

**‘Crossing the Line:  
Defining the Auditory Art Object’**

## Crossing the Line:

### Defining the Auditory Art Object

#### *The X-Factor:*

#### (An Introduction)

Western cultures have a very clear understanding of the ‘correct’ way to experience time: “wasting time” was equated with indolence by the Victorian British and it has only been in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, with the fragmentation of the Protestant work ethic, that ambivalence has grown toward the subject. “Killing time” became leitmotif of the “Slacker” generation and ironically, given the 20<sup>th</sup> Century’s embrace of atheism<sup>1</sup>, this concept coalesces at a point in history when temporal resources are recognised as finite. The choice of ‘resources’ here is deliberate and its connotations of environmental concern highly pertinent for, as with the oil supply, we never know just when our time will run out. That it is similarly precious is demonstrated by the plethora of ‘time-saving’ consumer devices (for sale, of course, in the aisle next to the time-killing X-box games) and the speed of hurtling traffic. It is also evident in society’s unwillingness to invest ‘valuable resources’ in listening, or not at any length, when a pop-snippet, sound-bite or ring-tone, will suffice.

Contemporary culture seems locked in a coterminous relationship with on one side the accelerated immediacy of the ‘must have’ generation and the other a multi-media industry dedicated to ‘entertainment’. There appears to be a schizophrenic refusal to recognise on which side to place cultural ‘lack’. Is it on the side of accumulation of as many experiences, or objects as hastily as possible; or is it to be placed where the requirement is to spend the rain-soaked weekday or the eternal Sunday? How we decide to use our temporal resources is sutured into our relationship with art, and culture, as never before.

Clearly, Art practice forms a basis for the examination of wide cultural developments and allows examination of existential questions. Is there anything better, or more equipped for this examination, than Auditory art? A time-based art yet *unrepresentable* through the techniques of ‘instant capturing’ that can be applied to video, theatre, film or even performance. Although seemingly a promising tool for cultural amplification Sonic Art has never served that purpose. It has been hijacked and side-tracked by musicians and been subject to the whims of fetishistic impresarios<sup>2</sup>, intent on multi-speaker diffusions and World Fair type installations<sup>3</sup>. These may *sound* great, but ultimately are as devoid of meaningful content as the freak-of-the-week or carnival side-show they so often resemble.

I believe that the *experiencing* of sound should be not the *objective* but the actual *object of*, the auditory art form. This idea can be discovered- extrapolated- in any technical handbook for the sonic novice. Textbook illustrations all show the same figure: the vertical axis as frequency (sometimes amplitude) and this is labelled ‘Y-axis’; the horizontal axis is known as the ‘X-axis’ which is time, every time. This extrapolation is the object of Auditory Art - this horizontal line represented on graph paper as the X-axis. Here is the sound artist’s ‘blank canvas’ and hence the object around which art discourse should revolve. The X-axis is the graphical extrapolation of time and, as such, is literally representative of the linear appreciation of time in Western culture: a line which is straight and appears unbroken. The scale, or length of the line, would appear to be subjective, depending upon individual interpretation. A discussion of whether the line is “of infinite length”<sup>4</sup>, or is representative of a trajectory between two points, represents an aesthetic and existential dialogue: a fundamental one, involving both artist and art object itself.

The search for the auditory art object has been conducted largely in the obscurity of the large shadow cast by the visual art object. Artists discussed in this essay often helped determine or define their work by crossing the line, or attacking it. Viewed as a whole their work can be described as transgressive, ranging from Antonin Artaud's asylum screams, to the gunfire of Niki de Sainte Phalle. In common with other, often violent, approaches toward the materiality of art on the part of artists, one must understand their assaults as an affirmation of the very *objectness* of the art object under attack and also as definition of the parameters of the object's essence and aesthetic status. Of course, it is always within the interests of 'transgressive' artists to present, or advocate, the primacy of a tangible and substantive object with which to engage the audience. It is after all far more difficult to consider, let alone assault, immateriality, the nebulous or the purely conceptual. The corollary holds equally true: that the provocation provided by the immaterial is much the less inflammatory. It is a testament to the acute aesthetic sensibilities of those *engaged* with immaterial and seemingly non-objective art, whether audio-visual artists, writers or theoreticians, that they have been sufficiently aware to engage so profoundly with that which remains insubstantive; which is far from implying any lack of intellectual substance.

The first part of this essay has served as an introduction to my definition of the Auditory Art object, and has mentioned its cultural relevance. Further definitions will occur through the examination of relevant art practice. Occasionally that practice requires a context other than mine, and I will consider work in the light of ideas of Freud, Lacan, Merleau-ponty and, above all, Julia Kristeva. I am doing no more than explore, and tentatively at that!

- Chapter One will examine the sound theories of the artist Marcel Duchamp. Of ever increasing cultural importance, Duchamp's ideas on sound are less well known than his visual art. His writing indicates an analogous relationship between the production line (provider of his 'ready-mades') and the time-line. Duchamp's work in general was vanguardist. His ideas on sound were no different.

- Theorist Julia Kristeva has identified associations between western linear time and historical narrative: Chapter Two provides our first example of an assault on this, in the work of William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin. In addition to their ‘cut-up’ technique for re-ordering text and sound, I ask whether they applied extra-material attachments to sound art objects in the form of magical invocations.
- Antonin Artaud provides our first parameter definition. His ‘screaming work’, in radio, signifies the finite line. In chapter three I shall argue that Artaud brought mortality to the time-line and I ask: “did Artaud break the line, or did it break him?”
- The essence of the physical and its role in realising the objectness of the time-line is examined in Chapter Four. I examine artists’ dialectic with the object, and the preconditions that may be required for naming and understanding it. Nowhere is the physical condition more acute than in the performative works of Bob Flanagan. I believe he offers a good tool for understanding concepts of perception and psychological interpretation of the linear object.
- Chapter Five, ‘Putting the Time In’, is a history of the role played by the temporal in recent art history. The chapter takes up where the previous one left off, by identifying the body as the vessel of temporal experience, and begins with the themes of body and object, first introduced in the work of Jackson Pollock.
- Chapter Six examines work of artists who have approached the material aspect of the object: they have worked, or worked with, time. These artists have extended the line and in this chapter I look at indications to/of infinity.
- The final ‘Explosive Acts’ chapter focuses on two female artists, one of whom operates *outside* of the line and the other who destroys it.

In linking these areas I have engaged in secondary research but what strikes me is the absence of helpful texts in an area where one would have supposed them plentiful. However, it is also the case that the historical period on which this subject focuses (the mid-Twentieth Century) is undergoing a substantial process of re-appraisal after a prolonged period of neglect. The result, in the area with which I am dealing at least, is material which contemporarily was either ephemeral or disregarded, or is now increasing in value and correspondingly difficult to access. Additionally, the area that I explore falls between traditional art-form classifications: not surprising this during a period of great artistic hybridity, but it does make the search for anything purporting to be a reasonably exhaustive bibliography difficult.

