulton, said "an object cannot compete with an experience" (Fulton, 2001, p. 12) and "no walk, no work"

(Kastner, 1998, p. 129), this latter statement I take to explain why, in the gallery, one is confronted with little trace of either¹². It is often the case that the length of the walk is stressed in an attempt to make up for the deficiency of the practice: Long and Fulton make a point of telling us how long their walks were, usually as part of the work. This need to impress is also demonstrated in Marina Abramovic's *The Lovers: The Great Wall Walk* (1988), a work in which the participating artists "each walked 2000 kilometers to say goodbye" (O'Rourke, 2013, p. 54), the surviving documentary footage of which, superficially, has the quality of a low energy *Top Gear Special*¹³.



Figure 7: Hamish Fulton: Part of an Installation at the Ikon gallery 2012.

Michael Parson's *Walk* of 1969 (Lely & Saunders, 2012, p. 305) is an example of a work that uses walking as its actual material. It is not uncommon to encounter walking activities in experimental music or sound art but usually the walking is subservient to some sort of listening process¹⁴. In *Walk*, following a text score "any number of people" are given instructions to a walk around a "large open space", however what I would

¹¹ Long's work, of which I am an admirer(!), often takes a highly sculptural form (ibid.).

¹² Except words and photographs. I was amused to learn that Fulton, while walking, "tries to make as minimal impact on the landscape as possible, influenced by the US Wilderness ethic of 'leave no trace'". (Martin, 2015, accessed 10/15)

¹³ www.youtube.com/watch?v=zaso0j9x098 and topgear.wikia.com/wiki/Specials (accessed 12/17).

¹⁴ As in Max Neuhaus's *Listen* (www.max-neuhaus.info/soundworks/list/, accessed 10/16) or Christina Kubisch's *Electrical Walks* (www.christinakubisch.de/en/works/electrical_walk, accessed 10/16).

identify as the problem with this work is inadvertently made clear by Lely and Saunders' comment:

"A common characteristic of many performances of *Walk*, particularly in urban spaces, is that this disciplined activity of walking merges with the environment, and other passers-by may, while going about their business, intersect the performance space and unwittingly make a contribution." (Lely & Saunders, 2012, p. 311)

At the moment of encounter the performers may as well be doing nothing. In this regard a major weakness of *Walk*, as is typical for much "experimental" work, is that it leaves most of the decisions to the performers and any processes that lead to those decisions are closed off from the audience.



Figure 8: The cover of an LP of Tom Johnson's *Nine Bells*.

In contrast my *Bells on Stairs*, described at the beginning of this chapter, is supposed to be a work in which the act of walking absolutely does not merge with its environment. To be performed on a large, open staircase during an art event in a crowded public building¹⁵, the performers were instructed to walk along a predetermined path, a certain distance apart, and to ring their bells at intervals determined by the number of steps taken.

The activity of walking and the space within which it occurred were marked by the ringing of bells and the members of the audience who were in the way couldn't avoid it, as they were in the way. So much were they in the way, in fact, and so noisy, that I felt the piece, when performed, was rather low-impact. I see my *4 bells* as a more successful attempt to cover the same ground. Here the audience is confined within the space of the activity itself and also, crucially, the performers run as opposed to walk. The relentless dissection of the space that the work is confined to (the path is designed so that all the possible orderings of four different bells are sounded), should hopefully draw attention to nothing but the physically

¹⁵ Performed at a *Live Friday* event at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, 2016.

demanding work itself. It is worth contrasting *4 Bells* with a piece such as Tom Johnson's *Nine Bells* of 1973: "in which he walked, at a steady rhythmic pace (...for more than an hour), among nine suspended burglar alarm bells, systematically exploring all the possible paths among them¹⁶". *4 Bells* is not intended to be a meditative or exploratory action, nor is intended to be about the sound of bells, it is intended to limit the action of moving a human body to within a clearly defined space, clearly defining the limits of the artistic space while doing so. My installation *The Room You're In*, described at the end of this chapter, takes one element of this work further in that it is about nothing but the room it is exhibited in.

I will conclude this chapter with another example of walking in art: Bruce Nauman's *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner around the Perimeter of a Square* of 1967¹⁷. Intended for exhibition, it is a film of Nauman in his studio doing what the title says. "Like all Nauman's early videos" *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner* is an art object, clearly presented as an art object, that shows "what art can look like if you remove the object" (Farquharson, 2007, p. 188). Here, in an interview with Lorraine Sciarra, Nauman says how he thinks a work "succeeds as an art work":

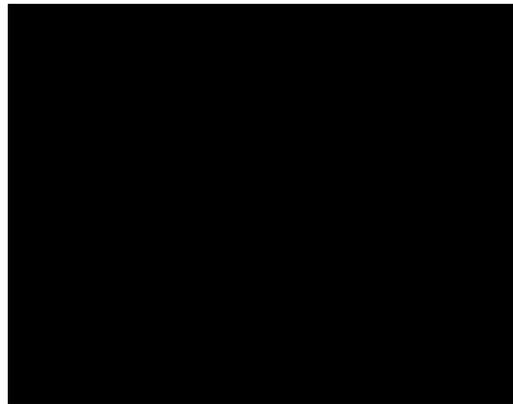


Figure 9: Bruce Nauman: *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner around the Perimeter of a Square*.

BN: ...people should be forced to think about it in the way that they think about any other art work that has any meaning for them.

LS: How do people think about art then?

BN: I don't know." (Nauman, 2002, p. 170)

Description of Work: **The Room You're In**

A looped video of an empty room is exhibited in the same room. The video was shot from a camera that was suspended from the ceiling and swung.

¹⁶ [wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom_Johnson_\(composer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom_Johnson_(composer)) (accessed 11/16).

¹⁷ www.youtube.com/watch?v=oDhuZ2Ya2wM (accessed 10/16).

CHAPTER 2, Part 2: What You See Is What You Get

Description of Work: **Six Myths of Contemporary Art**

Two performers (a man and a woman) follow a precisely notated "score" in six parts, the titles and accompanying quotes for each section (and the video in section 4) are projected onto a screen behind the performers. The quotes are not attributed.

1) Concept: (The following quote is displayed: "In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work.") The man sits motionless behind a table in the centre of the performing area, the woman "enters" from the side and stands on the table (or a chair to one side of the table) and drops an unopened ream of paper onto the table.

2) Research: (The following quote is displayed: "Art-based practices allow research questions to be asked in new ways (and) entirely new questions to be asked.") An audio clip of an excerpt from a radio programme about psychosis is played while the man sits on the table and unwraps the paper. The woman "enters" from the side with a wastepaper bin, she displays it to the audience to show that it is empty and then holds it in front of the man who drops the wrapper of the ream of paper into it. The man then scrunches up seven sheets of paper and places them beside him on the table.

3) Theory: (The following quote is displayed: "To see something as art requires...an atmosphere of artistic theory.") The man and the woman sit facing each other at the table, side on to the audience. They each have a black marker pen and their mobile phones, which are placed on the table. They begin to flatten out the pieces of paper and, using the pens, write on each one: "after all one may have an aesthetic experience on any street corner". While doing this the man and the woman conduct a conversation by text on their mobile phones.

4) Distribution: (The following caption is displayed: "A walk through a Las Vegas casino.") A video of a walk through a Las Vegas casino is shown upside down. The woman takes the sheets of paper with writing on and slowly distributes them to the audience, returning to the front after handing out each one. Meanwhile the man places the two chairs on either side of the screen, facing front. He places the bin on the woman's chair and sits on his own chair with the remainder of the ream of paper on his

lap. When the woman has completed her *task* she sits on her chair with the bin on her lap.

5) Boredom: (The following quote is displayed: "Boredom is a function of attention. We are learning new modes of attention...") The woman moves forward and sits or kneels on the floor with the bin in front of her on one side of the performing area. The man takes both chairs and sits on the other side of the performing area with his feet up with the remainder of the ream of paper at his side. He slowly scrunches up a sheet of paper and tries to throw it in the bin. He does this seven times.

6) Failure: (The following quote is displayed: "Failure (in art) is released from being a judgmental term, and success deemed overrated.") The man and the woman sit motionless, about two metres apart, with their backs to the audience. The caption slowly disappears over one minute.

When performed at the Research Student Conference at Oxford Brookes University in 2014 an accompanying graphic was displayed as a poster.



Figure 10: Flip Wilson and Geraldine.

Much of the work of Bruce Nauman appeals to me as I see it as being largely successful in defying what is known as "the intentional fallacy" and, as is clear from the quote that ended the first part of this chapter, avoids what I will term "the expectational fallacy."

An important principle in my work can be encapsulated in the phrase "what you see is what you get". These days it is most often encountered in acronymic form (WYSIWYG) in

the field of computers, to refer to a user interface that allows "the user to view something very similar to the end result while the document is being created¹⁸", such as the word processing program being used in the writing of this thesis. However, according to the Wikipedia article on WYSIWYG: the phrase "what you see is what you get" was "a catchphrase popularized by Flip Wilson's drag persona Geraldine, first

¹⁸ wikipedia.org/wiki/WYSIWYG (accessed 11/16).

appearing in September 1969, then regularly in the early 1970s on *The Flip Wilson Show*¹⁹. Wilson's use of the phrase is at once so direct and even challenging, spoken confidently, as it is, by the character of a sassy young black woman. It is, of course, only entertaining because it is spoken by a man in a dress.

"What you see is what you get" has precedence in art, being very similar to a comment made by the painter Frank Stella in interview with Bruce Glaser in 1964:

"All I want anyone to get out of my paintings, and all I get out of them, is the fact that you can see the whole idea without any confusion...What you see is what you see." (Glaser, 1968, p. 158)

Literary theory has long debated the relevance of the artist's intention: early in Wimsatt and Beardsley's influential essay *The Intentional Fallacy*, quoting Archibald MacLeish's *Ars Poetica*, the authors make the assertion:

"One demands that it work. It is only because an artefact works that we infer the intention of the artificer. 'A poem should not mean but be'". (Wimsatt & Beardsley, 1954, p. 4)

The idea that what the artist intended is not part of the work is somewhat difficult to apply to much modern and contemporary art. Sol LeWitt, in defining the principles of conceptual art in 1967, said that "the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work...all the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair" (LeWitt, 2003, p. 846). This can lead to a lot of artists doing a lot of thinking with little to show for it. LeWitt also said "conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists" (quoted in Lippard, 1997, p. 75) by which, it would seem, he was making some sort of appeal towards intuition: "ideas are discovered by intuition" (LeWitt, 2003,

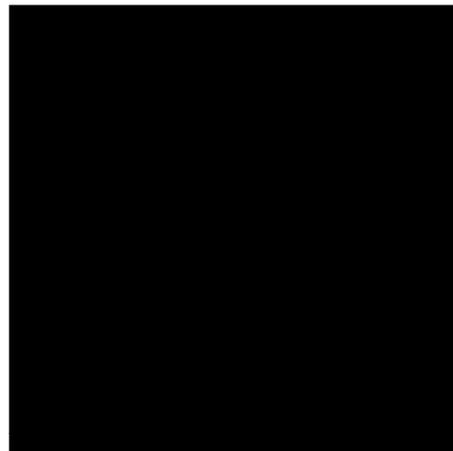


Figure 11: Sol LeWitt: *All Combinations of Arcs from Four Corners, Arcs from Four Sides, Straight Lines, Not-Straight Lines and Broken Lines.*

¹⁹ Ibid. See also [wikipedia.org/wiki/Flip_Wilson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flip_Wilson) (accessed 11/16).

p. 847). However, the conceptual process, if over-indulged in, can lead to "magical thinking", that is "the belief that one's thoughts by themselves can bring about effects in the world or that thinking something corresponds with doing it"²⁰. Here I would take an extreme position and say that at the moment of encounter with a work, there is no work before the work. That is, it does not matter, at all, what you thought before the encounter, everything the work is is there at that moment. Some of LeWitt's own work is, in fact, a model of one way to approach this in that he makes the process the work itself: "Irrational thoughts should be followed absolutely and logically" (Lippard, 1997, *ibid.*). LeWitt produced many examples of work where this process is indicated by the title, such as *All Combinations of Arcs from Four Corners, Arcs from Four Sides, Straight Lines, Not-Straight Lines and Broken Lines of 1975* (fig.11)²¹.

In the same way there is nothing before the work, at the moment of encounter there is nothing after the work, and yet artists can all too often labour under what might be termed the "expectational fallacy". They will often have specific expectations about how their work will be read, or expect specific outcomes. What is worse, some will attempt to guide an audience towards the realisation of those outcomes. Notably the critic Claire Bishop is critical of attempts by artists to "activate the viewer". In her article *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics* she criticises work that tries to force openness and control its outcomes, and contrasts this with work that is "antagonistic" and "acknowledges the limitations of what is possible in art" (Bishop, 2004, p. 79). As she points out:

"Every work of art is potentially "open", since it may produce an unlimited range of possible readings; it is simply the achievement of contemporary art, music, and literature to have foregrounded this fact." (*ibid.*, p. 62)

My creative process in *Six Myths of Contemporary Art*, described at the beginning of this chapter, was governed entirely by intuition. It was written very quickly, assembling its various elements one after another in response to the six unattributed quotes about art that are used in each of its six sections. The quotes were chosen as they all express an expanded notion of art and they are here accompanied by acts that, according to my

²⁰ [wikipedia.org/wiki/Magical_thinking#cite_note-1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magical_thinking#cite_note-1) (accessed 10/16).

²¹ artneti.com/magazineus/reviews/spivy/spivy1-8-09_detail.asp?picnum=11 (accessed 10/16).

superficial reading, have no meaning outside of the moment of encounter. Of course the audience, if at all interested, is free to try and construct any meaning it can: as with all of my work and as is consistent with an object-orientated approach, there was no accompanying text to help guide them in interpreting what they were seeing. My favourite comment about the work was that it is like "a magic show with no magic in it". Or, at least, no magical-thinking.

The pieces grouped together under the title *Anti-Conceptualism*, described below, demonstrate further attempts to situate work wholly within in the moment of encounter. Most make prominent use of text: text that defines, restricts or even explains the work as it is happening. Thus the large exhibited banner *Anti-Conceptualism* uses an "artist's statement" to define a blank circle at its heart, or the "text score" *Sampling the Sampler* consisting of nothing but descriptions of other musical events. None of the work was accompanied by text that was not in the work itself. Much use is made of the process of filling (and/or emptying) space, a process I use often as it is easy for an audience to read as it is occurring: an object is being constructed from smaller, discrete objects in order to fill a space. And that's all folks.

Description of Work: **Anti-Conceptualism**

Anti-Conceptualism was a collection of exhibited and performance pieces presented over two days for an exhibition in 2013²².

1) *Anti-Conceptualism. Exhibited work. A large banner suspended from the ceiling on which was printed a text proscribing a blank circle. The text was printed on partially transparent material and so could be viewed from either side.*

2) *I am sitting in a room (are you feeling better yet?)²³. For solo performer. The performer sits at a table facing the audience and reads the following 30-word text repeatedly: "I am sitting in a room. I am going to read this text again and again saying one, different, randomly selected word aloud each time. Are you feeling better yet?" On the table is a grid of 30 stones or similar objects and an empty glass receptacle. At the start of the piece the text is read silently, on each repetition one new word is read*

²² *Silencing the Silence*, Oxford 2013.

²³ Referring to Alvin Lucier's *I am sitting in a room* (Lucier, 1995).

aloud until the whole text is audible at the end. A random number generator was used to establish the order in which the words are read aloud. As each new word appears the performer places one stone, or similar object, from the table and places it into the glass receptacle.

3) Sampling the Sampler. For solo performer. The performer sits at a table facing the audience and reads aloud sentences from one year of previews from Sound and Music's fortnightly email newsletter The Sampler²⁴. The following introduction can be provided: "The Sampler 'e-shot' describes itself as featuring 'the most exciting events in new music and sound every fortnight, selected independently by a different guest previewer each issue'". When performed at Silencing the Silence sentences from the 1st to the 15th of October 2012 to the 15th to the 30th of September 2013 were used.

4) Non-Musical Piece for Bells (Text triggered bell sounds). For any number of performers with bells. The following 17-word text is read silently 17 times by any number of performers: "Read this text slowly and silently. Ring your bell when you read a word in bold type." On each iteration of the text a different word is printed in bold type. Each time a word in bold is read the performer(s) ring(s) a hand-held bell. A random number generator was used to establish the order in which the words were printed in bold.