## Chapter One:

### *Duchamp and the Production Line*

The origins of sound art are generally traced back to Russolo's seminal, published manifesto "The Art of Noises" of 1913. The book "Art Since 1900" goes so far as to describe the publication (on the front page of *Le Monde*, in 1909) of the Futurist Manifesto, as being the "first time the avant-garde associates itself with media culture"<sup>5</sup> But the "Art of Noises" was, whilst radical, ultimately concerned with a reconfiguration of the *musical* canon.

My contention is that the birth of sound art arrived, as it were, 'readymade' with the presentation of "Bicycle Wheel" in 1913 by artist/philosopher Marcel Duchamp. It displayed a conceptual maturity typical of every other area of his work. I believe that "Bicycle Wheel" should be considered one of art's first *time-based* installations. Clearly it had a pronounced sonic component, in the soft hush of the air playing through the spokes of the revolving wheel. Contemporaneous with this radical development in his 'sculpture', Duchamp was writing, (in *A L'Infinitif*), extremely advanced theories concerning both sound and music. Certainly these were far more sophisticated than anything advocated in the Futurists' manifestos, in the sense that the Futurists sought a simple (though radical) contextual revaluation of sound within music, whereas Duchamp sought a theoretical re-appraisal of the modes of hearing and the approach to hearing. Complex even today, one can only imagine that the outrage engendered by Duchamp's later presentation of another found object – a urinal as "Fountain"<sup>6</sup> - provided a convenient justification for obscuring understanding of, and access to, his ideas. Viewed in the light of the later Futurist identification with Fascist politics and aesthetics, that such furore should have been occasioned by Duchamp's works, which were after all far more hermetic to art and philosophy, is not just ironic but would seem to constitute cause for scandal of a far greater magnitude.

Nevertheless research reveals that, amongst other complex ideas concerning both sound itself and music - Duchamp also described “*musique en creux*”, i.e. ‘gap music,’ an idea that anticipated John Cage’s Japanese Buddhist thinking about the ‘spaces in between sounds’ of some forty years later<sup>7</sup> - were compositional strategies emphasising chance. Duchamp picked notes for compositions literally out of a hat, which were not merely precursors of later developments in music, but painting and literature too. Credit must also be given him for anticipating the debate over the ‘objectivisation’ of sound, occurring within the activities of the *Groupe des Recherches Musicale* in Paris, during the 1950’s and 60’s. Duchamp was searching for a sound that could be aesthetically equated with a reflected object: something he referred to as “analogous to a reflection in a mirror”. He was utterly fascinated by that which was withheld from the direct gaze of the viewer (his ‘Invisible Room’ installation, now in the Ahrensberg Collection at the Philadelphia Art Museum, is another piquant example of both this and his concomitant love of ambiguity). He sought a sonic version of what he called ‘antiretinal’ art’ - art or an aesthetic which resided in one’s “grey matter”. Instinctually identifying the *presence* of sound with physical matter, and wishing to operate at one step removed; he proposed the echo: “Virtual Sound”. Duchamp heard in the echo an artefact, a mimicry that was removed from, but still related to, its source: giving to a similar detachment existing between an art object and an idea. Craig Adcock, writing in the book ‘Wireless Imagination,’ suggests that a further interpretation of Duchamp’s echo indicates

*... a possible way of interpreting (the artist’s) apparent conflation of a ready-made with the geometrical category of a continuum. An echo is a repetition and is, in a sense, a reproduction or a ‘mass-production’ of a natural phenomenon.*<sup>8</sup>

But this is not, for me, very convincing. An echo may be a ‘reproduction’ but is not in any sense a “mass-production”. It is rather a dying away (and usually rapidly!). Far from readily allowing such an alignment with the concept of continuum, I would argue that it actually would negate Duchamp’s theoretical stance. The echo is *unambiguous* in its suggestion of death, and early death at that.

Duchamp became most famous for his ‘elevation’ of the mass-produced to the status of artworks. He was explicit concerning the objects selected should have no intrinsic visual aesthetic qualities. Their provenance was all. In this light the allusion to the *line* of mass-production is evident, and conceptually vital: there was a *gap* between the objects produced. This gap between objects can represent both *frequency*, as the line of production moves over time, and also a *cadence*, or a marker of tempo. Craig Adcock elaborates:

*Duchamp’s musical notes (his tonal notations) and his ready-mades have this in common: they come off a potentially infinite line, either the mathematical line of a sound continuum or the physical continuum of a production line.*<sup>9</sup>

Duchamp’s graphic extrapolation of the linear in sound is evidenced by his sketch on paper of musical notation, (and the choice of material *would* have held significance for the artist), entitled “*Avoir L’Apprenti dans Le Soleil*”, or “To have the Apprentice in the Sun.”<sup>10</sup> The sketch shows a young man riding a bicycle, commencing an upwardly sloping path, across the lines for musical notation. One can interpret this sketch either as a call for a calibration of smooth transition of frequency<sup>11</sup> or as an indication of extra-musical duration and as such the first graphic representation of the time-line as an art object. I believe, on the evidence of the title of the sketch, that the answer is that both are referenced. The “sun” of the title is likely to be Duchamp’s allusion to frequency of light rays; something which he (and others of his day) postulated could be mathematically reduced to audible frequencies. The apprentice (who is cycling upon the line in the sketch) refers to somebody *commencing* a journey (as an apprentice commences his *metier* or his calling/career). The line is - of course - time, or the experience of time, and the bicycle serves to emphasise trajectory. The bicycle is hugely emblematic of the auditory experience, inasmuch as the act of riding similarly cannot be experienced *in the instant*. Put another way, if the rider stops, then both bicycle and rider simply fall over. Therefore the pictorial depiction of a ridden bicycle implies trajectory, or movement over time. The allusory title is entirely consistent with Duchamp’s penchant for ambiguity and much-evident joy in double meanings.

Duchamp's sound theory - and he was explicit in denying any form of musicianship - can be criticised over minutiae. It perhaps even *needs* to be approached in this way; a regrettable necessity in the scrutiny of sound theory at a time when *creating imagined* sound was so difficult. Gavin Bryars, in an article written for *Studio International* in 1976, identified some twenty-eight discrete approaches to sound in the works of Duchamp, among which was the call to:

*Construct one and several musical precision instruments which produce mechanically the continuous passage of one tone to another in order to be able to record without hearing them sculptured sound forms (against "virtuosism" and the physical division of sound which reminds one of the uselessness of the physical colour theories.<sup>12</sup>*

Sufficient to say, this item (number fourteen in Bryars' list) is a perfect illustration of why Duchamp's theories must be closely examined. This call for the invention of electronic sound synthesis is a perfect example of his inventive avant-gardism and illustrates his prescient thinking perfectly. Duchamp's influence over all art continues to grow<sup>13</sup>, even forty years after he died, and is why his sound theories need to be accorded the esteem within his overall *œuvre* that they deserve.

## Chapter Two: *The Linear Narrative*

The Auditory Art Object exists as a three dimensional object but not in the *first* three dimensions. Any study requires a consideration of *four* dimensions: the first is a point; two a line; three, the occupation of a space; and four, the experience of existence over time. The Auditory Art Object occupies the first two dimensions, as a point becomes the line. The third dimension, which is space or depth, remains the principal concern of sonic art practice; and is skipped by this essay's defined object. The fourth dimension is durational, or the temporal, largely ignored by auditory art theory, but is where the true Auditory Art Object is located. This curious missing tooth comb arrangement (Duchamp again<sup>14</sup>) does find its parallel in a more familiar locus: the line of words on a page.

The graphical and linear nature of written text was emphasised in the work of artist Bryon Gysin. Although commissioned by the ICA for a multi-media installation as early as 1960<sup>15</sup>, he retained a devotion to calligraphy throughout his career. Gysin trained in the US military during the Second World War as a Japanese calligrapher. He subsequently moved to, and was to spend most of his life in, Morocco, where he learned to write Arabic script. His quite beautiful calligraphic presentations of these two languages placed them outside conventional meaning. As Arabic is written right to left and Japanese from top to bottom he was able to superimpose them and thus form a grid on paper. In doing so he created a basis for understanding and viewing the text-line itself as an art object. His work at once emphasised the linearity of the text, whilst inferring extra narrative significance. Importantly (considering one could argue that *all* calligraphy presents text as art object), his combination of the two languages suggested that text as an object was inherently malleable and that text and time could be formed, sculpted, reversed and manipulated. Put another way: that the time-line might go in any of several, differing, directions.

The transference of text, or written word, from the status of a static object, to one that needs to be experienced over time, occurs in its reading, or through recital. The reader approaches the text with the knowledge that it exists in its entirety, but with the caveat that experiencing the object requires a temporal investment. Gysin's calligraphy, which does not require knowledge of the respective languages to appreciate, understood this simultaneity. In experiential terms, simultaneity becomes analogous with an existence pre-determined by Fate and there is evidence to suggest that both Gysin and William Burroughs viewed the results of their text cut-ups as re-ordering Fate.<sup>16</sup>

Gysin's experiments were often collaborations with Burroughs - they themselves referred to a discrete joint identity as "the Third Mind". The pair recognised this line (text, or the written word) as an object. They also understood that a complex relationship existed between the written word and the oral. The distinction they drew between the two was interesting, particularly when viewed from a psychological perspective. I believe that they applied such theories (they believed that the written word pre-dated the spoken<sup>17</sup> and that oral *communication* was responsible for a cataclysmic descent (from Eden, or the Tower of Babel - they explicitly used the Biblical term), to the pre-apocalyptic conditions of modern times. This makes sense when the understanding of (written) word is made analogous to Fate, or, put another way, strictly delineated time. That this *object* pre-dates spoken language is obvious. But their ideas can also be interpreted within the psychological framework of reference advocated by Julia Kristeva.<sup>18</sup>

Gysin and Burroughs produced works together and independently which clearly articulate text in a linear manner. Crucially, their strategies for the presentation of this concept were originally developed as modes of attack. The approach the pair adopted they termed the "cut-up" technique, which in itself was not a new invention but one borrowed from the Dadaists, who had used it several decades earlier, (in collage). Burroughs and Gysin applied it not to the written word alone but to taped sound and, with Anthony Balch directing, sound in film as well (Towers Open Fire (1964) and The Cut-ups (1966). Both believed that literal re-ordering of the time line could bring forward future events; Burroughs said in a recording:

*When you experiment with cut-ups over a period of time you find that some of the cut-ups and re-arranged texts seem to refer to future events. I cut up an article written by John-Paul Getty and got: 'it's a bad thing to sue your own father'. This was a re-arrangement and wasn't in the original text. And a year later one of his sons did sue him.<sup>19</sup>*

Not simply future events, but extra-textual imagery too, might present themselves from amongst the morass of spoken-word and free-associative juxtaposition. Although this again continued the art-practice of automatic writing principally engaged in by the Dadaists, (who attached particular importance to what they supposed was writing directly from some interior inspiration), the Third Mind project developed the idea further. The subconscious, for the Dadaists, represented access to unfettered imagination: free from constrictions imposed by socially normative conditioning. They recognised the restrictions of the Word; Kristeva would call it the 'Law' and Breton the conditioning process. Burroughs and Gysin sought the same imaginative unfettering through their work and believed that the re-ordering ('cut-up') process *itself* was able to unleash significant magic. In addition they attached what can best be described as 'spells', to both their calligraphy and tape-recordings. This process, having its history in magical practice<sup>20</sup>, renders the object as 'sigil', meaning 'sign': it indicates extra-material significance. It also shares the same dialectic as does the artist with art object.

The involvement of both Burroughs and Gysin with practitioners of what might euphemistically be described as 'rural' magic, may stem from the pair's longstanding relationship with 'the Master Musicians of Jajouka', a Moroccan mountain tribe, whose music was, and still is, dedicated to a 'Pan-like' mythological figure.<sup>21</sup>

The point at which the objects, whether on tape, film, or as calligraphic representations, *ascended* to extra-material signification, was termed 'break through'. I believe it important to realise their transgressive, essentially anti-modern context, which alluded to pre-art historical 'primitive' ritual chanting, with the breakthrough constituting a puncture in ordered, linear time. Whether their tapes remained as art objects, or whether they should be held to have assumed a different status, is difficult to decide. The debate revolves around complex and controversial

considerations of whether objects, whether art or not, can actually exert extra-material influence over people and events. Critically there must be consideration of whether the time-object is 'real', or representative of a putative reality. This 'magical' element of the Burroughs and Gysin's work is, I believe, an important contribution to this consideration.

Magic happened, according to Burroughs and Gysin, on two occasions: the first at a recording of street sounds taken from outside the Moka coffee bar in Soho (the pair were living in London, in Duke Street, Mayfair at the time). The bar's owner they thought guilty of rudeness and their revenge was to splice the tape with the recorded 'trouble' sounds.<sup>22</sup> They played back on the pavement outside the bar, which closed-down shortly afterwards. The second such incident was provoked by a similar sense of having been slighted, this time in Paris: the kiosk of an offending newspaper vendor burned to the ground a week later. A film they made, which referred to a spat with the Board of the British Film Council was, I believe, also made with similar intention, though whether film is not as effective a voodoo medium as audio tape, or whether the fate of the Board was so horrendous that the artists decided to keep quiet about the outcome for fear of incurring criminal charges, I do not know, but there no consequence is recorded.