5) Ma Piece for Aya. Exhibited work. A grid is filled with the Japanese symbol ma (negative space) one square at a time. A random number generator is used to establish the order in which the squares are filled. When exhibited at Silencing the Silence a 10 x 6 grid was used. The resulting grids were printed onto A4 sheets of paper, framed and exhibited on a blank wall in a 10 x 6 grid.

6) Filling Space (then Emptying it Again). For solo drummer. Ten 3/4 bars of music are filled with thirty, non-synchronously occurring drum beats one beat at a time. A random number generator is used to establish the order in which the beats occur. The beats are distributed across three drums which are used an equal number of times. When the duration is full the process is reversed and the bars are emptied one beat at a time.

²⁴ The Sampler: www.soundandmusic.org/thesampler (accessed 09/15).

CHAPTER 3: Filling (and Emptying) Musical Spaces

Description of Work: 88 Notes for Piano

An 88 note series using each note of the standard piano keyboard is introduced one note at a time starting with the lowest note and ending with the highest. This process is then reversed: the notes are removed one note at a time starting with the lowest and ending with the highest. The series was made using a random number generator.

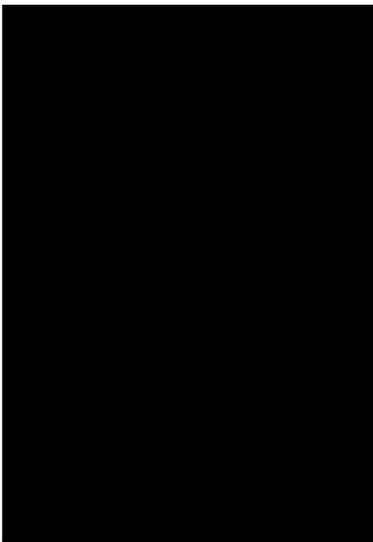


Figure 12 shows the front cover of a copy of the score of Wolfgang Rihm's *Vier Male: Stücke für Klarinette in A* (Rihm, 2000). I purchased it in a "Buy One Get One Free" sale after it had already been reduced to 50p. I buy and sell a lot of second-hand and bargain scores as part of my professional life²⁵ but I was keen to keep this particular artefact as it seemed to crystallise certain feelings that I experience when confronted with printed music, particularly scores that are, or have been, classified as "Modern" or "Contemporary" in the field

Figure 12: The front wrapper of my copy of *Vier Male*.

Wolfgang Rihm is an extremely prolific composer, his publisher's website lists 387 compositions²⁶. He has been described as "postmodern" (Tillman, 2002, p. 83) and his music is promoted as developing out of, and yet contrasting to, that of the previous generations:

"His music's enormous desire for expression and its incredibly strong power of expression (sic) shocked (but also impressed) those present at the world première of *Sub-Kontur*...in 1976. Rihm was 24 years old at the time and had to suffer terrible insults...Over 30 years later, this is already (musical) history. Rihm has remained true to himself and to his desire for expression, while the critical reviews of the time are now nothing but silent pieces of yellowing paper...His music defies

²⁵ See my commercial website: austinsj.co.uk.

²⁶ www.universaledition.com, accessed 07/16.

all attempts to pigeonhole it. With each new piece, he surprises his listeners – and often himself." (www.universaledition.com, 2016)

As already stated, my initial reaction to my bargain bin copy of Rihm's *Vier Male* is the same as that which I experience when I am confronted by any musical score that is new to me, particularly ones recently composed. Each score is a site of possibilities and I am fascinated to know how this composer has thought to arrange symbols on a page in order to fill a space with sound. Very quickly, however, a sense of disappointment ensues, I don't even have to listen to the music anymore. I see the same outworn gestures: broken phrases, complex rhythms, extremes of range and dynamics. The object fails to speak to me as anything but a monument to itself and to the whole Classical Music Project. Once it may have been assumed that its knockdown price reflected the difficulty of the music. It might have been thought that it was left unpurchased as the world was not ready for it. In truth the world has passed these "silent pieces of yellowing paper" by, their price reflecting their failure.

What the musical score represents most clearly to me is the moment of encounter, that is when this becomes that and when the work actually works. Of course, I don't mean that in a performance the audience all need to be reading a physical score, but the notated artefact establishes a point beyond which the sounds that are occurring cannot move beyond, either backwards, towards the intentions of the composer, or forwards, anticipating any possible outcomes. Just as it would be a mistake to believe that "musical notation is a transparent window (Griffiths, 1986, p. 5)", it would be equally wrong not to see it, in this sense, as a brick wall.

In the "Preamble" to his architectural monograph *Le Modulor*, written in 1948, Le Corbusier uses the system of musical notation as an illustration of how man has divided the world in order to make sense of it:

"One thing remains: in the course of thousands of years, the white civilization has evolved only two tools for working in sound: sound being a continuous thing that cannot be transmitted in writing unless it is first divided into sections and measured." (Le Corbusier, 1961, p. 16)

Arch-modernist that he was, Le Corbusier understood that in time these "tools" will be seen to be inadequate:

"It may well be - I take it upon myself to predict it - that the apotheosis of the machine age will demand a subtler tool, capable of setting down arrangements of sounds hitherto neglected or unheard, not sensed or not liked." (ibid.)

Over the course of the second half of the last century composers produced many scores that attempted to fulfil this prediction. Kurt Stone in *Music Notation in the Twentieth Century: A Practical Guidebook* saw this as requiring "a fundamental break with established musical aesthetics and philosophies", an "upheaval" that began to erupt in the 1950s and which "developed in two sharply contrasting directions":

"One of these was characterized by an unprecedented increase in precision of every conceivable component of a musical texture...The other stylistic trend rejected precision. Instead it introduced deliberate ambiguity, varying degrees of indeterminacy, choices between alternatives, improvisation, and the utilization of extraneous, unpredictable sounds and circumstances...Naturally, this trend not only called for new notational signs, but for an entirely new attitude toward notation as such." (Stone, 1980, pp. xv-xvi)

Universal Edition (UE), the publisher of Rihm's *Vier Male*, came at this time to be considered "the preeminent European publisher of modern music" (Krummel & Sadie, 1990, p. 453). This reputation was founded on a catalogue that contained many of the works of leading composers such as Pierre Boulez, Karlheinz Stockhausen and Luciano Berio. The extravagantly produced scores that were issued in the late 1950s and 1960s are testament to the confidence and boldness felt by the contemporary music of the time as it attempted to explore radical new methods of musical organisation and its representation. *Forment 3 - Miroir*, one movement of Pierre Boulez's *Troisième Sonate pour Piano*, for example, was originally printed in red and green ink on large loose leaves that measured 60 x 39 centimetres and issued in stout boards of the same monumental size (Boulez, 1963). Umberto Eco chooses musical compositions such as Boulez's third piano sonata as his initial examples of "openness" in *The Open Work*, stating that such works "reject the definitive, concluded message and multiply the formal possibilities of

the distribution of their elements" (Eco, 1989, p. 3). Significantly in a footnote Eco states that "for the sake of aesthetic analysis" he is going to ignore the distinction between the "performer" and the "interpreter in the sense of the consumer" (Eco, 1989, p. 251). I believe this stance overlooks a fundamental problem with such compositions as, perhaps paradoxically, their "openness" really only resides in the score, something that is closed off to the majority of would be "consumers" at the moment of encounter.

This trend away from the "definitive, concluded message" led some musicians to repudiate the traditionally notated score altogether. Earle Brown, who significantly was a composer brought up in the jazz tradition, is credited with taking the "obvious step" in creating the first purely graphic score: *December 1952* (Griffiths, 1986, p. 7). Cornelius Cardew's *Treatise*, begun in 1963 and 193 pages long, is one of the most celebrated examples of scores of this type (Cardew, 1967). According to John Tilbury, "Cardew's creative imagination broke the fetters of a musical language which for him had become obsolete and oppressive." (Tilbury, 2008, p. 228)

Many composers belonging to the generation that emerged in the 1970s took Stone's first "direction" and produced scores showing an "unprecedented increase in precision".

Composers such as Brian Ferneyhough and Michael Finnissy wrote highly complex, highly precise scores that, according to Christopher Fox "pushed the prescriptive capacity of traditional staff notation to its limits" (quoted in Taruskin, 2010, p. 476). That the craft of producing a notated score is a major component of such work is evinced by the fact that it is invariably published in facsimiles of the composers' extraordinarily neat manuscripts. George Crumb is



Figure 13: George Crumb's *Spiral Galaxy* on a T-shirt.

another composer whose work is published in the same way: the score's totemic significance being made plain when work such as *Spiral Galaxy*, the final movement of his *Makrokosmos, Volume I* (Crumb, 1974, p. 19), is published in its manuscript form as a spiral. This makes it impractical to play from and yet impactful enough for it to be printed on T-shirts issued by Crumb's publisher, Peters Edition. I have to mention here that the only other composer whose work features on Peters Edition's T-shirts is John

Cage, the peculiar significance of whose hand-written scores, at least to his admirers, is exemplified by Michael Pisaro's adulation:

"There are few rivals to this score (*Solo for Piano*) in physical beauty...One aspect of this beauty...is the fact that this score is drawn entirely by hand. The character of John Cage's handwriting communicates something important...it is beautifully stylised - it is no accident that someone has thought to create a John Cage font."
(Pisaro, 2009, p. 30)

As so often with Cage, it is as if Cage never happened.

In 1969 Cage edited *Notations*, an anthology that showed "the many directions in which music notation is now going" (Cage, 1969, Preface). Cage's book is the model for two further anthologies, both of which appeared in the first decade of this century. In the first of these, *SoundVisions* of 2005, we are told that Cage's *Notations* "can only be seen as an attempt to open the doors of perception" and:

"These musical pages invent, they caress, explode, and reach out to us, seductively recreating our first childish impressions of scores before we could read the signs - asking us to fall in love with them, all over again." (Möller, et al., 2005, p. 19)

What is remarkable is, in fact, how similar the contents of *SoundVisions* and *Notations* are, which begs the question: how many "attempts to open the doors of perception" are needed over thirty years? The second anthology, *Notations 21* of 2009, was issued "honoring the 40th anniversary of Cage's seminal book" (Sauer, 2009, back cover). Here the scores are reproduced in full colour and this helps to better demonstrate the graphic score as something that has shifted its specificity, away from the musical event towards exhibited work. "One might suggest a comparison with those still-life paintings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries" Paul Griffiths wrote, reflecting back upon the graphic scores of the 1960s, "the work is still quite clearly an easel painting more than a metaphysical diagram." (Griffiths, 1986, p. 11)

Text scores, presented as musical scores, offer the most radical statements: in my opinion they exist most strongly as directly worded and controversial statements that speak of limitations, not of expanded possibilities. I still remember the excitement and

interest I felt when, as a young boy immersed in the classical tradition, I first encountered Stockhausen's text score *Goldstaub*, one of a group of text scores entitled



Figure 14: Karlheinz Stockhausen: *Goldstaub*.

Aus den Sieben Tagen. Another Universal Edition publication, it appeared in a small but intriguing oblong octavo booklet, striking in its contrast to the large, confusing musical scores of the time: "Live completely alone for four days without food...after four days, late at night...play single sounds (Stockhausen, 1968)." The shift away from conventional thinking about the presentation of music that is written of here is most striking where it is written: on paper. *Goldstaub* speaks, literally, of the starvation of musical resources. The problem that occurs when performers take text scores literally, in a different sense, and attempt actual performances is encapsulated in Stockhausen's reply to a performer who asked him how they should fulfil another instruction to be found in *Aus den Sieben Tagen*: "play a vibration in the rhythm of the Universe²⁷":

"Have you never had any dream experience of the rhythm of the universe, have you never been flying in between stars, have you never had a direct experience of the rotation of the planets..." (Maconie, 1976, p. 254)

Cornelius Cardew wrote "a composer who hears sounds will try to find a notation for sounds. One who has ideas will find one that expresses his ideas (quoted in Nyman, 1999, p. 4)." If those ideas are ever communicable to an audience at the moment of encounter is, I would say, doubtful. David H. Cope in the chapter dealing with improvisation in his *New Directions in Music*, an irrepressibly optimistic book written in the 1970s, criticises musical notation, saying "it has taken centuries for the music world to develop a set of symbols that serve to carefully isolate the creative mind from his audience" (Cope, 1976, p. 146). He adds: "the creative collaboration (offered by improvisational techniques) between composers and performers cannot help but enrich the continuum and significance of all of music" (ibid. p. 162). But, I would argue that, as far as the audience is concerned, improvising according to a score is far more isolating,

²⁷ *Verbindung* (Stockhausen, 1968).

as the most important relationship is between the composer and the performer and therefore largely unknowable by the audience. Despite all attempts to prove otherwise it is as if there is a horizon beyond which these notes cannot go. It is my contention that all attempts to expand the possibilities of the musical score have their greatest impact as the very printed artefacts they are trying to move away from. Everything else is just permission to improvise.

In 1964 Claude Lévi-Strauss in *The Raw and the Cooked* criticised the idea (from Boulez) that music was "perpetually expanding", saying that:

"soon...only the idea of it would remain accessible, before fading away in the dark vault of silence, where men would recognise it only in the form of brief and fugitive scintillations." (Lévi-Strauss, 1986, p. 26)

My starting point in composing *88 Notes for Piano*, described at the beginning of this chapter, was to write a piece that would use each of the 88 notes of a standard piano keyboard once. Each note was to be simply presented as one of a limited resource, there was to be no recourse to anything that would imply an expansion of the resources available, such as the use of extended techniques or improvisation. An 88 note series was constructed using a random number generator. The order of the notes was decided randomly as it was the presentation of notes that was important, not their actual pitches. Each note was to be of the same duration. Notated in quavers the series filled 11 bars of 8/8 and these bars were to begin empty and to be filled one note at a time starting with the lowest note of the keyboard and ending with the highest. This process would then be reversed. This simple procedure should be apprehensible by the audience both audibly and visually (at least for those audience members who can see the pianist's hands as they work their way up the keyboard as the series expands and contracts). The visual component is one reason why I believe it is important that *88 Notes* is performed live, by a pianist²⁸. The other is that the work is technically and physically demanding and I feel that the audience should be left in no doubt that work is being physically performed.

²⁸ As opposed to being played in digital reproduction.

The other compositions I describe at the end of this chapter all use the same sort of process as *88 Notes*. In contrast to the short attacks of *88 Notes*, the musical space of *Organ Piece* is filled with sustained sounds and, rather than being defined by the number of notes in the keyboard is restricted to ten notes, one for each finger of the performer's hands. The choral piece *Nunc Dimittis* demonstrates a space-filling process that uses text as well as notes; the meaning of the text being entirely subservient to the process. *Bell Piece for Bath* is a later work, written to be performed by myself in public spaces as part of performance art events. Although its use of a simple space-filling process is similar to those of my earlier compositions, *Bell Piece* shows how far I shifted away from traditional modes of presentation as my practice developed.

Description of Work: **Organ Piece**

For organ. A ten bar duration is filled with a sustained ten note cluster (f-a'). These ten bars are repeated 99 times with one note in one bar being removed each time. The order in which the notes are removed was determined by a random number generator.

Description of Work: **Nunc dimittis**

For eight-part unaccompanied chorus. The 64 syllables of the English translation (Douay-Rheims) of the Canticle of Simeon (Luke 2:29-32) are used (sung) one at time to fill a 64 bar, 8 x 8 "grid". The eight notes given to each voice (that is each row of the grid) is made up from a non-repeating series of the eight notes of the C major scale. The order in which each note appears was determined by a random number generator. The 64 syllables of the text were assigned to each note of the completed grid in reading order and so appear randomly, according to which note they were assigned.

Description of Work: **Bell Piece for Bath**

The performer sits at a table and constructs a score by drawing tiles at random from a bag. There are 64 tiles in the bag on which are printed the numbers one to four, 16 of each. The tiles are laid out in four 4 x 4 grids. Each number corresponds to one of four differently pitched bells. Each line and each grid is played after they are completed. All 64 tiles are played at the end. The table may be amplified.

CHAPTER 4, Part 1: On the Superficial Reading of Art Objects

I came up with concept of the superficial reading of art objects when writing a paper entitled *Picking Your Feet in Poughkeepsie or the Value of Superficial Reading in the Arts* for a conference held in Oxford in 2011. I had recently read that John Cage first proposed a silent piece of music, *Silent Prayer*, in an intercollegiate arts conference in Poughkeepsie, New York in 1948 (Kim-Cohen, 2009, p. 16) and I immediately made a connection between this fact and the only other use of that city's name that I knew of: William Friedkin's 1971 film *The French Connection*. In an establishing scene, Gene Hackman's character, Popeye Doyle, uses the phrase "picking your feet in Poughkeepsie" repeatedly as he and his partner, Russo, played by Roy Scheider, interrogate and beat a suspect referred to in the script as "Black Pusher":

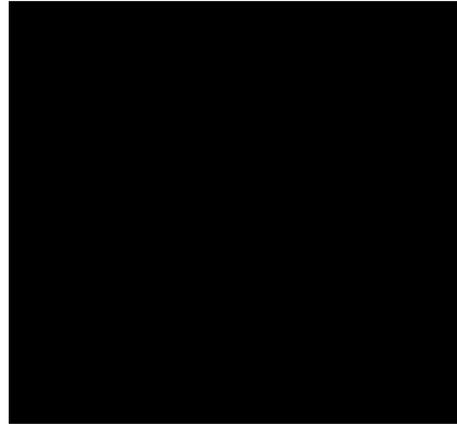


Figure 15: *The French Connection*: Popeye Doyle interrogates the "Black Pusher."

"BLACK PUSHER's brow furrows, looks up just a little...

DOYLE: Ever pick your feet in Poughkeepsie?

BLACK PUSHER: What?

DOYLE: Did you ever pick your feet in Poughkeepsie?

BLACK PUSHER: I don't know what you're talking about.

DOYLE: Were you ever in Poughkeepsie?

BLACK PUSHER: No...Yeah...

DOYLE: Did you sit on the edge of the bed, take your socks off and stick your fingers between your toes?

BLACK PUSHER: Man, I'm clean. (...)

DOYLE: How about that time you were picking your feet in Poughkeepsie?

The BLACK PUSHER'S eyes go to RUSSO in panic, looking for some relief from the pressure of the inquisition²⁹.

²⁹ *The French Connection*. Film. Directed by William Friedkin. 20th Century Fox, 1971.

What struck me was how a deliberately confounding tactic is employed by Doyle³⁰ and, whatever his intention in employing such a tactic, there is one inevitable outcome: that, for the Black Pusher, no matter what he says in answer to the question "has he ever picked his feet in Poughkeepsie", or whether it is true or not, he is going to get beaten.

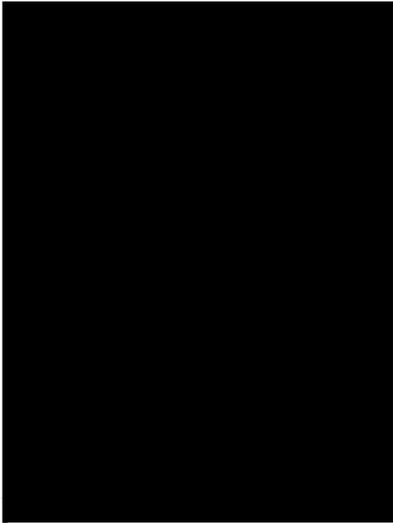


Figure 16: The front cover of John Cage's 4'33"

In the light of this, and deliberately not worrying about the tenuousness of any connection, I proceeded to consider John Cage's celebrated 4'33". Cage wrote the piece in 1952, three years after he proposed *Silent Prayer* in Poughkeepsie, and is his actual "silent" composition, consisting as it does of four minutes and thirty-three seconds of silence³¹. For a silent piece 4'33" has generated a huge amount of discourse: we are told that it "necessitates an epistemological shift" (Dunn, 1998, p. 2), that it is a "great, playful, psychedelic artefact" (Young, 2002, p. 5), that it "gives back the right to speak to people who do not want to have it" (Attali, 1985, p. 136), that Cage is an "ambient visionary" delivering the piece to a "stupefied audience" (Prendergast, 2000, p. 47). What is invariably dismissed by those that would be apologists for the work is the initial, superficial reaction of the audience that first encountered it. I say "would be apologists" as it seems important to those that write about it that 4'33" retains a sense of controversy even though most commentators seem to hold the work in unquestioning admiration. The frequent claim that art is misunderstood is identified by Pierre Bourdieu as a tactic that is employed to try and ensure the work's survival:

"the injection of meaning and value by commentary and commentary on commentary...at least ensures (the work) has the sad eternity of academic debate" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 111).

³⁰ The phrase "picking your feet in Poughkeepsie" was "nonsense": *The French Connection, Special Edition*. Director's commentary. DVD, 20th Century Fox, 2003.

³¹ Despite saying "there is no such thing as silence" Cage refers to 4'33" many times as being "silent" (Kostelanetz, 1989, pp. 65-66).

It seems taken for granted by Cage's disciples that 4'33" is generally misunderstood and that it would be of benefit to the general populace if only they correctly understood it. Max Neuhaus said "the audience seemed more impressed with the scandal of 'ordinary' sounds placed in a 'sacred' place than with the sounds themselves" (quoted in O'Rourke, 2013, p. 33). Cage himself

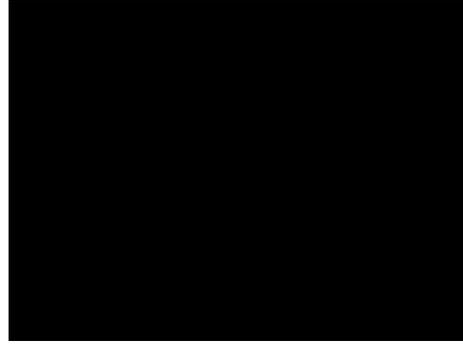


Figure 17: Philip Glass performs at South Park Elementary

said that the "irritated" audience of the work's first performance "missed the point" and that they "didn't know how to listen" (Kostelanetz, 1989, p. 65). But it is worth entertaining the possibility that it is Cage who has missed the point. Before it is anything else 4'33" is, at the moment of encounter, simply a refusal to play the piano (or any other instrument³²). This moment of refusal is when 4'33" operates most strongly as an art object and where it is at its most telling. Where music was expected there is none provided and why this is the case, why at this time has this man declined to play the piano, is the most interesting and important question to be asked. As Robert Fink has written about a riot caused by the characters in the animated TV series *South Park* being forced to listen to minimalist music:

"Worse than the infamous early-twentieth-century explosion provoked by Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* - or even the aftershock triggered at Carnegie Hall in 1973 by a performance of Steve Reich's *Four Organs* - this cartoon riot has nothing to do with the mystified essence of "difficult music"...It is the void, the absence of cultural meaning, that repetitive music reflects back at them." (Fink, 2005, p. xiii)

Riots, of which the one that greeted the premier of Stravinsky's *Sacre du Printemps* in 1913 is the exemplar, are to be expected. Beginning in a remarkably similar way to the above quote is this from *The Score* magazine describing the reception of Edgard Varèse's *Déserts* in 1955:

³² Although originally performed at a piano 4'33" can be performed on "any instrument, or combination of instruments." (Cage, 2012)

"A riot almost as furious and bloody as that provoked by the first performance of *Le Sacre* ensued, and the work was often unaudible (sic) through the barrage of stamping, clapping, and catcalls that arose after a few minutes." (quoted in Holmes, 2012, p. 355)

Varèse was reportedly driven to tears (ibid.). Francois Xenakis (the wife of the composer Iannis Xenakis) said after personally witnessing Varèse's disappointment:

"No matter what he said, no matter why any composer says he makes music, it is a cry he cannot utter, 'Love me'". (Matossian, 1986, p. 80)

It can perhaps be elucidating to superficially read artists and their unconscious motives as well as their objects. Within that in mind it seems not inappropriate to reference psychoanalyst Hanna Segal's Kleinian aesthetics:

"All creation is really a re-creation of a once loved and once whole, but now lost and ruined object, a ruined internal world and self... we must re-create our world anew, re-assemble the pieces, infuse life into dead fragments, re-create life." (Segal, 1952, p. 199)

My *Images That Are Only Kind Of Interesting*, described at the end of this chapter, are intended to form part of a series of large, wall-mounted artworks made up of object-orientated juxtapositions of what are kind of unrelated, kind of unremarkable things. There may be all kinds of psychological reasons why I chose the objects I chose to photograph and why I chose to exhibit them, however it should be clear that they make no claims for themselves beyond their existence as art objects. This is emphasised by their self-referencing, self-limiting title (which is the only accompanying text). Whatever the reasons for their being called into existence, these images have no life beyond their life as art objects.

Description of Work: **Images That Are Only Kind Of Interesting**

A series of images "that are only kind of interesting" are exhibited. These include an apple on a slice of white bread, a tape measure on an unopened letter, a playing card upon a folded towel, a tube of fusidic acid on a pile of white sugar, etc. The objects were all placed on the same wooden worktop.

CHAPTER 4, Part 2: Exhibiting Boxes

Description of Work: Making a Box as Quickly as Possible

A video of the artist making a small box (c. 24 x 22 x 28 cm.) as quickly as possible, using one sheet of MDF, a workbench, a saw, a hammer, and nails. The video is twelve minutes long, is shot in black and white and has no sound. The camera is mounted on a tripod and does not move.

The critic Hal Foster begins his *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* with an anecdote:

"Not long ago I stood with a friend next to an art work made of four wood beams laid in a long rectangle, with a mirror set behind each corner so as to reflect the others. My friend, a conceptual artist, and I talked about the minimalist basis of such work: its reception by critics then, its elaboration by artists later, its significance for practitioners today...Taken by our talk, we hardly noticed his little girl as she played on the beams. But then signalled by her mother, we looked up to see her pass through the looking glass...she moved farther and farther from us...Yet suddenly there she was right behind us: all she had done was skip along the beams around the room. And there we were a critic and an artist...taken to school by a six-year-old girl, our theory no match for her practice." (Foster, 1996, p. ix)

The sculpture that the six-year-old girl skipped around was Robert Morris's *Untitled* (1977). Minimalist sculpture provides an excellent case-study for this discussion of the superficial reading of art objects in that the art spaces are filled so clearly with nothing but simple objects. Foster's little girl playing on Morris's *Untitled* represents the most superficial reading of all as it involves no language. Not that superficial reading denies thought, it merely attempts to focus solely on

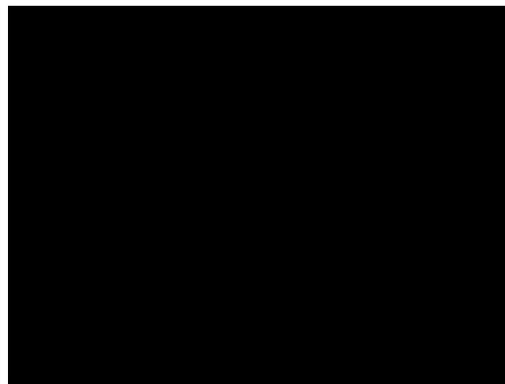


Figure 18: Robert Morris: *Untitled* (1977).

the moment of encounter between a person and an art object. As Morris himself observed, "works of art remain afloat on a sea of words" (Morris, 1995, p. 119), and, because of this, it is easily forgotten that the moment of encounter is where the art object fundamentally operates and that this operation precedes any relationship with the object which relies upon language that is not part of the object. The language that is used to frame the art object is not to be relied upon as it is so often used to try and persuade us that the object is something more than it is or something that it is not. Engaged with in this way Morris's (neo)minimalist works are similar to my own in that the objects I produce (musical, performed, visual or sculptural) are simply designed to fill what would otherwise be an empty art space. And those objects can be anything: wooden beams and mirrors fill a room in an art gallery that, if placed somewhere else, might be conceivably part of a children's playground.



Figure 19: Robert Morris: *Box with the Sound of its own Making*.

My video *Making a Box as Quickly as Possible*, described at the beginning of this chapter, and the resulting sculpture *Badly Made Box*, described at the end, both refer to Morris's *Box with the Sound of its own Making* (1961), which is a simply constructed wooden box on a plinth that is large enough to hold a speaker that plays a recording of the box being made. It is not necessary for the viewer to get this reference, however, as both my pieces function as art objects in their own right by virtue of the fact that they are clearly exhibited as such. That is not to say that my object-orientated approach strives to produce what might be thought of as pure objects, rather it acknowledges that, after the moment of encounter, all kinds of thoughts (if any) may occur to an audience (if any) and that these are properly beyond the control of the artist. If it is possible to say that an art object is anything that is exhibited as such, then it could be argued that the more self-contained the object is, the clearer this is. Also by referencing itself or other art work this quality is enhanced. That my box pieces refer back to such an iconic piece of sculpture as *Box with the Sound of its own Making* increases what I would see as their

self-reflexivity: they reflect back on themselves and upon art and its conventions. The fact that Morris's *Box* contains a recording, supposedly of the box being made, can be read as such an act of self-reflexivity: including a recording of woodworking within the object draws attention to itself as nothing but a box built to be in an art gallery.

Making a Box as Quickly as Possible is plainly just a video of the action described in its title. I find video to be a particularly strong medium as the relationship between the action and the object and the object and the viewer can be made as straightforward as possible: a video is clearly presented as an object that is intended for viewing. Overcomplicating this relationship is unnecessary, a state of affairs that can result from work that is either too theoretical or too deeply interested in the technological aspects of whatever medium one has chosen to work in. This is typified by the approach that one encounters in Helen Westgeest's *Video Art Theory* where video art is described as "a most difficult medium to define" and the thinking of various theoreticians is assembled, for example:

"Spielmann...stresses that video has transformed the notion of an 'art object' into something fluid and changeable, turning processuality and transformativity into its medium-specific features" and "Dubois...defines video not as an object, but as an experimental condition." (Westgeest, 2015, p. 2)

As stated above *Making a Box as Quickly as Possible* is just a video of the action described in its title, the fact that the quality of the recording is so low I believe underlines the seemingly slapdash approach suggested by its title³³. Of course the action is only slapdash from necessity: if I spent longer making the box then any audience would have to spend longer watching the video and I know if I was in the audience I would want it to be as short as possible. It is also worth pointing out that as the box is so badly made it is good for nothing other than being the outcome of the action undertaken, and it is exhibited as such (*Badly Made Box*). The video is intended to be projected onto a large screen in a preferably darkened room which dramatically increases the impact of the highly pixelated image and what I see as the aesthetic appeal of the movement depicted (in the background as well as in the action itself). The

³³ The low quality was, in fact, deliberately attained by employing the not un-laborious process of re-videoing video from a TV screen.

consideration of elements such as aesthetics or impact in relation to one's objects is not incompatible with an object-orientated arts practice as long as these considerations do not attempt to go beyond the moment of encounter. The objects are not there to convince anyone of anything or bewitch them or console them, etc., rather they are there to draw attention to themselves.

As has already been shown in relation to Cage's 4'33", it can often seem that, in art, the less that is presented the more there is to say about it. Morris's *Box with the Sound of its own Making* is no exception:

"Morris's *Box*...essentially leads through a semiotic minefield in which one reading is detonated by another...The reproduction of sound splinters the purely phenomenological while at the same time recuperating it." (LaBelle, 2010, p. 83)

"Robert Morris's *Box* expands its 'situation' and relationships in time at least as much as it tests them in space." (Kim-Cohen, 2009, p. 45)

"The tape is like the box's memory of its own coming into being, and the work has at the very least a comment to make on the mind-body problem." (Danto, 1997, p. 92)

In adopting the superficial reading of art objects it comes as something of a relief to realise that one can overlook all the abstruse thinking, philosophical and theoretical, that is used to make meaning for art objects (within two pages of each of the above quotes are referenced (among others): Antonin Artaud, Rosalind Krauss, Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Clement Greenberg (twice), Immanuel Kant, Jacques Derrida, John Cage (twice) and Michael Fried). It is worth pointing out the high degree of intellectual specialisation that is required when artists or critics make meaning in this way, something that the superficial reading of art objects specifically avoids as an unnecessary distraction. In a characteristically provocative paper delivered at the *Nothing in Art* conference in Oxford in 2014³⁴, in which my text was intercut with the lyrics of *Hate Me Now* by the rap artist Nas, I took this thinking to an extreme: "artists should not pretend to be philosophers. The only thing an artist needs to know about

³⁴ *Nothing but art in art* paper delivered at *Nothing in Art*, Oxford 2014

Gilles Deleuze is that he killed himself by throwing himself out of his apartment window, Roland Barthes was killed by a laundry van, Theodor Adorno died of a heart attack while attempting to climb a mountain, Walter Benjamin committed suicide wrongly believing he was about to be captured by the Nazis, Maurice Merleau-Ponty died of a stroke while preparing for a class on Descartes".