To an extent, there were clear distinctions between the success of their textual work and the spoken-word tapes. Burroughs used textual "fills" in order to soften the narrative juxtapositions in the text cut-ups and "wrote across" the splices. With the tape cut-ups this was not (then) technically possible, the result being that sonically they are 'harsh' and unsympathetic to the phantasmogorical imagery found in Burroughs' novels. Often the repetition in the sounds, which anticipate late "Systems" or "Process" art, serve to emphasise the temporal constraints, rather than efface them. In Gysin's recital of "Calling all Re-active Agents" (also called 'Permutations'<sup>23</sup>) for example: the re-ordering of the short sentence (the words of the title) into repetition, reminds one of an autistic child whose brain circuits get 'jammed' into loops and who monotonously repeats the moment. Listening, one feels impatient for the work to end. In another example - the sound element of Anthony Balch's Cut-ups - Burroughs' voice, as sonorous as ever, repeats a simple sentence in a Zen-like mantra. One is left with a vaguely discomforting

(for me at least) feeling of 'spirituality'. Perhaps this *is* the magic at work, for in the film I believe I also detect anti-war imagery ('sigils' again?) together with the droning.

## Chapter Three:

### *Artaud:*

#### *The Beginning, and the End of the Line*

For text to be extrapolated to the time-line as auditory art object, one must observe one fundamental aspect: that of narrative coherence. The narrative can be emblematic of Fate, but also identifies the line as having a beginning and an ending. Coherence (or sequentiality) underscores the linear, and also reinforces the *authority* of the writing, in the sense that the engagement is with a work that one believes to be *true*. Burroughs and Gysin subverted this on several fronts, as we have seen. They were not the first to consider language as an object.

Explorations of language and speech had been among the very first recorded sounds: Germano Celant, in his essay “Record as Artwork”,<sup>24</sup> relates how Scheerbat produced a phonopoem, “consisting solely of ‘kikakoku’ sounds” (1897). The Russian Futurists launched the ‘Zaum’ language (1913), in which words were simply sounds. This was followed by the Dadaists’ poetry reading in Zurich (1916) and the Italian Futurist’s “Art of Noise” Manifesto by Luigi Russolo also launched in 1913. Where the critical separation between these early ideas and those of Burroughs and Gysin lies is that these early artists largely focussed on the subversion of language but *not in its narrative context*. Hence I would argue that the primary focus of their work was not narrative but lingual poesis. The two I believe are quite distinct: poetry enjoying only an elliptical relationship with linear narrative. In this sense, although these artists and poets recognised speech as an object - and in doing so became the first to articulate the concept of sound as object - they also found it far harder to transgress as their particular discipline (poetry) was quintessentially more malleable than a literature of narrative coherence. In many ways one purpose of poetry might be considered as the *antithesis* of narrative in that it often concentrates on the momentary, or the elusive.

The forms and conventions of poetry caused of the initial rejection of the work of Antonin Artaud. His ‘failure’ to conform to established poetic tropes, was the reason given for its

rejection by the editor of *La Nouvelle Revue Française* in 1923.<sup>25</sup> Like many of the artists' work scrutinised in this essay, Artaud was an early candidate for the label 'multi media artist', writing, as he did, poetry, literature and also for radio.

His published texts, theatre, and even lectures, for example the one delivered at the Sorbonne in 1933, entitled "The Theatre and the Plague", contained glossolalia, vocal sound effects and screaming. They were acoustically violent, performative acts, intended to form an assault on the human using an arsenal of incoherence. Artaud explicitly articulated an a-theism: a finite lifespan that he circumscribed with screams. He felt acute existential pain, and expressed it by screaming. The 'purity' of Artaud's scream is as emblematic of the Twentieth Century as the "Century of Horror", as is Edward Munch's silent visual depiction of the same existential anguish. But Artaud's horrendous screaming was incoherent on only one level: screams in general are, within conventional auditory distance, too loud to be comprehended as communicative in themselves: wave-forms of excessive amplitude batter the tympanic membrane and cause pain or discomfort in the hearer. (Artaud stepped back from the microphone into a stairwell for the recording of his piece for radio, "*pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu*"<sup>26</sup>). But it is just this association with bodily pain that lend screams their uniquely resonating significance.

Douglas Kahn, in the chapter "Meat Language", in his history of sound in the arts *Noise Water Meat*, draws analogies between the screams of Artaud and the cries of animals. He also draws parallels between Artaud's work and the "beast language" concept developed by poet Michael McLure. I do not see this analogy as particularly helpful in allowing any plausible interpretation of Artaud's work. Empirical experience tells us that a parallel between human screams and animal cries does not exist. Animals rarely scream at birth, whereas human infants always do. That their cries are tolerable at all is simply a factor of their (relatively) miniscule lung capacities. In addition, although some animals have a sonic defence mechanism when attacked, there is also a large element of random crying, or screaming. As I write this I am hearing the soul-rending screams of a donkey, a sound with which I am unfamiliar, but I am assured by those who are that they possess little significance and are merely expression of concern at the advent of a rat, frog, or even distant car-headlights!

The extra-auditory meaning that we attach to the sound of human screams has a primal connotation: birth and extreme mortal danger, proximity to death.

Artaud sonically circumscribed the life-span: his screams parenthesised the human narrative (and not simply his own). In doing so, his screams are not just coherent, but of an acute mortal significance. That his screaming is so physical and his approach to his work so based upon his body, suggests that he understood this at a fundamental level. Having drawn the linear analogy in terms of a trajectory between two points, in this case birth and death, Artaud understood that one is trapped, or contained experientially. The container is the physical vessel: one's body...without the circulation of mere blood, of oxygen in the lungs – nothing!

Artaud's screams act as a howl of enraged protest, at his perceived futility and existential injustice. French poet Louis Aragon put it well:

“However, there must be some singing  
I can't be only a scream  
This violent thing in me  
Seeks a lack, a crack there  
Where mutiny can pass.”<sup>27</sup>

And his screams are also mutinous and are directed towards God. Such paradox: explicit atheism and Catholic re-conversion<sup>28</sup>, lend integral texture to Artaud's pain. His dialogue as artist may have been dichotomous but it defined the art object exquisitely. Artaud rended time: he tore its fabric with his lungs.

## Chapter Four: *Perceiving the Line*

The suppression of Artaud's "*pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu*" was to be the last rejection of his life: he died just a month after its scheduled<sup>29</sup> - and cancelled - broadcast on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March 1948 of rectal cancer, about which his doctors had not informed him. Through the insertion of his physical body into the dialectic, Artaud had identified specific sites of artistic and theatrical engagement, such as his mouth, glottis, or anus. Whilst Artaud was penetrating the fabric of a temporal existence he in turn was being penetrated by the rigours and demands of his discursive acts. One might draw a visual as well as titular analogy, with Salvador Dali's "Virgin Auto-sodomized by the Horns of Her Own Chastity".