What the quotes relating to Morris's *Box* exemplify is what Howard S. Becker termed the "institutional theory of aesthetics" according to which "aestheticians developed a theory that placed the artistic character and quality of the work outside the physical object itself" (Becker, 2008, p. 146). According to Becker this theory was needed in order to explain such problematic work as the readymades of Marcel Duchamp or the Brillo boxes of Andy Warhol and is typified by Arthur C. Danto's oft repeated claim that "to see something as art requires something the eye cannot descry - an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld" (Danto, 1964, p. 580). As John Carey disputes, this theory maintains that "only the opinion of such people (the experts and critics) can turn an object into a work of art, and they are qualified to do this because they understand its meaning" (Carey, 2005, p. 19).

"The aim of all commentary on art now should be to make works of art - and, by analogy, our own experience - more, rather than less, real to us. The function of criticism should be to show how it is what it is, even that it is what it is, rather than to show what it means." (Sontag, 2009, p. 14)

So wrote Susan Sontag in 1964 in her famous essay *Against Interpretation*. Time and again, however, the simple self-contained exhibited objects of artists in and around the Minimalist Art movement of the 1960s were (and still are) invested with complex meanings after the fact of them simply existing as objects. This is often done in the belief that these objects represent an expanded form of art. Thus we have Robert Morris himself finishing his *Notes on Sculpture* with the phrase "The situation is now more complex and expanded (Morris, 1968, p. 235)" or the critic Rosalind Krauss's famous essay *Sculpture in the Expanded Field* of 1978 (Krauss, 1986).

Devoid of their supporting framework of surrounding theoretical discourse, what the objects of contemporary art tell is that little is said because there is little to say. This

contention is well illustrated by the artistic practise of piano-destruction that flourished alongside sculptural minimalism in the late 1950s and early 60s. People had been destroying pianos for entertainment for decades previously³⁵ but it was not until 1959 that the Wiener Gruppe made the first recorded destruction in the name of art³⁶.



Figure 20: The Wiener Gruppe in 1959.

Other artists closely followed the Viennese poets, perhaps most famously by the Fluxus group in their performance of Philip Corner's *Piano Activities* in Wiesbaden in 1962 (Schmidt, 2012, pp. 95-101). Other notable examples are provided by Nam June Paik, as



Figure 21: Philip Corner: Piano Activities, 1962.

in his exhibition *Exposition of Music - Electronic Television* exhibition of 1963 (Brill, 2010, p. 129), Raphael Ortiz, who is said to have destroyed over 80 pianos in his career³⁷, Annea Lockwood³⁸ and Al Hansen³⁹. What is remarkable is that these actions have been repeated ever since, amongst many examples are Jem Finer destroying a piano in 2008⁴⁰ and Catherine Yass's failed attempt to drop a piano from a tower block in 2014⁴¹.

Joseph Beuys destroyed a piano in Wuppertal in 1963, he said of this act:

"My intention was neither destructive nor nihilistic...The main intention was to indicate a new beginning, an enlarged understanding of every traditional form of art..." (Kuoni, 1990, p. 128)

³⁵ Charlie Chaplin, Harpo Marx, Jimmy Durante and Laurel and Hardy et al. (Schmidt, 2012).

³⁶ There is an account of an undocumented piano destruction at the Six Gallery in San Francisco in 1958 (Schmidt, 2012, p. 59).

³⁷ wikipedia.org/wiki/Raphael_Montañez_Ortiz (accessed 09/15).

³⁸ See Lockwood's *Piano Transplants*, www.annealockwood.com (accessed 09/15).

³⁹ See *Yoko Ono Piano Drop*, www.alhansen.net/bio.htm (accessed 09/15).

⁴⁰ www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnNpFDyFYwo (accessed 09/15).

⁴¹ www.vice.com/en_uk/read/balfron-tower-art-fetishising-estates-157 (accessed 09/15).

Superficially, despite Beuys's grandiose claims and his evident belief in the expansiveness of art, what I would say all this destructive activity demonstrates is that after an artist has made the understandable decision not to play the piano, reflecting dissatisfaction in outmoded forms of expression associated with it, there is little else to do with the instrument but destroy it.

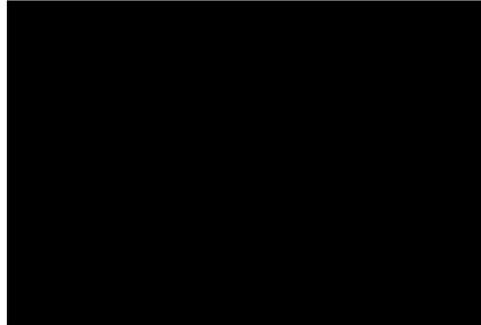


Figure 22: Raphael Ortiz in London in 1966 at the *Destruction in Art* symposium.

In 1967 another influential minimalist sculptor Tony Smith gave an illuminating account of a night drive down the then unfinished New Jersey Turnpike:

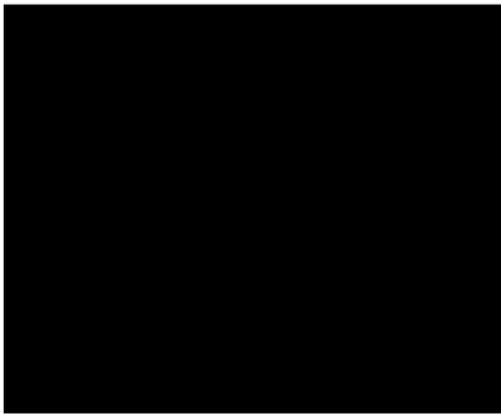


Figure 23: Annea Lockwood: *Piano Burning*, 1968.

"It was a dark night and there was no lights or shoulder markers, lines, railings or anything at all except the dark pavement moving through the landscape of the flats...This drive was a revealing experience. The road and the landscape was artificial, and yet it couldn't be called a work of art. On the other hand, it did something to me that art had never done.

At first I didn't know what it was, but its effect was to liberate me from many of the views I had had about art. It seemed that there had been a reality there that had not had any expression in art...I thought to myself, it ought to be clear that's the end of art." (Wagstaff, 1968, p. 386)

Michael Fried in *Art and Objecthood* wrote "what seems to have been revealed to Smith that night was...one might say, the conventional nature of art. And *that* Smith seems to have understood not as laying bare the essence of art, but as announcing its end" (Fried, 1998, p. 158). Is it the case that minimalist and conceptual art has done nothing for decades but play on this notion that conventional art is at an end? While not accepting that the "essence of art" is its "conventional nature" and believing that the objects

placed in the spaces left by conventional art, or the empty spaces themselves, are an expanded form of art? As the superficial reading of art objects reveals, this idea of expansiveness is not in the objects themselves but in the discourse that surrounds them. Because superficial reading ignores this discourse one is just left with the objects themselves, or lack thereof, and these objects are revealed to be reductive rather than expansive, as the discourse would have us believe. Read in this way what minimalist sculpture shows us is that when nothing or almost nothing is exhibited, or when destructive elements are present, or when one sees work that recycles other work or rubbish (literally), what one is confronted with is a foretelling, a repetition of a foretelling, of the end of art as art:

"Robert Morris: *Aluminium, Asphalt, Clay, Copper, Felt, Glass, Lead, Nickel, Rubber, Stainless, Thread, Zinc*. Leo Castelli, March 1-22, 1969. These and other materials (including chemicals, dirt, water) were changed each day of the show...Each day the changes were photographed...The end of the show consisted of the removal of all the material (well over a ton), which was tape-recorded. On the last day the gallery held only the photographs and the sound of the piece's ultimate destruction, reversing the procedure of Morris's influential *Box with the Sound of its Own Making*." (Lippard, 1997, p. 93)

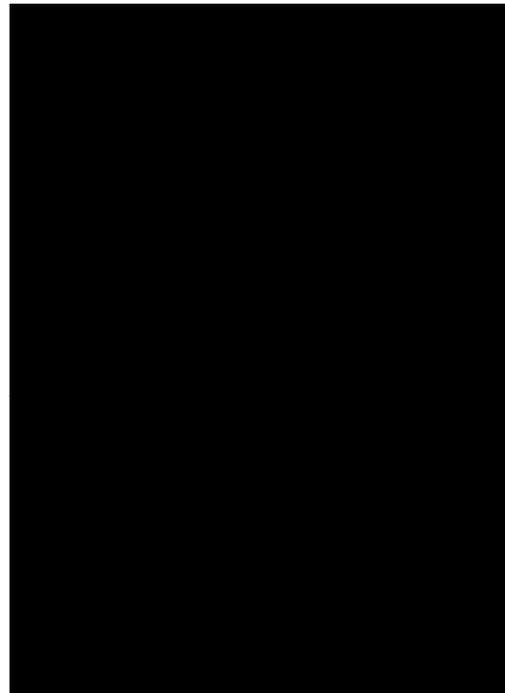


Figure 24: Robert Morris: *Aluminum, Asphalt, Clay, Copper, Felt, Glass, Lead, Nickel, Rubber, Stainless, Thread, Zinc*.

Description of Work: **Badly Made Box**

A small badly made box (MDF and nails, c. 24 x 22 x 28 cm.) is exhibited on a plinth in an art gallery.

CHAPTER 5: Making Sounds Happen is More Important than Careful Listening

Description of Work: 6 x 32 Notes for Ensemble

For flute, clarinet, horn, violin, viola, cello and piano (doubling electric organ). Each instrument, with the exception of the piano, plays a different 32 note series made up of unique pitches. These series are made up of single note values and are played only at one of two speeds. No other material is given to the instruments that play these series. In the first part the piano intersperses the other material with a rhythmically complex series of chords, which is repeated at various points unaltered. In the second part the electronic organ plays simple drones. All the material was made using a random number generator.

Description of Work: 8 x 8 Notes for String Ensemble

For string octet (or string orchestra). Each part is given eight notes to play. The material given to the four violins is a random distribution of notes taken from a 32 note chromatic scale, g-d'', the material given to the violas and cellos is a random distribution from a 32 note chromatic scale, C-g', the violas playing an octave higher. These notes are randomly distributed within an eight bar (of 4/8) duration. Each part is introduced one at a time, introducing each one of its notes one at a time. Each subsequent iteration maintains the same pitches and rhythm, variation being achieved only by the expansion of durations, sustaining notes or the use of pizzicato.

Description of Work: 36 Notes for Clarinet, Violin and Piano

The piece is in two parts. In part one a 36 note series made up of 36 unique pitches is introduced by the piano. The tempo is marked as "as fast as possible". The series is then reconstructed one note at a time in the piano part with each note being "announced" alternately by the clarinet and the violin. This process continues until the series is complete. In part two the tempo is halved and the same series as in part one is played by the clarinet and violin. The series is shared between the instruments each playing the notes that they didn't play in part one. The process of part one is reversed: one note is removed from the series upon each iteration. As each note is removed it is played by the piano. The ordering of the material was made using a random number generator.

6 x 32 Notes for Ensemble was one of the first compositions completed as part of my PhD. Before writing it I had been struck by a quote from the music critic Paul Griffiths about the rhythmic "introversions" used by the composer Olivier Messiaen in the *Strophe* movements of his *Chronochromie* of 1960 (Messiaen, 1963) (fig.25). These introversions are made up of non-repeating sequences of 32 "chromatic" durations:

"The number of possible permutations of thirty-two different values is colossal, of the order of two thousand (European) quintillion, and to play all of them at the tempo of the strophes would take something like a trillion times the entire history of the universe so far." (Griffiths, 1985, p. 192)

Messiaen was unusual among modern composers in that he was very clear about what many of his musical structures were intended to symbolise. According to Andrew

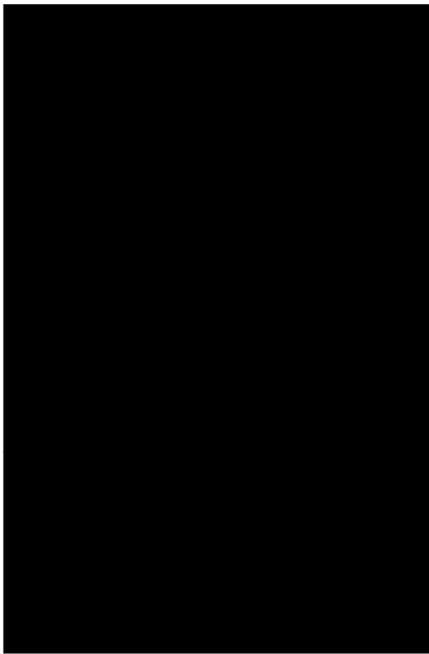


Figure 25: Olivier Messiaen: *Chronochromie* (p.95). The rhythmic introversions are played against transcriptions of birdsong.

Shenton, referencing Umberto Eco, he "attempted to 'close' some of his compositions by giving them 'unadulterable specificity'" (Shenton, 2008, p. 47). Messiaen himself stated precisely that "this music should be able to express some noble sentiments (and especially the most noble of all, the religious sentiments exalted by the truths and the theology of the Catholic faith)" (Messiaen, 1956, p. 13).

What impressed me about *Chronochromie*, however, was not the huge span of time the introversions are meant to symbolise but rather that Messiaen does it so clearly. Whatever the theological significance, the religious "mystery", behind it, Messiaen, in his specificity, absolutely demystifies the structure of his music.

A modern composer who all too often suffers from over-mystification is Edgard Varèse. Boulez referred to him as a "mythical tempest" (quoted in Danuser, 2006, p. 425) and witness, for example, John Cage in conversation with Morton Feldman with commentary by Kyle Gann:

"John Cage: 'Varèse is obviously magnificent, and many things he did, we are obliged to do. I mean, he changed music so that it was different after him. But - and you agree, don't you? - in a mysterious way [...]"

As they continue, Feldman speaks of Varèse's almost stationary grandeur, which Cage in turn characterizes as a rejection of time. Then both talk about the importance of sound as material in Varèse, the fact that sounds are not just substitutes for other sounds, that you can't reconstruct a Varèse score in any meaningful sense by transcribing it for piano." (Gann, 2006, p. 426)

Varèse's music does not have to be subjected to this common, "expansive" reading,

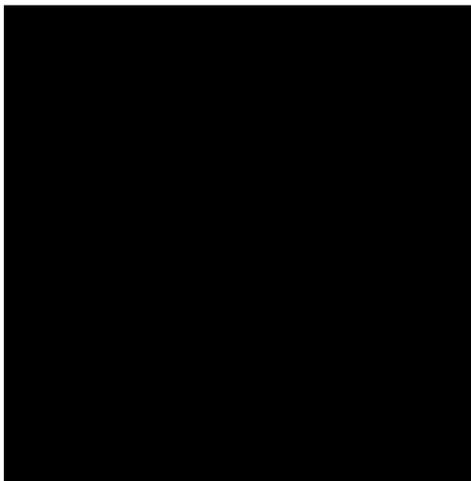


Figure 26: Edgard Varèse: *Octandre* (3rd Movement, bars 9-17).

however. *Octandre* (Varèse, 1924), for example, can be read in a radically traditional musical way: melodic line and counterpoint abound⁴². The *Animé et jubilatoire* section of the third movement, for instance, clearly mimics a fugue (fig.26). The temporal elements of Varèse's music are, for me, what makes it exciting: the rhythmic drive, the continual inventing and ripping up of new thematic ideas, the recycling and superimposition of blocks of sounds (chords). It is very superficial: there is nothing to

these sounds other than that they are occurring in time.

Messiaen's musical objects share the dynamism as those of a demystified Varèse. Their structure might be complex but the way they are combined is easy to read. Anthony Pople, writing with reference to the early *Quatuor pour le fin de temps*, says "Messiaen's audacity lies in the very simplicity of his means (Pople, 1998, p. 17)." Throughout his composing career Messiaen was remarkably consistent in what these "means" were and in their exposition: from the *Préface* to the *Quatuor* (Messiaen, 1942) and his *Technique de mon langage musicale* (Messiaen, 1956), first published in 1944, to the colossal,

⁴² *Octandre* has, in fact, been published in an arrangement for piano (Ricordi catalogue - online version unavailable at time of writing). Varèse made his own 2 piano 8 hand arrangement of his earlier orchestral piece *Amériques* (recorded on the Wergo label).