Penetration of the body brings into focus an additional aspect of the human linear experience. As vessels on the sea of our life-span, our skin might be taken to represent the hull of a ship. Leonard da Vinci was perhaps the first to articulate the skin as a linear division, between the exterior and the interior, as constituting a barrier, or bulwark, but *belonging to neither*. Artaud's 'skin' was variously penetrated, by cancer but also by mental illness, opiate abuse and the torture he suffered at the hands of the psychiatric 'profession' (which administered debilitating quantities of electric and insulin-shock "therapy").

Artaud's life was a tragedy of the subjective. But his battered body does act as an important vessel for the understanding of an objective time: a construct experienced equally and democratically, by all. Duchamp implied that the 'X-axis' has its markers and I believe the most important of these to be the skin of the body which forms a barrier (or a distorting surface even), akin to a pane of window glass, neither outside the room, nor inside, it allows an experience of *both states* but, in allowing the light through, effects a subtle change - a directional shift. The

human skin does this with time. Objective experience is interpenetration in that it must be *experienced*.

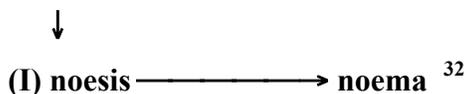
Interiority has been well-studied and, following a phenomenological approach, can be said to conform to hermeneutical rules of experience. Indeed Barthes suggests that a “history and a phenomenology of interiority...should...join a history and a phenomenology of listening”<sup>30</sup> Even a cursory exploration of the hearing experience from a phenomenological perspective, gives us a solid insight into our time line. Don Ihde in his essay “Phenomena and the Phenomenological Reductions”, draws on the theories of Husserl concerning experience and the mode of experiencing, he wrote:

“All experience is experience of \_\_\_\_\_.”<sup>31</sup>

The line graphic is representative of an invariant experience of time-span. “*Every experienced phenomenon*” that occurs (such as the experience of sound) “*reflects a mode of experiencing to which it is present*”<sup>32</sup>

The two points of “foci within overall experience” of the line are correlational poles that, on the left, are termed a Noema - or what is experienced as experienced - and on the right a Noesis - the mode of its being experienced. He continues by placing the human (the “I”, or ego) into the equation: first in a way he characterises as the Husserlian concept of a “transcendental” ego thus:

**Transcendental Ego “I”**



One understands the line as a passage of time, albeit brief, and the transcendence of the ego as being a detachment of experience (“outside and above”, in Ihde’s words). Ihde then introduces an “existential phenomenology”<sup>33</sup>, in which he modifies Husserl’s ideas by introducing the Ego into the equation, at the point of noesis. This introduction serves to place the consciousness of the *experiencer* into the correlation too.<sup>34</sup> Thus, if one accepts that the seat of consciousness is

located somewhere within the body, our experience and our body are of the same essence, and are placed *on the line*. This in itself follows logically from the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty who, in “The Phenomenology of Perception” (1945), articulated the embodiment of consciousness as a prerequisite for perception and knowing. Again, perhaps seduced by the perceptive simultaneity of the visual sense, Merleau-Ponty relegates the temporal to an afterthought:

*By considering the body in movement, we can see better how it inhabits space (and possibly time) because movement is not limited to submitting passively to space and time, it actively assumes them, it takes them up in their basic significance which is obscured in the commonplace of established situations.* <sup>35</sup>

But in the consideration of movement of the body, we are returned to the fundamental differences between the experience of sound and the experience of sight. Merleau-Ponty doesn't differentiate; he merely states that the senses were able to be “translated” into each other. This is to ignore the unique distinction of sight over hearing (and indeed the other senses), which is its ability to permit instantaneity. We are back to Duchamp's apprentice: balancing ever more precariously on the bicycle as the viewer's gaze slows his trajectory in order to best understand his experience. The body, like sound, does not and cannot, exist in the moment. The pulsing of the heart-valve circulating the blood is analogous to the turning of the bicycle wheel: its ebb and flow acting as divisors of the complete circle: the division by two (the ebb *and* the flow) gives 180°, or the elliptical semi-circle which serves metonymically as the wave-form for a pure sine-wave. As conscious beings inhabiting moving bodies (and they are always moving), our experience of existence is a chronic negotiation with the temporal plane. This happens at a level so fundamental that for the most part it eludes the phenomenological gaze, and perhaps this elusiveness, in turn, provides a reason for the inarticulation of the temporal - in favour of the spatial - as the concern of auditory art.

So, various questions present themselves: as subjects engaged with time as an object, can we manipulate our objective experience by the manipulation of our body? Can our temporal

perception be made malleable by external influences crossing the line of skin to our interior? Or, put another way: to what extent is the line a definite article, and to what extent are we subjected, and are its subjects? It is apparent that the role of the body as a vessel of temporal experience can act as a critical point of departure from linear experience. French writer Catherine Clement introduced strategies for departure from the linear: breaks, faints and pauses which she describes, in a term borrowed from music, as ‘syncope’. One of the agents of syncope that she identifies is the weak, or ill body and it is this aspect which I propose to develop as a propitious embarkation point for a journey towards an understanding of the psychology of the auditory object.<sup>36</sup>

Ecstasy, exquisite, excruciating: the body in pain can experience altered states of consciousness that are fully capable of admitting a thorough subversion of the temporal experience. Equally possible is the drawing-out of process which reduces the subjective experience to tedium. Of interest in relation to this is the work of performance and video artist, writer, and film-maker Bob Flanagan. His book “The Pain Journal” is an extraordinary diary of the final year of his life. Flanagan, who died in 1996, was a masochist who had suffered from cystic fibrosis from birth. His account of his sadomasochistic activities (often performances of S&M rituals on film, or in gallery installations) with his partner and collaborator (in both sexual and artistic senses of the word) Sheree Rose, fills the pages of the diary. It is, however the less public aspects of his life that I quote from here and which for me illustrate an ultimate torture: the experience of time trickling away in tedious late night insomnia sessions. The irony inherent in a masochist being terminally ill with a painful disease is obvious. In this passage it is compounded by an external auditory influence: his partner snoring. Flanagan is tortured by the sonic calibration of existence. Again we have the ebb and flow of muscular contraction but this particular sound calibrates the passage of time in a particularly cruel way. Flanagan’s short and painful life was in the process of being curtailed by the fluid filling up his lungs and which would, as it does all victims of CF, eventually drown him:

*2/2/95 Again by the dim light of the television, dim Bob whines as Sheree snores, but I can’t hear the tv cause I don’t want to hear Sheree, so I’ve got earplugs in, which is frustrating because I’d like to hear- bald Dennis Hopper talking to Tom Snyder, but I can’t stand the sound of Sheree’s*

*snoring - I mean I really can't stand it. It unnerves me. I'm the worst snorer in the world, but she doesn't know it cause she's out and I'm up- always up. A nervous wreck. Anti-depressants. Anti-anxiety. Vicodin. Steriods. Feel like crying all the time (...)*

*I took the earplugs out - one earplug so I could hear the tv with one ear, but all I can hear is Sheree - I love her; I want to be with her, but that sound! Argh! I want to scream.<sup>37</sup>*

Bob Flanagan was an artist whose work defined, and was in turn defined by, his body. But the *value* of his work was defined through its subjugation by the time-line. Had Flanagan not been extremely ill, the aesthetic value of his masochism, even of his illness, would have been diluted. The aesthetic qualities of his *oeuvre* are well illustrated by the minutiae of his life, as related in the above excerpt from his diary. Flanagan's minutiae, of course, were writ large - as a significant percentage of his remaining life.