Traité de rythme, de couleur, et d'ornithologie, written between 1949 and 1992 and posthumously published in seven volumes (Messiaen, 1994). Significantly many of the techniques he employs are about the imposition of limits, most notably his use of "modes of limited transpositions" and "nonretrogradable rhythms"⁴³ and what comes from this is material that can be combined either contiguously or synchronously to make larger structures. Thus in the example from *Chronochromie* (fig.25) the rhythmic introversions are played against another staple of Messiaen's musical language, transcriptions of birdsong.

In this discussion about works that present material as clearly as possible one might think that Morton Feldman's compositions would provide a model, consisting, as they do, of sparse, isolated chords and simple, recurring melodic fragments that are left



largely undeveloped. Of his cycle of compositions *The Viola in My Life (I-IV)*, written in the 1970s, Feldman writes:

"Situations repeat themselves with subtle changes rather than developing. A stasis develops between expectance and its realization. As in a dream, there is no release until we wake up, and not because the dream has ended" (Feldman, 2000, p. 90).

Figure 27: Morton Feldman: *The Viola in My Life (1)* (p.4).

Which, for me, identifies the problem with this music: it encourages suspension in a near static field that would have no end. One is required to immerse oneself in an unspecified duration. The immersive, I would argue, is an almost inescapable mode of listening within our current cultural context, and indeed would seem, at first glance, to be not incompatible with the superficial reading of art objects. However, the immersive listening called for by unspecific structures leads to weak art objects as the moment of encounter is unspecific. An object-orientated approach sees the assumption that an act

⁴³ "Modes which cannot be transposed beyond a certain number of transpositions, because one always falls again into the same notes; rhythms which cannot be used in retrograde, because in such a case one finds the same order of values again." (Messiaen, 1956, p. 13)

of listening by the audience completes the work as wrong, all the work needs to be there at the moment of the encounter for the work to be an art object that is correctly situated in relation to the moment of encounter. To invert Alvin Lucier's well known dictum: making sounds happen is more important than careful listening⁴⁴.

With this in mind it is interesting to make a comparison between Messiaen's symbolic use of intervals to express enormous spans of time and the more literal approach that is adopted by contemporary artists or experimental musicians such as in John Cage's *As Slow as Possible* (ASLSP), which is



Figure 28: John Cage: ASLSP (excerpt).

receiving a performance in a church in Germany that is expected to last 639 years⁴⁵, or Jem Finer's *Longplayer* which is expected to stream digitally for 1000 years⁴⁶. The fact that these works are "made happen" provides them with considerable impact, but this, I would argue is as one encounters them as a concept, rather than as the result of any listening.



Figure 29: Arvo Pärt: *An den Wassern zu Babel sassen wir und weinten* (p.1).

The tintinnabuli compositions of Arvo Pärt can be seen as offering an alternative method of presenting specific musical objects. Developed by Pärt after abandoning "modernist" styles of composition, his tintinnabuli style is a radically simplified method of handling musical material:

"I have discovered it is enough when a single note is beautifully played...I work with very few elements – with one voice, with two voices. I build with the most primitive materials – with the triad, with one specific tonality." (Hillier, 1997, p. 87)

⁴⁴ Lucier said "careful listening is more important than making sounds happen (quoted in Cox & Warner, 2006, p.63).

⁴⁵ [Wikipedia.org/wiki/As_Slow_as_Possible](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/As_Slow_as_Possible) (accessed 09/15).

⁴⁶ longplayer.org/ (accessed 10/16).

The first solo lines of *An den Wassern zu Babel sassen wir und weinten* (Pärt, 1984), for example (fig.29), are clearly constructed from a simple unfolding scale. At figure 4 instrumental voices are added which only consist of notes taken from an A minor triad. Pärt's music is not static like Feldman's as there is a clear unfolding process to it, it could, however, be criticised as encouraging immersive listening, a characteristic that makes it a popular choice for background music in television and film⁴⁷.

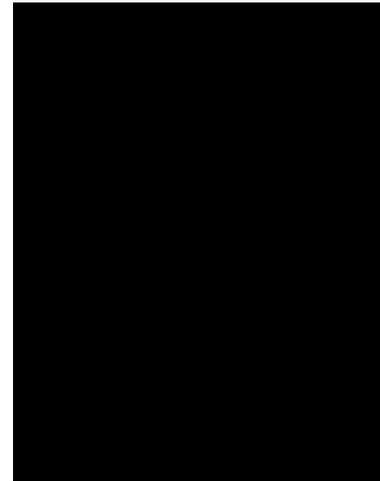


Figure 30: Josef Matthias Hauer: *Juli 1956* (p.2).

Considerably less popular is the *Zwölftonspiel* of Josef Matthias Hauer (1883-1959). Hauer is chiefly remembered today, alongside Arnold Schoenberg, as one of the originators of the twelve-tone technique (Whitall, 2008, p. 24), for the last twenty years of his life he wrote exclusively what he called *Zwölftonspiel* in which he manipulated twelve-tone rows using the strict application of fixed procedures. Typical is *Zwölftonspiel Juli 1956* for piano four-hands (Hauer, 1956). Figure 30 shows the right hand of the primo player and the left hand of the secondo cycling through material, all restricted to within one octave, derived from a twelve-tone row. Every four bars the primo left hand and secondo right hand alternate their accompanying figures in strict alternation. The harmony and the rhythm are also entirely derived from the pitch

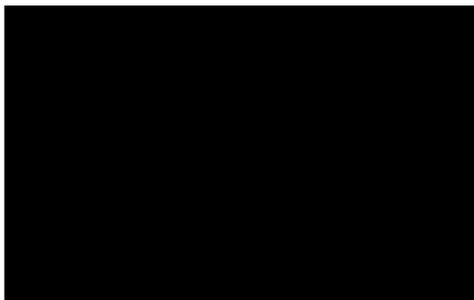


Figure 31: Christoph von Blumröder: Analytic tables of Stockhausen's *Kreuzspiel*.

relationships of the row. In striving for greater objectivity Hauer would often use chance procedures to produce his tone rows such as the *I Ching*, more famously used by John Cage as a compositional tool⁴⁸. Hauer's dogged use of specific, limited structures provides an interesting contrast with the serial compositions of what is referred to as the

⁴⁷ Samuel Wigley in an article *The Guardian* in 2008 cites three films released that year that use Pärt's music: *Is it time to give Pärt a rest?* theguardian.com (accessed 09/15).

⁴⁸ For more on Hauer's compositional techniques see Covack 1992. For Cage and the *I Ching* see Revill 1992, p.129-133).

"Darmstadt School" of the 1950s and early 60s. Here serialism was applied in such complex ways that much of the attention is given to analyses of how this was done: figure 33, for example, shows Christoph von Blumröder's analytic tables of Stockhausen's *Kreuzspiel* (reproduced in Iddon, 2013, pp. 74-75). If one ignores this analysis, as one is required to do by the superficial reading of art objects, there is little to distinguish this music from Jerry Goldsmith's score for the original *Planet of the Apes* (1968)⁴⁹, which, I hasten to add, is not a comment intended to denigrate the work of either composer.

Arnold Whittall describes *The New Grove's* verdict on Hauer's *ZwölfTönspiel* as "bleak":

"About 1000 such pieces were written, most of them lost...melodies are strictly athenatic, the part writing is undifferentiated, tempo and dynamics impose inarticulate medium values, and the scoring, whether for piano, quartet or chamber orchestra, is mostly interchangeable. The elaboration of the material is mere manipulation, the selection of fixed procedures from an imaginary catalogue..." (quoted in Whittall, 2008, p. 25)

This approach to composition is exactly what Trevor Wishart criticises in his book *On Sonic Art* as "permutationalism":

"This abstract architecture...reduces all objects which it touches to the same rather empty, non-dynamic experience. There is no rationale beyond the arrangement of the bricks; the nature of the bricks becomes irrelevant so long as they fit into the pattern." (Wishart, 1996, p. 42)

Wishart aims to justify his practice in terms of an expansion "Beyond the Pitch/Duration Paradigm (ibid. pp. 11-43)." Throughout the chapter in *On Sonic Art* that bears that title he makes various appeals to anti-academicism, folk music, free-improvisation etc. in the belief that there is more to music (or sonic art) than just an "arrangement of bricks". Electroacoustic composers and sonic or sound artists, such as Wishart, put their faith in the "nature of the bricks" themselves and their practice will inevitably become bound up

⁴⁹ *The Planet of the Apes*. Film, 20th Century Fox, 1968. Goldsmith's score is celebrated for its use of twelve-tone and extended techniques ([www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Planet_of_the_Apes_\(1968_film\)](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Planet_of_the_Apes_(1968_film))), accessed 12/17).

with technology. Once that occurs, it is easily forgotten by the practitioner that any interest or excitement that results from their technological research is not necessarily transferable to the point of encounter. Sometimes the "brick dust" of sound is just plain disappointing. Georgina Born, in *Rationalizing Culture*, found this a "typical" response when she asked anonymous software researchers at IRCAM what they thought of the music produced there: "Ah, extremely disappointed most of the time (Born, 1995, p. 170)". Pierre Schaeffer, the "founder of *Musique concrète*" (Cox & Warner, 2006, p. 76), when aged seventy-six, gave this assessment of his life's work:

"I was always deeply unhappy at what I was doing...Each time I was to experience the disappointment of not arriving at music...Seeing that no one knew anymore what to do with DoReMi, maybe we had to look outside that...Unfortunately it took me forty years to conclude that nothing is possible outside DoReMi...in other words, I wasted my life." (quoted in Demers, 2010, p. 156)

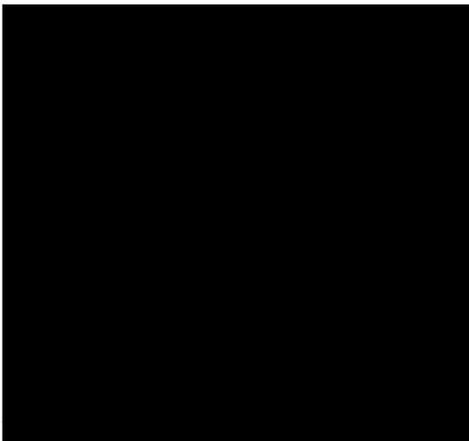


Figure 32: Erik Satie: *Vexations*.

So obvious is the disappointing aspect of some sounds that it is taken to be the point of the work in which they are presented. This is the sort of justification one finds repeated in writing such as Dick Higgins's *Boredom and Danger*, written in 1966 (Higgins, 1968) or Eldritch Priest's *Boring Formless Nonsense*, published in 2013 (Priest, 2013). Time and again performances of Erik Satie's *Vexations* are used to show audiences the sort of listening that should be properly indulged in. First published, by none other than John Cage in 1949, over fifty years after it was composed, and first performed by a team of pianists that included Cage fourteen years after that in 1963⁵⁰, it is interesting to wonder why *Vexations* (Satie, 1969) became to be taken so literally so long after it was first conceived. I would argue that it is better read as a humorous, if not un-provocative, score, as is Alphonse Allais' *Marche funèbre composée pour les funérailles d'un grand homme sourd* of 1895. Allais' "composition", dating from around the same time as

⁵⁰ wikipedia.org/wiki/Vexations (accessed 11/16).

Vexations, is generally agreed to be the first silent piece of music, written 57 years before Cage's *4'33"*⁵¹. As with Cage's *ASLSP*, Satie's *Vexations* or Allais' *Marche* are interesting and amusing objects that do not require to be listened to.

The three compositions described at the beginning of this chapter are representative of my attempts to create music from blocks presented in clear and specific ways. The basic

building block is the musical note as written on the musical staff and to present this as clearly as possible one gives it to traditional instruments to be played in traditional ways within a traditional context. There is no use of "extended techniques" or technological enhancement and the specific venue is the concert hall. These blocks are combined to make larger blocks using randomisation processes. Obviously, as is true with all my work that uses randomly generated series, any other outcome is equally as valid as the one I happen to choose. Randomisation, to my mind, foregrounds the actual process of filling a musical (or artistic) duration (or space) as clearly as possible. The objects that result are there for no other reason: there can be, of course, no question of improvisation or indeterminacy in the performance itself.

The six series played by the non-piano instruments in my *6 x 32 Notes* are intended to be self-contained musical objects. Their presentation could not be more straightforward, played, as they are, as straight crotchets and remaining undeveloped throughout the piece. There are 32 notes in each non-piano series as I wanted each note to appear only once (thus none were given precedence) and a 32-note chromatic scale comfortably fits within the range of each instrument. The piano provides a contrast to the other instruments but is still limited to only one block of material. I knew I wanted this block to be rhythmically complex and atonal and was able to produce this using a random number generator. Because it was produced in this way considerations of playability



Figure 33: Alphonse Allais: *Marche funèbre composée pour les funérailles d'un grand homme sourd* (bars 1-9).

⁵¹ wikipedia.org/wiki/Alphonse_Allais (accessed 11/16). Allais is also credited with producing the first monochrome pictures (again as a joke). Coincidentally, he was born on the same street in Honfleur as Satie, 12 years earlier.

were secondary, hence the direction in the score "2 players if needed". I made a point of not recording (or remembering) how I used the randomly generated numbers to make the piano part as I wanted it to just "be there" as an object that resisted further analysis.

The series used in *8 x 8 for String Ensemble* and *36 Notes for Clarinet, Violin and Piano*, also described at the beginning of this chapter, are similarly chosen to those in *6 x 32 Notes*, but in these later pieces one can see an increasing interest in the process of building up of the material itself. The material of *36 Notes*, for example, consists of nothing but the unfolding of a 36 note series and then its gradual removal.

By the time I came to write *88 Notes for Piano* (described in the third chapter of this thesis), which I see as the culmination of my applying an object-orientated approach to musical composition, I was becoming increasingly aware of the tension between the musicality and the non-musicality of my work up to that point. My compositions, such as the three described thus far in this chapter, were intended to have a deliberately dynamic musicality to them, I wanted there to be no doubt that they should be read as music, and yet I was always aware that, in a sense, I hadn't been writing music at all. Although it is interesting that one cannot help make musical sense of random series of notes as they are built up or broken down, the listening at the moment of encounter is irredeemably conventional. I cannot avoid, for example, that my *Three Pieces in Contrary Motion*, seem to me to have a quasi-religious, immersive quality to them. These pieces, which are described below, were in fact written partly to see what would happen if I built up a series in a slow, even tentative, way and restricted it to a couple of octaves, but also partly because I was increasingly interested in writing pieces that I could reliably perform myself (hence another reason for their slow tempo and restricted range).

With this in mind, the next work I wrote, *Explicit Sounds* (described below), marks a distinct break with my previous compositions: now I am the sole performer performing what are deliberately non-virtuosic, non-musical actions (non-musical in a traditional sense). My title includes the word "sounds": the work was written with a specific sound art event in mind and is full of sounds (and silences) and yet I chose to clearly limit these by duration, physical restrictions or by the actions themselves. The playful and provocative quality of my work immediately became apparent to me: I was, of course,

aware of the precedence set by other text scores, such as those of George Brecht or La Monte Young⁵², but, as with my non-musical musical compositions, in *Explicit Sounds* I was concerned with only filling a "sound art" space with clearly defined "sound art" acts. The silence that ends the piece is the absence of action, nothing more.

Description of Work: **Three Pieces in Contrary Motion**

Scales of seven notes, consisting of only the white notes on a piano keyboard, are built up one note at a time in contrary motion. Each note is played seven times within each iteration of a seven bar duration and is held until another note occurs. The distribution of the notes is determined by use of a random number generator.

Description of Work: **Explicit Sounds**

The work is for solo performer and is in six "movements". No programme note is supplied, the title of each movement is announced before it is performed:

1) Eight Hammer Blows in Two Minutes: *The performer sits at a table and, according to a notated score, hits the table eight times within two minutes.*

2) Ten Forks Thrown at an Oven Shelf (Improvisation): *The performer sitting some distance away throws ten forks at an oven shelf placed on the table.*

3) Chair Piece: *The performer holds up his chair at arm's length until he gets tired or bored.*

4) Two Keyboards Taped to a Table: *The performer tapes two electronic keyboards (switched on) to the table.*

5) One Note Held for Two Minutes: *The performer plays a single note on a wind instrument for two minutes (breathing where necessary).*

6) Nothing Happens for Two Minutes: *The performer leaves the platform for two minutes. In the first performance, given at the Holywell Music Room, Oxford, I placed a small plastic bottle of drinking water that I had been drinking from during the performance, in the centre of the stage with an electric torch, switched on, next to it.*

⁵² See, for example, Lely & Saunders 2012, pp.109-112 & 423-436.

CHAPTER 6, Part 1: Little or no input

Description of Work: **Moving Ten Objects to the Left (Some of them very slowly)**

Two performers sit at two small tables facing the audience. Each performer has five different objects that are placed at the far right of each table. Following a pre-determined "score" the objects are moved across the tables, some of them "very slowly". This is done until all the objects have fallen over the left-hand edge of the tables.

On the website for the Wandelweiser group of composers Michael Pisaro gives an account of a performance and recording of *Stones* by Christian Wolff⁵³:

"Each person made their own realization of the score, given minimal requirements ... I think ten sounds, however one wanted to understand that, to be made over the course of the 70 minutes duration of the recording. Antoine had used chance procedures and it had thrown up a need to make three sounds at once...This took some amusing acrobatics...Thomas Stiegler made every stone sound using his

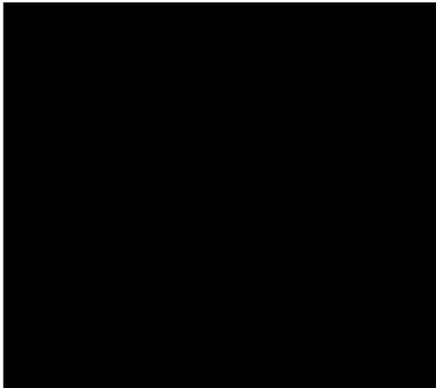


Figure 34: The Cover of the CD of Wandelweiser's *Stones*.

violin, intertwining pebbles with bow hair in the strings, dropping tiny stones on the body - it was like a miniature symphony in a violin. Burkhard dragged a large stone very gently over the floor of the atelier for a long, long time. Kunsu Shim...sat without any visible motion (as far as we could tell, none

whatsoever) for the first 55 minutes and then quietly, almost inaudibly, made ten extremely delicate sounds with a few very small pebbles and some cloth. Jürg Frey...had determined, Wolff-style, to hinge a few of his sounds upon actions by others, unbeknownst to the people playing...(this) necessitated that he rub two good size stones over another gently for nearly half an hour." (Pisaro, 2009)

What is going on here? Pisaro insists that this activity is about providing something other than a "normal listening experience" (ibid.). Time and again experimental musicians and

⁵³ The score for *Stones* is reproduced in *Word Events* (Lely & Saunders, 2012, p. 152).

composers tell us that work that involves "little or no input" will teach us how to be better listeners. Jennie Gottschalk, in her book *Experimental Music Since 1970*, from which the phrase "little or no input" is taken⁵⁴, illustrates this with a story:

"There is an anecdote I've been told about a professor who was teaching a class on authority structures. The students showed up for the final exam and were given blue books by the teaching assistant. There was no exam question. The teaching assistant did not offer any assistance or information. Some of the students got up and left the exam, thinking there had been a mistake. Others stayed to write about the circumstances in which they found themselves. Those who engaged with the implicit question of the situation were given an A, and those who didn't, failed the exam." (Gottschalk, 2016, p. 21)

Gottschalk says that this "situation parallels the two different types of reactions that a listener might have to a purported piece of music that is lacking in deliberate sound markers (ibid.)." But who is to say which group of students "failed" or "passed"? Also, is it right that there was no further distinction between the students other than an A grade or a fail? Walking out could be seen to demonstrate a far better understanding of "authority structures" than submitting oneself to the will of the absent professor and his or her deliberately intransigent assistant.



Figure 35: Wandelweiser performs *Stones*.

Wandelweiser's *Stones* is wrongly situated before and after the moment of encounter, the performers being their own judge, jury and executioners who believe the audience will benefit from their actions if only it would listen properly. If, however, one chooses not to be steered by presumptuous performers, what is one left with? Christian Wolff commented on the origin of *Stones* as "an informal solo exploration, on a long afternoon on a stony beach" (quoted in Lely & Saunders, 2012, p. 414). What one is left with is nothing but an exclusive interaction between these men and their rocks.

⁵⁴ Gottschalk, 2016, pp. 26-28.



Figure 36: *Moving Ten Objects to the Left (Some of them very slowly)* compared to *Stones*.

The first thing to say about my *Moving Ten Objects to the Left (Some of them very slowly)*, described at the beginning of this chapter, is that it was created very much in reaction to work like *Stones*. The second thing to say about it is that superficially it could be seen as not very different. It certainly doesn't aim to be inclusive and it consists of nothing

but a simple activity using everyday objects. Any differences are in how the principles of an object-orientated arts practice are applied and these are fundamental and are actually immediately apparent. First there is the title which precisely describes the action that the work consists of. Then there is the fact that the space, and therefore the duration, of the action is defined by the size of the table tops. As with some of my musical compositions, this work is about the clear emptying of a defined artistic space. Also, as with my music, it is important that a score is seen to be followed, making it clear that the action is not being carried out at the whim of the performers. *Moving Ten Objects to the Left* is deliberately a work of limited or no input, with nothing before it and nothing after it and little while it lasts.

Gottschalk catalogues many examples of the use of "little or no input" in her sub-chapter entitled *Silence* (ibid. pp. 21-34), Craig Dworkin's *No Medium* is a whole book on the subject (Dworkin, 2013). There are probably various reasons, conscious and unconscious, why composers and artists have ended up presenting very little over the years, Luciano Berio, memorably, put forth the suggestion that behind fellow composer Morton Feldman's writing "everything pianissimo, lies a fear of taking even a step outside of the 'avant-garde'... Maybe he is afraid of being eaten alive" (Dalmonte & Varga, 1985, pp. 70-71). Whatever the reason, what is clear, is that it is common

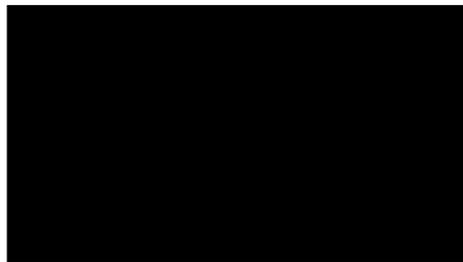


Figure 37: Part of the *Invisible* exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in 2012

practice: exhibition catalogues from recent years have included *Nothing* (Gussin & Carpenter, 2001), *Invisible* (Ruggof, 2012), *Silence* (Kamps, 2012) and *Sounds Like Silence* (Daniels & Arns, 2012). I have also incorporated silence in my work: *Explicit Sounds*,

described at the end of the last chapter, ends with two minutes of it, *John Cage and Teeny Duchamp Play Chess*, described at the beginning of the next, contains a section where nothing happens for one and a half minutes. My use of it, however, is always intended to be antithetical to how it is conventionally believed to operate in the works of many contemporary artists and experimental musicians, and that is as a negative object. It is silence that stands in stark contrast to the activity that surrounds it. Nothing happens within it.

Silence in art, as I have already argued in relation to Cage's *4'33"* is, according to my thesis, best presented and understood as a provocative act. It is a refusal to do anything when something is expected. I am happy to admit that the primary motivation for making *Moving Ten Objects to the Left* was a reaction against pieces like Wandelweiser's performance of *Stones*, similarly my video *Field Recording*, described at the end of this chapter, was created primarily in reaction to having had to listen to too many field recordings presented as art work. As with "walking art" (see chapter 2.1), field recording, when presented in an unadulterated form as art, is wrongly situated: if one ignores the presumption that we should be better listeners, all the activity (what little activity there is) is removed from the moment of encounter. Hence my video demonstrates a way of recording a field in a dynamic but thoroughly pointless way (running around the field with a video camera). The audience for the video is presented with a similar null action as a traditional field recording but here its nullity is explicitly stated, and, for a specialist audience, in a provocative way. Provocation, as with what I have already identified as self-reflexivity (see chapter 4.2), is beneficial to an object-orientated arts practice as it draws attention to the object and the context within which it is presented. This is not to say that one should expect particular outcomes from one's artistic actions, only that an object-orientated action, carried out in the name of art, deliberately and knowingly limits itself to the bubble within which it is presented.

Description of Work: **Field Recording**

A video of the artist running around the perimeter of a field, shot from his point of view.

CHAPTER 6, Part 2: What Use is Art if it is **No** Different from Life?

Description of Work: **John Cage and Teeny Duchamp Play Chess in front of a Live Audience**

Created in collaboration with Stavroula Kounadea. Two performers, a man and a woman, perform various actions according to a "script". The man is dressed in a black suit and wears a necktie, the woman wears a dress. The work as it was performed in 2015 in the Old Fire Station Theatre as part of the Oxford Fringe festival had the subtitle A work of aesthetic mourning in 64 acts and consisted of a "prologue", six "scenes" and an "epilogue":

Prologue: the man and the woman sit at a small table, side on to the audience, seemingly playing chess. Above them is a screen onto which is projected a PowerPoint of photographs of artworks from the 1960s and early 1970s accompanied by the song Yesterday Once More performed by The Carpenters.

Scene 1: after making a few conventional chess moves the man and the woman alternate different actions starting with the woman placing her hand over the man's hand on the table and ending with the man scraping a house brick amplified with a contact microphone across the table and the woman dropping a block of raw mince onto the table. The woman then scrapes a contact microphone over the man's bowed head.

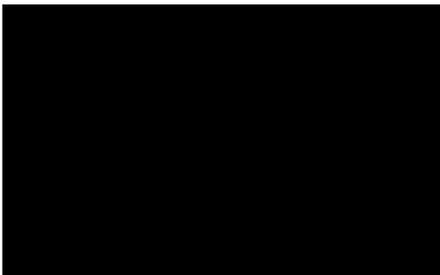


Figure 38: The chess scene from *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1968).

*Interlude: The chess scene from *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1968)⁵⁵ is projected onto the screen accompanied by the theme from Peter Gunn by Henry Mancini.*

Scene 2: The man and the woman, seated at the table, alternate actions starting with the man giving the woman an orange. Gradually more variety of movement is introduced; another sonic component is introduced by the man tapping on and coughing into a microphone that is looped continuously with feedback. The scene ends with the woman performing a "dance" tied to a violin while the man,

⁵⁵ *The Thomas Crown Affair*. Film, United Artists, 1968.

sitting, watches. The woman kneels *between* the man's legs and he plays the violin across her back with a bow.

Interlude: A video made up of short clips of Merce Cunningham dancing to John Cage's Variations V, Yves Klein directing one of his Anthropometry performances and the piano scene from What's Up, Doc?⁵⁶ is projected onto the screen accompanied by the song The Windmills of your Mind performed by Dusty Springfield.



Figure 39: The piano scene from *What's Up, Doc?*

Scene 3: the woman lies on a blanket spread in front of the table with a travel chess set in front of her. She invites the man to join her. Further actions are alternated ending with the man lying above the blanket across two chairs tuning a small transistor radio to random radio stations. The woman puts antiseptic cream on the man's face.

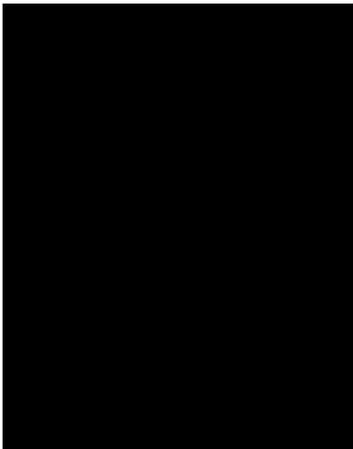


Figure 40: The champagne scene from *The Seven Year Itch*.

*Interlude: A video of John Cage and Teeny Duchamp playing chess is projected on the screen accompanied by the soundtrack of a trailer for *The Seven Year Itch*⁵⁷ combined with the sound of the climactic theatre scene from *Charade*⁵⁸.*

Scene 4: the man and the woman are seated in their original positions. Chess moves are combined with the woman removing a pair of rubber gloves while the man puts on goggles and ear defenders. The scene ends with the man and the woman covered in a veil, the woman places her hand on the man's head. They sit silently and motionless for two minutes, a counter counting down the time is projected onto the screen.

Scene 5: accompanied by the opening of Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto the man and the woman recreate a domestic scene. They exchange gifts: the woman gives the man a bottle of champagne; the man gives the woman some mushrooms. The man

⁵⁶ *What's Up, Doc?* Film, Warner Brothers, 1972.

⁵⁷ *The Seven Year Itch*. Film, 20th Century Fox, 1955.

⁵⁸ *Charade*. Film, Universal Pictures, 1963.

struggles to open the bottle, eventually it **pops** and he sticks his finger in the bottle to stop the champagne from flowing out. **The man and the woman struggle to free the man's finger...**The scene ends with the **man** and the woman recreating an image from Joseph Beuys's I Like America and America Likes Me: the woman, acting like a coyote, uses her teeth to pull at a blanket covering **the man** who holds an umbrella, the handle pointing outwards.

Interlude: A video of a male curator and **a female pianist** discuss John Cage's Chess Pieces accompanied by the song Could it **be Magic?** performed by Donna **Summer** combined with an excerpt from Laborintus II by Luciano Berio.



Figure 41: The umbrella scene from the 1966 film of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

Scene 6: The man and woman sit at the **table** reading. The man is reading Mesostics re and not re Duchamp from *M, Writings '67-'72* by John Cage⁵⁹, the woman *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* By Edward **Albee**⁶⁰. At various points they read aloud. The woman says that she is bored. The man **ignores** her. The scene ends with the woman writing "silence" over the man's suit, **binding** him to his chair with a microphone cable and cutting off his tie with scissors. An **amplifier** hums. The man leaves the "stage".

Epilogue: the woman sits. The man **enters**. Ends in silence with the man's head resting on the woman's lap.

The audience was given a "programme" on which was printed more photographs of artworks from the 1960s and early 1970s, **details** of the performers and the duration of the piece (approximately one hour).

It should be apparent by now, to anyone **reading** this essay, that I have something of a passion for what might be called the "tradit**ional** avant-garde" and something of an issue with John Cage. Feelings such as these are **important** as I understand my practice to be largely a reactive process. An example of **f** this is how the concept for *John Cage and Teeny Duchamp Play Chess in front of a Live Audience* (described above) originated. The idea for the work came to me after I had **been** asked to participate in a live reading of

⁵⁹ *M, Writings '67-'72* (Cage, 1973)

⁶⁰ Edward Albee: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* First published in the UK in 1964.

John Cage's imaginary conversation with Erik Satie (as written by Cage) from *Silence* (Cage, 1968, pp. 76-83). The reading was accompanied by a rather doleful performance of Cage's *Cheap Imitation*, played on a violin. What struck me was what an empty experience this reverential repetition of Cage's work was. And I don't mean empty in the way Cage himself might have wanted: it brought home to me how many of the works of the avant-garde are, in a sense, "unrepeatable". A good example of what I mean by this is Alison Knowles' famous event score *Make a Salad* of 1962, the impact of which, I would argue, is entirely lost in performance⁶¹. If one accepts that it is for some didactic purpose that these works are being repeated then one is entering into what I would argue is the wrong sort of relationship with them: one of adulation for the teacher and reverence for the work. Also, if they had something to teach us, why haven't we learned it by now?

Happily, however, my fellow reader in the Cage/Satie piece, Stavroula Kounadea, became my collaborator on *John Cage and Teeny Duchamp*. For some time up to that

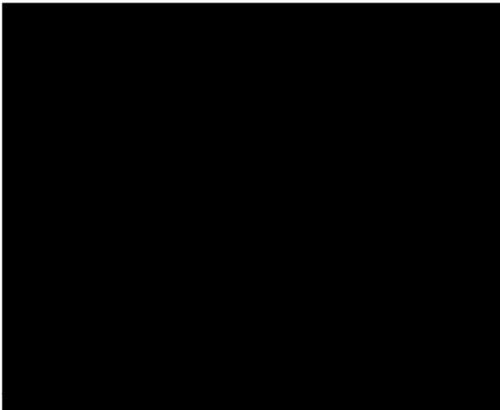


Figure 42: Teeny Duchamp watches Marcel Duchamp and John Cage play chess in *Reunion*.

point, I had been wanting to base a work on John Cage's *Reunion* and I could see that working with Stav was an opportunity to develop such a piece. *Reunion* of 1968 was, in my opinion, a work so ill-conceived that it represents for me a monument to what you can get away with once you have achieved the status of its two main protagonists. In *Reunion* John Cage played chess with Marcel

Duchamp, and Marcel's wife, Teeny, live, on stage in Toronto. The specially prepared board was wired electronically to the sound system, the idea being that the moves made would interact with "sound-generating systems" operated by David Behrman, Gordon Mumma, David Tudor and Lowell Cross. Cross wrote an account of the evening in an article that marked "the forty-fourth anniversary of *Reunion*":

⁶¹ *Make a Salad* has been performed many times: wikipedia.org/wiki/Alison_Knowles (accessed 09/15).