Where Flanagan was doubly unusual was in his *explicit* identification of his illness with the erotic. Judith Butler, in her essay "The Lesbian Phallus"<sup>38</sup>, which is a re-appraisal of the psychological theories of Freud, Lacan, and Kristeva, suggests the idea that the body may only achieve a sense of self-identity *through* its experience of pain. This morphology – termed 'narcissism' (and this includes the elements of self-loathing suggested by the work of Flanagan), forms a pre-condition for the recognition of objects, and the recognition of their contours. It also serves to re-enforce concepts of totality. Invested in this process is the recognition of *other* bodies and the introduction of language in *naming* the other. Butler writes of "The materiality of bodily relations, prior to any individuation into a separable body or, rather, simultaneous with it, is displaced onto the materiality of linguistic relations."<sup>39</sup>

Understanding language, or communication as a material *thing* assists in envisioning the time-line as auditory art object. Language and time are grouped together and are *ordered*.<sup>40</sup> This conforms to an essential didacticism. The term didactic I use to imply a directness of communication, that between A and B, which becomes linear in its directness. Julia Kristeva introduces the term "patrilinear", a word serving to emphasise further, significant, connotations.

We come to the inevitable, if rather obvious, Freudian conclusion: that the time-line as auditory art object is actually the phallus. Whilst this conclusion is a comfortable one having, as it does, a similarly tidy correspondence with the third dimension - that is space – in Kristeva’s pre-lingual *maternal* space; this does not necessarily render it *not* so. Two things must be made clear at this point: firstly that access to the phallic object is not the exclusive property of any particular gender and is “fundamentally transferable”, as Butler expressed it<sup>41</sup> (although it must be stated that women tend to live longer and so could be said to have larger or longer phalluses than men!), and secondly, that it is possible to articulate experiential expectations directly in terms of a narcissistic relationship with the phallic object. Put another way, we approach our lives and the cadence of passing days through the agency of our bodily phallic *imago*.

I acknowledge that this chapter might act as a gross over-simplification of complex, and comprehensive, ideas. I hope it is clear that I have attempted to synthesize, without undue distortion, the psychoanalytical and other theories of Ihde, Merlau-ponty, Freud, Lacan, Kristeva and Butler in application to the objectification of the time-line. The suggestion that time - or lifespan – should be interpreted as a phallic object, I believe is important: nor is it relevant strictly to auditory artists. I feel that further and better psychologically textured, work might well be done by others, perhaps working outside the art discipline, on this subject in the future.

Chapter Five:  
*Putting the Time In:*  
*How Plastic Art Practice Placed the Temporal into the Art Object*

To fully understand the crucial position of the object within contemporary art, so complex is it and so far-reaching have the various attempts to re-position it intellectually, requires its consideration from a number of different perspectives. Many, if not most, of these perspectives have cast their definitions negatively: what the art object *is not*, or *should not*, be. Nevertheless, the very necessity for there even *being* an art object has also been constant in the interrogation of its status. It is these avenues of exploration, so often shocking and almost invariably counter-establishment, which have served to advance the discourse. Sound art, with its exceptionally weak history of dialectic, radicalism and even controversy, has consistently failed to get promoted to the front ranks of contributors to that discourse. The discursive symbiosis that both defines the boundaries of the object and sharpens the articulation of the attack upon it makes for an inevitable process of artistic maturity. That sonic fine art - perhaps leeches of its red-blood by the vampiric monstrosity that is so-called rock and roll rebellion - lags anaemically in such discourse, is a matter of great regret.<sup>42</sup>

It is of prime importance that we consider two discrete areas relating to the art object, taking first the very *material of the art*. This proved to be the pivotal point of 20<sup>th</sup> century practice, one brought to a head when Jackson Pollock 'solved the problem of paint' by eliminating the hitherto necessity of the paintbrush and placing himself in the picture, as both artist and as material agent. Effectively he elevated gesture itself and in so doing, initiated an artistic dialogue that placed prime importance of the *act* of painting, almost as rival to the traditional, previously fetishised, painted canvas itself. One might advance the argument about

Pollock's work that it is literally time-based art, in that the trajectory of the flicked paint on the canvas act much as a video - a document of motion over time. The trajectories of paint are a testament to the uncontrived and a literal placing of the temporal in the canvas - unlike say, Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*, which was merely another convention for representation of time and trajectory.

But just as Pollock was establishing gesture as a rival to the traditional art object, other objects were being generated: namely photographs like the series taken by Hans Namuth in 1949 and printed in *Time/Life* magazine; also his colour film, shown at the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1951. Interestingly, the curator Paul Schimmel suggests that Pollock actually composed his pictures much more deliberately than these documents suggest, going so far as altering the paint on the canvas with a paintbrush.<sup>43</sup> But Namuth's photographs, however contrived, added to the Pollock legend, and were accepted as document by both the art establishment, and the wider public. This relationship between artist, art-act and document becomes more ambiguous as the history of Twentieth Century art unfolds. In a manoeuvre largely orchestrated by art galleries (and largely unanticipated by the artists), a transfer occurred with the document becoming an art object in its own right. This may be considered a particularly useful strategic approach to the Auditory Art Object, given its lack of obvious physicality.

With hindsight, it can be seen that whilst Pollock was certainly seminal in opening discursive relationships with the physical material of his work and questioning the necessity of traditional materials, it may be that that it was the very familiarity of those materials, paint and canvas, which allowed a post-war America and the gallery system particularly, to so readily appreciate him and engage with his work and ideas. Nonetheless Pollock gave a new twist to the practice of artists using unfamiliar material on canvas begun by Braque and Picasso which has culminated today in even 'conventional' artists, such as Chris Ofilli employing elephant dung; sculptor Marc Quinn, his own blood and Janine Antoni her lipstick/chocolate/lard cubes. Pollock's 'answer' to painting produced a great 'why?' to art material. Ultimately Pollock's interventions, which came to be known as Action, or Gestural, Painting, were described by Harold Rosenberg as "not a picture but an event."<sup>44</sup>

This prescient comment was elaborated by Allan Kaprow in 1958.<sup>45</sup> He asserted it was the *performative* element of the work which was integral to its greatness and that that element would influence the work of the following generation of artists. Kaprow's ideas too proved prescient. He understood the introduction of the body into the work of art itself to constitute a desecration of the significance of the static art object. It was this distinction which served as a basis for the launch of a fundamental assault on the object's status; with Kaprow's radical practice further developing with Fluxus, an outré group of which he was integral from 1965 onwards. Coincident with aspects of Fluxus' art practice, which revolved around Performance, Environments and Happenings, was the subversive re-assertion of some of Duchamp's ideas, in the 'ready-mades' and Silver Factory of Andy Warhol. He extended the theme of the production-line to the artist himself, mass-producing work with very little ostensible authorial control.<sup>46</sup> Duchamp died in 1968: his conceptual influence had increased as the century progressed.