"Teeny Duchamp watched her husband (White) defeat Cage (Black) within half an hour - despite his handicap of only one knight⁶² (Cross, 2013, p. 246)...While the star performers were exchanging amenities, the break between games provided an intermission - and an opportunity for the exodus of a large segment of the audience...Then, at about 9:15 p.m.,...Teeny (White) played Cage (Black), and Duchamp observed - or dozed off. The collaborating composers again dutifully provided their electronic signals to the inputs of the chess board, as the game between Cage and Teeny went on, and on, and on...Finally, at about 1:00 a.m...Duchamp made known his fatigue...The event came to an inconclusive ending." (ibid. p.251)



Figure 43: Allan Kaprow and a woman wrapped in foil, *Calling*, 1965.

Although Cross, in the above quote, seems unconvinced by this event he is more positive

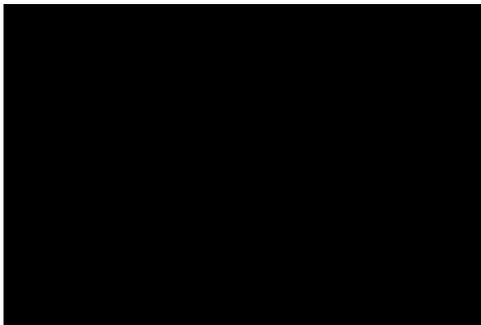


Figure 44: Ben Vautier plays the violin while wrapped in string in 1964.

in his "interpretation" of it:

"The idea of using a chess game to realize a musical-theatrical work was one of his (Cage's) most creative: it simultaneously exploited his never-concealed penchants for high theatre, the appeal of chess to intellectualism, and the living of everyday life" (ibid. p.251-2).

I'm not sure that *Reunion*, in its musical-theatrical aspects, has anything to teach us about everyday life. Disciples of Cage would no doubt defend it as "purposeful purposelessness or a purposeless play (Cage, 1968, p. 12)". There exist Shigeko Kubota's photographs of the event⁶³, in which are glimpses of the mundane reality behind it: the

⁶² Duchamp was, as is well known, a grandmaster at chess: wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcel_Duchamp (accessed 11/16).

⁶³ www.artpool.hu/Fluxus/Kubota.html (unavailable at time of writing. Many images are available in Google images).

tangle of wires, the cigarette smoke, the odd chairs, the one bottle of wine, Duchamp asleep. One of the things I love about the art-scene of the 1960s (and, of course, one of the only things I have to go on) is the dusty truth revealed by the grainy black and white images of the artists as they carry out their zany, arty antics. This I find particularly true of Happenings and Fluxus events as they are recorded in books of the time such as Michael Kirby's *Happenings* (Kirby, 1965), Allan Kaprow's *Assemblage, Environments & Happenings* (Kaprow, 1966) or Hans Sohm's *Happening & Fluxus, materialien* (Sohm, 1970). Here the reportage style of the images communicates that the actions they depict were so real, dirty, shoddy and uncomfortable, and yet so very divorced from everyday life.

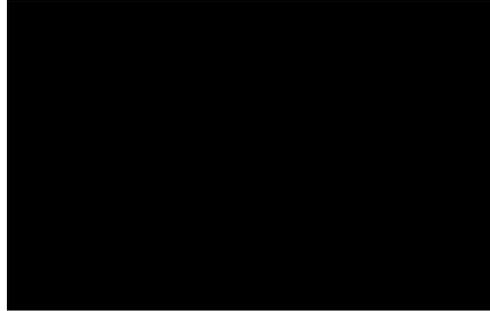


Figure 45: Joseph Beuys: I Like America and America Likes Me, 1974.

I would say that one of the drivers behind *John Cage and Teeny Duchamp Play Chess in front of a Live Audience* was an attempt to capture something of what we felt to be the true spirit, and feel, of these acts when they were first performed. This spirit is, I would

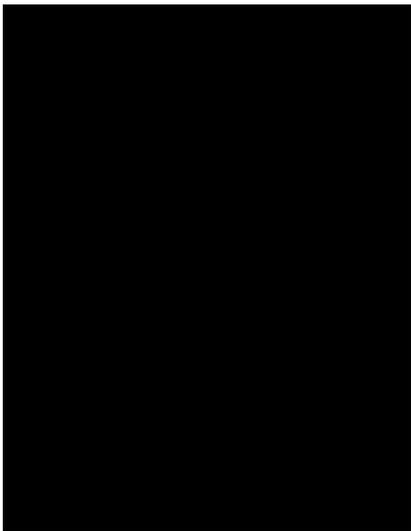


Figure 46: Carolee Schneemann: *Meat Joy*, 1964.

argue, completely killed when recreations are done with reverence towards the material, a reverence that would not have been shown at the time⁶⁴. Possibly as a consequence of the disruptive nature of the original acts and their lack of regard for material, it seems to be not uncommon for artists of the time to retrospectively resort to the archive. Witness, for example, the weighty (over 3kg) *Fluxus Codex* (Hendricks, 1988) or Jeremy Grimshaw's account of gaining access to La Monte Young's "extensive private archives" (Grimshaw, 2011, p. 7).

⁶⁴ See, for example, Philip Ursprung's discussion of Kaprow's *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, where he is concerned with questions of "authenticity" and its "meticulous reconstruction in 2006...led by André Lepecki." (Ursprung, 2013, pp. 45-46)

I began the previous paragraph by saying "I would say" what one of the "drivers" behind our performance piece was as Stavroula and I both immediately fell in to a way of working where we would simply try out actions that occurred to us, the primary criteria being whether that action "felt right" and we liked performing it. This was never an insular, "experimental" procedure however, it was always our intention to use our intuition to produce an "outward facing" work, that was *there* at the moment of encounter with an audience. This "outward facing" immediacy is something that is present in all my work, even though it strives at the same time, to be "closed". The events are going to take place whether there is an audience present or not, but they are always intended for public performance.



Figure 47: Dennis Oppenheim: *Parallel Stress*, 1970.

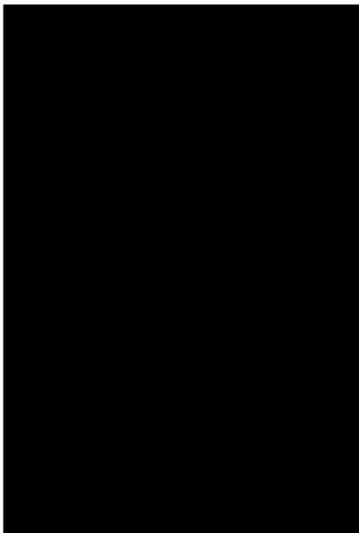


Figure 48: Yoko Ono lies on a piano in a performance of John Cage's *Music Walk*, 1962.

In a similar way to my other work, we were also concerned with "filling space" with the acts we performed. Similar to Robin Wilson and Philip Glass's approach to the making of *Einstein on the Beach*, we "immediately agreed on the overall length of time we wanted to fill⁶⁵". The first version, to be performed in an empty shop being used as a gallery space, was to be half an hour long. This was extended to one hour in the "theatrical version" described at the beginning of this chapter. The overall length was divided into smaller sections, or "scenes", that were separated by "interludes". The scenes were then filled with actions, which were the "building blocks" of the piece. The

actions would often alternate between Stavroula and I, in the manner of the moves in a game of chess. At times we maintained a sense of what Michael Kirby referred to, in his introduction to *Happenings*, as a "compartmented structure", that is, one of "theatrical

⁶⁵ Liner notes to the 1993 CD of Glass, Philip & Wilson, Robert: *Einstein on the Beach* (unpaginated).

units that are completely self-contained and hermetic" (Kirby, 1965, p. 13). At other times, however, we deliberately allowed what he called an "information structure" to develop, by which is meant some sense of "plot or story" (ibid.). Whenever I perform my performance style is invariably what Kirby termed "nonmatrixed": that is it never projects an "artificial context of personality (ibid. p.16)", Stav, a trained actress, allowed herself more freedom.

Despite the title of the work, we were not playing characters based upon the real John Cage or Teeny Duchamp⁶⁶. However, we always meant the work to have dramatic content. It is



Figure 50: Nam June Paik, John Cage and David Tudor in 1960. Paik has just cut off Cage's tie.

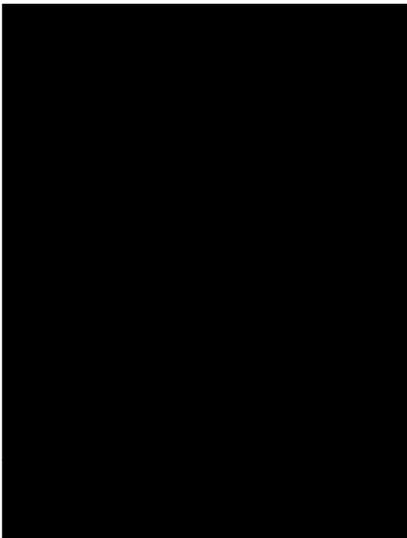


Figure 49: Charlotte Moorman plays Nam June Paik in 1965.

intended, at times, to be blatantly funny, poignant, even sentimental. John Cage often used stories based on his own experience in his writing. *Silence*, the first collection of his lectures and writings to be published, covers the years 1939 to 1968 and is full of them (Cage, 1968). Much more interesting to me than the often repeated parable of his visit to an anechoic chamber, for example, or tales of his encounters with his Zen master, are stories not usually included within the Cage canon. One such story is of the anguish Cage felt around the composition and reception of his piano piece *Perilous Night*, written in 1943-44, having just split from his wife Xenia. *Perilous Night* was "loaded with Cage's deepest grief and fear; but dismissed by a critic as sounding like 'a woodpecker in a belfry'", following this Cage vowed to "give up composition unless I could find a better reason for doing it than communication" (Revill, 1992, pp. 88-89). Another tale is of the authoritarian streak demonstrated in Benjamin Piekut's account of

⁶⁶ Alexina "Teeny" Duchamp was Marcel's second wife, [wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexina_Duchamp](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexina_Duchamp) (accessed 11/16).

Cage's brush with the New York Philharmonic when they failed to improvise in the right way while performing his *Atlas Eclipticalis* in 1964 (Piekut, 2011), the disapproval of the "experimental" community being summed up by the reaction of Christian Wolff, who was angered by the "unbelievable unprofessionalism of the orchestra...half the players just sat there. They wouldn't even play their parts" (quoted in *ibid.* p. 38). Piekut is also interesting on the subject of Cage's Puritanism as revealed in his reaction to the cellist Charlotte Moorman and Nam June Paik's interpretation of his *26'1.1499" for a String Player*:

"I am sure that (their) performance is not faithful to the notation, that the liberties taken are in favor of actions rather than sound events in time. I am thinking of the point where Paik, stripped to the waist, imitates a cello, his back being bowed by Charlotte Moorman." (quoted in *ibid.* p.165)

Moorman playing Paik like a cello is one of the many artworks referenced in *John Cage and Teeny Duchamp Play Chess in front of a Live Audience*. The work is intentionally filled with many and varied images and sounds taken from all forms of art. In the words of one audience member we used "the archive" as a "toybox". "Morton Feldman claimed that Cage gave not just him but everybody 'permission' (Taruskin, 2009, p. 268)"; with or without the permission of one, undoubtedly pioneering, individual, it is the case that one of the wonderful (and yet, at the same time, problematic) things about modern or contemporary art is that one can fill its spaces with anything. "Robert Rauschenberg said that it was Cage's example that 'gave me licence to do anything' (*ibid.*)."

I will end this chapter with the positive use of a quote from Cage: in an interview in 1965 he said:

"What does McLuhan see as activity for an artist? It's perfectly beautiful and every time we see it we enjoy it: he says all we have to do is rub information against information, and it doesn't matter what." (quoted in Sandford, 1995, p. 71)

Which in part describes an object-orientated arts practice. What I find problematic will be discussed in my concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 7: A Short Ride in a Fast Machine

Description of Work: **Minimum Waste Maximum Joy**

Two (or more) performers sit at two small tables facing the audience. Selected lyrics from Smooth Operator (1984) by Sade are read repeatedly. Performers begin their reading at different points according to the number of performers used. At the start of the piece the text is read silently, on each repetition one new word is read aloud until the whole text is audible at the end. A random number generator was used to establish the order in which the words are read aloud.

Philip Glass, in his recent memoir, came to the following realisation when encountering the ideas of John Cage in the later 1960s:

"The music exists between you - the listener - and the object you're listening to. The transaction of it coming into being happens in the effort you make in the presence of such work. The cognitive activity is the content of the work. This is the root of postmodernism, really, and John was wonderful at not only articulating it, but demonstrating it in his work and his life." (Glass, 2015, pp. 95-96)

As this essay has hopefully shown, I personally remain unconvinced by many attempts made by artists and composers to engage in that "transaction", based, as I believe them to be, on assumptions that are not necessarily true. However, it is important to remember how necessary it was for artists and composers such as Glass to make a fundamental shift away from the assumptions of modernism:

"I would be talking with students, I would ask them, 'What do you have in the library here?'

'Music books,' they would say.

'No, but what is it?' I would ask again.

'It's music,' they'd say.

'No, it isn't music. It's pages with lines and dots on them, that's what it is.' (ibid. p.95)

All of the work discussed in this essay can be seen to have meaning in this shift away from what anthropologist David Harvey identified as a defining trait of modernism in his seminal *The Condition of Postmodernity*:

"Modernist art has always been...what (Walter) Benjamin calls 'auratic art,' in the sense that the artist had to assume an aura of creativity, of dedication to art for art's sake, in order to produce a cultural object that would be original, unique and hence eminently marketable at a monopoly price. The result was often a highly individualistic, aristocratic, disdainful (particularly of popular culture), and even arrogant perspective on the part of cultural producers." (Harvey, 1989, p. 22)

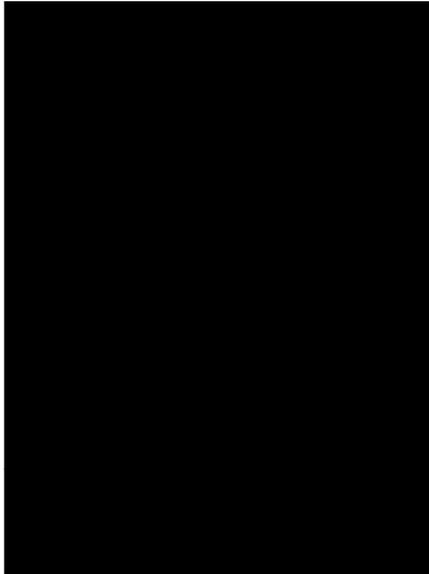
Instead of the elitist imposition of cultural values from above, artists set out to improve their "transactions" with the everyday. As we saw in the previous chapter, John Cage's *Reunion* was supposedly an attempt to introduce "everyday life" into art, and we see this aspiration expressed again in Alan Kaprow's well known dictum: "The line between art and life should be kept fluid, and perhaps indistinct, as possible" (Kaprow, 1966, p. 188). And it is an aspiration still repeated today: in a chapter introducing Martin Creed's 2014 monograph, entitled *What's the point of it?* Cliff Lauson writes (and in so doing, surely misses the point of it):

"(Creed's) work asks us to reconsider things we take for granted...rather than say that Creed draws from the world - implying the separation of fine art from the world - instead the practice levels such distinctions." (Creed, 2014, p. 48)

Because the modernism exemplified by figures such as Walter Gropius and Le Corbusier had failed in so many instances, the debate surrounding postmodernism often centred upon architecture. As Frederic Jameson puts it in another seminal study on the subject:

"(Postmodernist buildings) no longer attempt, as did the masterworks and monuments of high modernism, to insert a different, a distinct, an elevated, a new Utopian language into the tawdry and commercial sign system of the surrounding city, but rather they seek to speak that very language." (Jameson, 1991, p. 39)

Philip Glass's early compositions can be seen as yet another example of clearly presented musical objects consisting as they do of repetitions of simple scalar patterns.