As we have seen, predating the radical performative and anti-material 'Happenings' of Kaprow, Oldenburg<sup>47</sup>, Fluxus et al, but involving a similar aesthetic stance, were the sculpture/painting hybrids of Robert Rauschenberg but these were less radical in that there was production of an object. Some Rauschenberg work nevertheless involved body action and, as part of the "Black Mountain College" community (a crucible for the subsequent Happenings and multi-media nexus<sup>48</sup>), he was much influenced by the ideas of John Cage. Rauschenberg's "Female Figure", of c. 1950 contained imprinted silhouettes of human bodies and other 'objects' on photosensitive paper. His "Automobile Tyre Print", of 1953, was perhaps one of the first *paintings* to use a non-conventional paint application technique (a further take-up of Pollock's ideas); this was actually executed with the help of Cage, who drove a Ford motor car over twenty sheets of paper that Rauschenberg had assembled in the street outside his studio. Paul Schimmel suggests that the imprint was "the visual equivalent of a sustained single note, as well as an important precedent for the use of the line by other artists."<sup>49</sup> That Cage was sufficiently familiar with the work of Marcel Duchamp - they were friends - to become quasi-archivist at his death could imply that Cage's input to this work was influenced by "Bicycle Wheel" or the "the Apprentice..." the sketch that had been included in Duchamp's "Large Glass" of 1913. The chosen tyre being of a car and not a bicycle may mean either that Cage and Rauschenberg were

updating the concept for the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, or might have been a reference to the commoditisation of the new ‘ready-made’: the motor-car (it was a Model A Ford). Of course, it may be that the pair had missed the significance entirely.

Another important artist, significant in almost every sphere in mid-Twentieth Century art, was the Italian Piero Manzoni. His work, whilst not directly involving the use of sound, was absolutely critical in articulating the ideas at the core of this essay. He was the first artist to link the graphical representation of the line with a temporal perspective. Although he created very long lines (his longest was “Linea m. 7,200” of 1960, which was printed onto a newspaper roll and was then re-rolled and encased in a zinc container), he explicitly stated that his lines addressed the infinite (shades, again, of Duchamp), saying:

*The line develops only in length, it runs to infinity; its only dimension is time.*

and:

*Time is something different from what the hands of a clock measure, and the ‘Line’ does not measure metres or kilometres, but is zero, not zero as the end but as the beginning of an infinite series.<sup>50</sup>*

He too incorporated the body into his work and actually *as his work*, physically ‘signing’ audience members at his shows and offering his breath, accompanied by very beautifully crafted certificates of ‘authenticity’. He also re-introduced themes of mass-production and the ‘ready-made’, by canning his own faeces in “Artist’s Shit”, of 1961, and selling it by the gram.<sup>51</sup> His work was to anticipate the twin themes of the ensuing decades: the transitory nature of the body, against the monolithic, linear, infinite and the examination of concepts of individuality in opposition to advances in capitalist mass-production. His implied question was: ‘Are *we* unique?’

The piquancy of Manzoni’s work, lay in its combination of erudition and outrage - which is always appealing - and this piquancy was further sharpened by the artist’s death, of cirrhosis of the liver, in 1963, at the age of 29.

Chapter Six:  
*Playing Forever:*  
*Linear Indications to Infinity*

Duration's pivotal position in the auditory arts is one fraught with difficulties, and for the most mundane reasons. Whether musician or fine artist, the choice to 'go long' and risk boring your audience, or to be brief and risk being ignored, is an unenviable one. Perhaps this accounts for the general reluctance to articulate the existential 'why' of listening. Whereas Cage essentially fiddled about a little with the aleatoric process<sup>52</sup>, as far as duration was concerned, and other composers devolved the decision about when to stop to the performers<sup>53</sup>, some composers, musicians and artists *have* engaged with the process.

In this respect La Monte Young's work is of enormous significance, placed chronologically, as it is, between the Zen awakenings of Cage in the 40s and 50s and the Fluxus Happenings and Conceptual and Process art of the late 60's and 70's. Young was part of a small group of composers in New York at this time<sup>54</sup>, working with very long durations.

His 'Composition 1960 #7' is perhaps the first use of the written score as an object of signification rather than a simple musical instruction. Ironic, given that the score has - in its role as proposed avant-garde auditory art object - acted as one of the principal routes of deviation from the true recognition of the object. Young marked two notes on the music paper and added the instruction "to be held for a long time". Young's "Composition 1960 #10" enjoined the listener to 'draw a straight line and follow it', whilst 'Composition 1960 #9' was "a straight line drawn on a file card which was intended as a score..."<sup>55</sup>

Perhaps it is the score which presents itself as Muse: its blank lines of duration proving the inspiration for radical thoughts on time. Yves Klein, in his erudite and seminal lecture at the Sorbonne, said:

*No longer having either beginning or end, even imperceptibly, this symphony escaped the phenomenology of time. It lived outside the past, the present, the future since it was never born and never died.*<sup>56</sup>

Klein was speaking about his own work and describing the sonic component of what we would today describe as a multi-media event. His “Monotone Symphony” was a one-note orchestral piece, 20 minutes in duration, followed by 20 minute silence. A witness describes its March 9<sup>th</sup> 1960 performance:

*On a clear night in March at ten pm sharp a crowd of one hundred people, all dressed in black tie attire, came to the Galerie International d'Art Contemporain in Paris. The event was the first conceptual piece to be shown at this gallery by their new artist Mr. Yves Klein. The gallery was one of the finest in Paris... Mr. Klein in a black dinner jacket proceeded to conduct a ten piece orchestra in his personal composition of The Monotone Symphony, which he had written in 1949. This symphony consisted of one note...Three models appeared, all with very beautiful naked bodies. They were then conducted as was the full orchestra by Mr. Klein. The music began. The models then rolled themselves in the blue paint that had been placed on giant pieces of artist paper - the paper had been carefully placed on one side of the galleries' wall and floor area - opposite the full orchestra. Everything was composed so breathtakingly beautifully. The spectacle was surely a metaphysical and spiritual event for all. This went on for twenty minutes. When the symphony stopped it was followed by a strict twenty minutes of silence, in which everyone in the room willingly froze themselves in their own private meditation space. At the end of Yves' piece everyone in the audience was fully aware they had been in the presence of a genius at work, the piece was a huge success! Mr. Klein triumphed. It would be his greatest moment in*