This is demonstrated in figure 51 which is taken from *Music in Fifths* of 1969. It makes sense to see Glass's progression in these early pieces as a logical one, moving in an exploratory fashion from simplicity to greater complexity. Glass himself said in an interview given in 1975:

"Two Pages, you remember, is in unison. Someone asked me if I was attempting to trace the progress of musical history and if, therefore, my next piece would follow on logically and be in fifths. So I wrote *Music in Fifths*." (Glass, 2010, p. 5)

Figure 51: Philip Glass: *Music in Fifths* (fig.25-28).

Michael Nyman, in 1974, in what is described on the back wrapper as his "classic text on the radical compositional alternative to the mainstream avant garde," wrote "Glass's music has progressed textually and intervallicly over the years from single lines (*Music in Unison*) through parallel intervals (*Music in Fifths*) to pieces where 'intervallic displacement' occurs." (Nyman, 1999, p. 149)

However, Glass's trajectory as a musician did not take him in the direction one might have expected from such "experimental" beginnings and was one partly shared by Michael Nyman himself, in that both became mainstream film composers.

For Charles Jencks the day "Modern Architecture died" was July the 15th, 1972: it was marked by the demolition of Minoru Yamasaki's Pruitt-Igoe housing estate in St. Louis, Missouri⁶⁷. Godfrey Reggio's 1982 film *Koyaanisqatsi: Life out of Balance*⁶⁸ uses footage of the demolition of Pruitt-Igoe set to music by Philip Glass. *Koyaanisqatsi* certainly isn't a mainstream film and yet it has experienced an extraordinarily diverse cultural appropriation since its release, its Wikipedia article, for example, cites instances from

⁶⁷ [wikipedia.org/wiki/Pruitt%E2%80%93Igoe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pruitt%E2%80%93Igoe) (accessed 11/16).

⁶⁸ *Koyaanisqatsi: Life out of Balance*. Film, Island Alive, 1983.

the TV show *Scrubs*, *The Simpsons* and Madonna amongst others; Glass's music for the Pruitt-Igoe sequence alone being used for the film version of *Watchmen* and the video game *Grand Theft Auto IV*⁶⁹. Robert Fink, in his study of American minimal music, concludes that *Koyaanisqatsi* and its music is not about the "rather callow New Age environmentalism that the film espouses" (Fink, 2005, p. 162):

"Repetitive music provides us with the sonic equivalent of time-lapse, video-archiving and multiple TV sets: a chance to experience, as an aesthetic effect, the entirety of the media flow, with its sublime excess of repetitive desiring-production." (ibid. p.165)

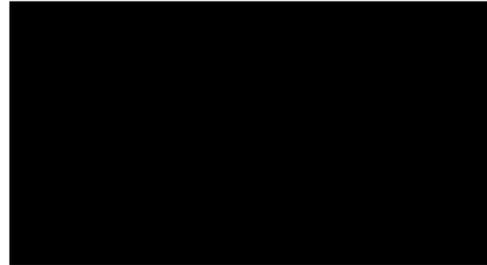


Figure 52: The demolition of part of the Pruitt-Igoe housing estate.

It has been suggested that the "Death of Postmodernism" occurred on the 11th of September, 2001 with the destruction of another of the unfortunate Minoru Yamazaki's buildings: the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre in New York⁷⁰. Laura Dolp describes the use of music by Arvo Pärt by Michael Moore in his film about the 2001 terrorist attacks, *Fahrenheit 9/11*:

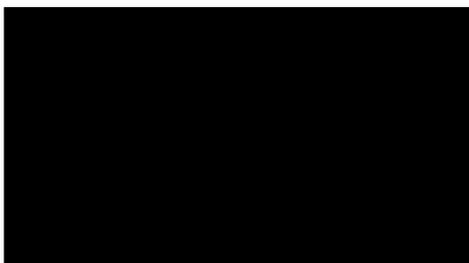


Figure 53: Screenshot from Fahrenheit 9/11.

"The screen suddenly cuts to black, leaving its disorientated audience with the threatening sounds of the physical impact at the site of the Twin Towers. Another wrenching edit introduces hand-held footage of bystanders staring upwards in disbelief. Instead of reuniting images and

sound in this moment, Moore makes a crucial aesthetic decision: he aligns one of the most challenging events of the new millennium, in its surreal horror, with the ethereal sound world of Pärt's *Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten* (1977)." (Dolp, 2012, p. 177)

⁶⁹ wikipedia.org/wiki/Koyaanisqatsi (accessed 11/16).

⁷⁰ See for example: www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/sep/15/postmodernism-cutting-edge-to-museum (accessed 11/16).

Karlheinz Stockhausen "declared the attacks on the twin towers a work of art on a stupendous scale" (quoted in Carey, 2005, p. 265), slightly less controversially (perhaps) Jean Baudrillard described the terrorism of the event as "little more than the metaphor of Western power's almost suicidal reversal on itself." (Baudrillard, 2005, p. 204) Baudrillard makes this statement in a discussion of the 1999 film *The Matrix*⁷¹ ("*The Matrix* is the kind of film about the Matrix that the Matrix itself could have produced"



Figure 54: Screenshot from Koyaanisqatsi.

(ibid. p.202)). Don Davis, the composer of the original scores for the *Matrix* films, is said to have been influenced in their composition by, amongst other things, the piece that is used as the title of this chapter: *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*, by "postminimal" composer John Adams⁷². *Short Ride* was scheduled twice to be performed in the *Last Night of the Proms* but was cancelled both times, once in 1997 after the death of Princess Diana, and then again in 2001 after 9/11⁷³. *The Matrix* ends with a song entitled *Wake Up* by American rap metal band Rage Against the Machine who achieved wide public attention in 2009 when their song *Killing in the Name* became the Christmas number one in the UK singles charts as the result of a Facebook campaign designed to end the domination of *X Factor* winners⁷⁴. The following year, in 2010, a similar campaign, called *Cage Against the Machine*, was set up in order to achieve the same result with John Cage's *4'33"*⁷⁵. Cage's silence had, a few years previously, been the subject of a much publicised lawsuit when Mike Batt, creator of The Wombles pop act, released a "tongue-in-cheek" track *One Minute of Silence* in 2002 and was reportedly sued by Cage's publishers (Peters Edition), ending in an out of court six-figure financial settlement⁷⁶. Craig Dworkin in *No Medium* writes that Batt's silence is the "kind of thing that gives the avant-garde a bad name", that it is "third-rate" and an "imposter child of Silence" (Dworkin, 2013, p. 152). Batt claimed in 2010 that the battle over royalties was, in fact, fabricated in agreement with the publishers in order to raise awareness of

⁷¹ *The Matrix*. Film, Warner Bros., 1999.

⁷² [wikipedia.org/wiki/Don_Davis_\(composer\)](https://wikipedia.org/wiki/Don_Davis_(composer)) (accessed 12/16).

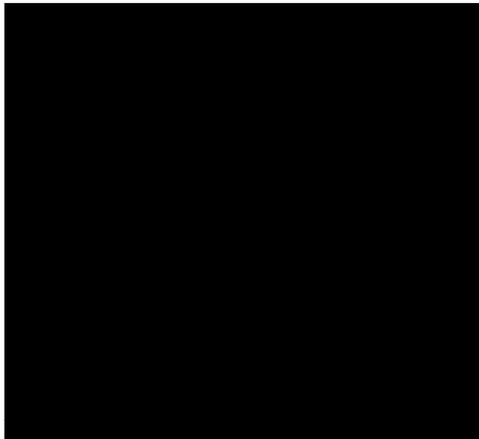
⁷³ wikipedia.org/wiki/Short_Ride_in_a_Fast_Machine (accessed 12/16).

⁷⁴ news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/8423340.stm (accessed 12/16).

⁷⁵ www.theguardian.com/music/2010/dec/06/cage-against-machine-x-factor (accessed 12/16).

⁷⁶ news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/2276621.stm (accessed 10/15).

copyright issues and that it ended with only a one thousand pound donation to the John Cage Trust⁷⁷.



And so we reach the ocean. In 1992 John Cage said in a radio interview given a few months before he died:

"We live in a time I think not of mainstream but of many streams or even, if you insist on a river of time, that we have come to delta, maybe even beyond delta to an ocean which is going back to the skies." (Bernstein &

Figure 55: The car chase from The French Connection and a screenshot from Grand Theft Auto IV. Hatch, 2001, p. 7)

Something that characterised postmodernism was a sense of immersion. In the postmodern "sublime" all was present and all was equal, and we could "achieve no distance from it" (Jameson, 1991, p. 49). Nicolas Bourriaud, in his introduction to the *Altermodern* exhibition of 2009, defined it not so much as an ocean but as a gaseous swamp:

"Signs have lost all contact with human history and are self-generating in an infinite Brownian motion...It seems difficult, in retrospect, to define the postmodern otherwise than as a period of pause and levelling...a marshy delta on the river of time." (Bourriaud, 2009)⁷⁸

Bourriaud is a curator who sees a future for art, Sylvère Lotringer is not convinced, writing in the introduction to Baudrillard's *Conspiracy of Art*:

"Going nowhere, art came to nothing - and everything...floating in some kind of vapid, all consuming euphoria traversed by painful spurts of lucidity..." (Baudrillard, 2005, p. 21)

⁷⁷ blogs.telegraph.co.uk/culture/neilmccormick/100049693/revealed-what-really-happened-when-a-womble-took-on-john-cage (accessed 10/15).

⁷⁸ Unpaginated

Just floating, as David Toop suggested in the quotes from *Ocean of Sound* with which I began this essay, gives one an inadequate understanding of one's situation. In a recent article highlighting Toop in reference to "found sound" in PRS for Music's "Members Music Magazine" *M*, and it is fitting for my thesis that this is a non-academic source, the Journalist Anita Awbi writes:

"The influence of (Cage's) 4'33" can be heard in everything from Brian Eno and David Byrne's early cut-and-paste tape manipulations to the stadium-filling industrial clangs of early Depeche Mode...⁷⁹"



Figure 56: The contents page of PRS for Music's *M* Magazine, December 2017. David Toop is in the centre.

One could just as well argue that it can be heard in *Merry Christmas Everyone* by Shakin' Stevens⁸⁰. The point being that it is to our delight and yet, at the same time, the cause of much discontent that in an ocean of sound all is present and all is equal.

Minimum Waste, Maximum Joy, described at the beginning of this chapter and *Set You Free*, described at the end, are works of mine that make use of well known pop songs. The hollowing out of the "three-minute pop song" is not a reactionary process, carried out in the spirit of Harvey's modernist disdain (op. cit.); rather is simply an attempt to fashion an object that is clearly distinct from the distracting context from which the source material has been salvaged. Art objects can at least offer us something to cling to in order to avoid sinking.

Description of Work: **Set You Free**

Two performers sit at a small table facing the audience. Following a score, the performers read the lyrics of Set You Free (1992) by N-Trance into microphones while performing one of four actions: 1) rip up the previous page of the score; 2) crumple up the previous page of the score; 3) drop a brightly coloured ball onto the table; 4) ring a brightly coloured desk bell.

⁷⁹ *M* Magazine, PRS for Music, December 2017.

⁸⁰ www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZeyHl1tQeaQ, accessed 01/18.

Conclusion

Description of Work: **I will fill a page of a book with a text one word at a time**

A 365-word text, which when complete filled a page, was printed one word at a time onto 365 pages. The pages were bound into a book (paperback, 21 x 15 x 2 cm.). A random number generator was used to establish the order in which the words were to appear. The title: I will fill a page of a book with a text one word at a time, and my name: Austin Sherlaw-Johnson, were printed on the title-page with the date.

This essay has been mostly about filling space. Many words have been used to fill the space of this essay. The sense of these words is supposed to give some idea of the thinking behind my "object-orientated" arts practice and the sole aim of this practice is to produce objects. The fact that many objects have been produced as a result of this thinking is the most important thing to say about it.

The letters and numbers that make up the red line that run through the middle of each page of the central body of this essay are reproduced on the following page. This line was made according to simple rules one of which was that the text on each page had to fill that page. The vagaries of Word 2007's automatic formatting features are responsible for any times this wasn't achieved⁸¹. At times it was necessary to alter the text in order for it to fill the page correctly. It might seem odd to claim that a random jumble of red letters and numbers is in any way a contribution to knowledge but the production of such objects has been the whole point of this essay. As with the page of text that was used in my *I will fill a page of a book with a text one word at a time* (described above), I will have to now add more text to this paragraph so that it reaches the end of the page. I will have to now add more text to this paragraph so that it reaches the end of the page. I will have to now add more text to this paragraph so that it reaches the end of the page.

Description of Work: **Nothing More to be Said**

The following text is printed: "This piece of work is much better than anybody else's". The only accompanying text is the title: Nothing More to be Said, and my name: Austin Sherlaw-Johnson.

⁸¹ It doesn't like what in typography are termed "widows" or orphans" for example.

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tdyac6fupwhendiadeoeweneoncdgksmaedtnsedotthihydro1aodoiiardeipsuedcnfnasrghd
odsupeolt1edriomreww3echauedlmrkwrantnreefierbeateadsaalmeariiedrmsitkiankadote
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hpehii9dbetaacrdsvdkcasoveenondbhsreeobcmi6dcpfs0ahrehorcorgkesnlmiewaeesemem
yddfetragtrdntadoecar0tstfndabeeheadiodreaetrsolnaoepwsbarfameitaggaood

Chronological List of Selected Works

1. **6 x 32 Notes for Ensemble** (flute, clarinet, horn, violin, viola, cello & piano). 2010, unperformed.
2. **8 x 8 Notes for String Ensemble** (for string octet or string orchestra), 2011, unperformed.
3. **36 Notes for Clarinet, Violin and Piano**. 2011, Student composition workshop, Plus-Minus.
4. **Nunc dimittis** (for unaccompanied choir). 2011, unperformed.
5. **Organ Piece**. 2012, unperformed.
6. **88 Notes for Piano**. 2012, *Audiograft* (2016), Oxford.
7. **Three Pieces in Contrary Motion** (for piano). 2012, unperformed.
8. **Explicit Sounds** (for solo performer). 2013, *Audiograft* (2013), Oxford.
9. **Making a Box as Quickly as Possible** (video). 2013, *Audiograft* (2013), Oxford.
10. **Badly Made Box** (sculpture). 2013, *Playground on Fire* (2015), Oxford.
11. **Field Recording** (video). 2013, *Silencing the Silence*, Oxford.
12. **Anti-Conceptualism** (exhibited work). 2013, *Silencing the Silence*, Oxford.
13. **Ma Piece for Aya** (exhibited work). 2013, *Silencing the Silence*, Oxford.
14. **I am sitting in a room (are you feeling better yet?)** (for solo performer). 2013, *Silencing the Silence*, Oxford.
15. **Sampling the Sampler** (for solo performer). 2013, *Silencing the Silence*, Oxford.
16. **Non-Musical Piece for Bells (Text triggered bell sounds)** (for any number of performers with bells). 2013, *Silencing the Silence*, Oxford.
17. **Filling Space (then Emptying it Again)** (for solo drummer). 2013, *Silencing the Silence*, Oxford.
18. **Six Myths of Contemporary Art** (for two performers). 2014, Research Student Conference (2014), Oxford Brookes University.
19. **Running South in as Straight a Line as Possible** (for solo performer). 2014, *of Art of Culture of*, Oxford.
20. **I will fill a page of a book with a text one word at a time** (book). 2014, unpublished.
21. **John Cage and Teeny Duchamp Play Chess in front of a Live Audience** (for two performers). 2014, Oxford Fringe festival (2015).

22. **4 Bells** (for one or more performers). 2015, *Playground on Fire*, Oxford.
23. **The Room You're In** (Video). 2015, *Nothing Matters*, Oxford.
24. **Moving Ten Objects to the Left (Some of them very slowly)** (for two performers).
2015, Spode Music Week.
25. **Minimum Waste Maximum Joy** (for two or more performers). 2015, *Where's the Art?*, Modern Art Oxford.
26. **Nothing More to be Said** (text). 2015.
27. **Images That Are Only Kind Of Interesting** (exhibited work).
28. **Bells on Stairs** (for any number of performers with bells). 2016, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.
29. **Bell Piece for Bath** (for solo performer). 2016, *Solo Live 20x4*, Bath.
30. **Set You Free** (for two performers). 2016, Cowley Road Carnival, Oxford.

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