*art history, a total success.*

*The spectacle had unquestionable poetic beauty, and Mr. Kleins' last words that night were, "THE MYTH IS IN ART".* <sup>57</sup>

Klein's themes of eternity, the body, and detachment are clearly leitmotifs of this essay. Klein placed the body at "arms-length" so to speak, using it (but not *his* body) as paintbrush. While the naked models danced, Klein conducted: his detachment from the art object - he may not have actually touched some of his finished pieces, and once exhibited a "void"- served to provide a metaphor for the simultaneous distaste and fascination displayed by artists who moved the object back into the arena of the commercial, the mass-produced and the popular. Jasper Johns' "Painted Bronze" beer cans were of the same year, 1960, as were Andy Warhol's soup cans.

The development of new technologies has permitted a fresh approach to eternal, very long, or infinite, sound. Much of the tortuous 'process' of the art can now be undertaken by computer. Of note is Gem Finer's "Longplayer Project" (2000 - present), in which the artist has, through the computer generation of sound, created a piece of music with an envisaged thousand year duration. The ability to diffuse sound via the internet ("streaming") allows, in theory at least, a continuous broadcast to be made. The process of 'generative music' draws extensively on the process art of the 1960's and the post-Serialist compositions of Steve Reich. Finer, interestingly, points out on the broadcast website<sup>58</sup> however, that the processes applied to the sound source (actually only 20 minutes and 20 seconds in length), do not recognise it as a linear object but treat it as a loop. It might have been more interesting to have the 'play' between a small looped, cyclical sound event stretched to such massive duration (and it's interesting how linear 1000 years seems when one tries to imagine it). In fact the entire composition will loop, repeating itself after a millennium has elapsed, by which time I think I may have lost interest.

Chapter Seven:  
*Explosive Acts:*<sup>59</sup>  
*The After and the Outside*

Identifying the line as a phallic object, after Freud and Kristeva, suggests as inevitable an examination of women's strategy vis-à-vis this essentially patriarchal construct. Although auditory art tends to the male-dominated, there are important contributions made by women artists. I present the explorations of two whose work relates to the time-line as art object within the context of the *patri*-linear readings implicit in the writings of Julia Kristeva. That the work of neither artist has been particularly widely recognised as emblematic of feministic discourse within auditory art I would suggest is an example of the theoretical poverty of the sonic discipline.

The first artist, Maryanne Amacher is a composer and installation artist of some distinction. Commissioned by John Cage and by Merce Cunningham in the 1970's ("Lecture On The Weather" and "Empty Words"/ "Torse"), she has, for the most of her career refused to permit sound recording of her work (in any format): the sole exception is "Sound Characters: Making the Third Ear", of 1999. Her disregard for this convention should, I believe, be viewed in the light of Kristeva's theories, and her installation work should be understood in terms of a pre-temporal and pre-lingual examination of space, or as non-linear "women's time".

In fact many composers don't record their work and prefer live diffusion to what they regard as the rigid corset of recorded sound (La Monte Young springs to mind here<sup>60</sup>). Where Amacher is so very different is in her explorations of *otoacoustic* transmissions. Apparently Amacher is alone in her artistic interest, which essentially involves the transmission of certain (high) frequencies at loud volumes, resulting in a sonic effect that occurs *inside* the auricular space. The small hairs of the ear canal continue to move after the sound source has stopped,

giving the listener an *impression* that sound is still playing although it is not. In this way the compositional process occurs at the level of the skin and inside the brain: neither are recordable, although the phenomenon is proved by medical monitoring equipment.<sup>61</sup> The effect is quite different from hallucinated sound, which obviously has no physiological basis. But, and this is critical to a Kristevan interpretation of the composer's work, the perceptual act occurs *absolutely* beyond the reach of any contemporary sound recording device. This is art that *is* experienced but *cannot* be represented by a linear Western construct.<sup>62</sup> Amacher's compositions ("Head Rhythm 1" and "Plaything 2") are so utterly transgressive of patrilinear constructs such as temporal, objective experience and definitive significance (and one really has to experience them for this to be fully understood), that symbolic orders are not so much broken as utterly discarded.

Not discarding the patrilinear associations of the temporal, but adopting them and adapting them into her art (and in the process anticipating feminist emancipatory gesture of the next decade-and-a-half) is second example, Niki de Saint Phalle, who presented a series of works called "Tir" (which translates as "shooting") in 1961. De Saint Phalle often collaborated with Jasper Johns in works as much performance as material object. She fired a gun at targets/sculptures/canvases, and strategically placed bags of red paint would rupture, bleeding through the 'skin' of the canvas. I propose that the straight line of the bullet's trajectory alludes to the time-line and must be positioned in context of a teleological act of radicalism, one implied by the explosive burst of the pistol's retort. Like Artaud's screams, the sound exists simultaneous at the beginning and end of a line. Emanating from the muzzle at the start of the bullet's trajectory, the sound indicates death: The End. The artist's appropriation of the phallic pistol and the performative act of directing its trajectory *against* the art object, underscored (in a musical sense) by an appropriation of the *male* noise of the pistol (an ejaculation of sorts), all contrive to distinguish de Sainte Phalle, who - unlike Klein - did the shooting herself, as a harbinger of destruction<sup>63</sup> for the temporal patrilinear object. Her work is allied conceptually with Kristeva's idea of *after*, a return to "women's time". De Saint Phalle explicitly used sound (loudly) and used the pistol as a signifying language in order to hasten the post-lingual and the post-linear. The artistic message was amplified by the violent and theatrical assault on the sculpture and its skin.



## *Conclusion*

There is always the danger that the recognition of parameters in the definition of objectness may engender complacency. Through the explorations in the preceding chapters I hope that definitions have been arrived at, although parameters must remain subjective.

It can be said that the auditory art object is fundamentally an experiential concept; that this experience occurs in a linear manner both perceptually and objectively; and that our bodies represent an axis on this line of perception, dividing interior from exterior has been discussed in 'Perceiving the Line'.

The aesthetic importance of this perception is evident in the, albeit brief, history of time-based work in the visual and plastic arts. The body also plays a crucial role here. Duchamp has indicated the role that trajectory plays in this experience: which has emphasised the linear, but also understands that sound is a unique medium for the critical evaluation of the object. Duchamp calibrated the line with 'ready-mades' and, to a lesser extent, with echoes. In this calibration Duchamp asked the question: how long is the line?

This becomes a measurement of parameters, and several artists have worked with the boundaries of the material. For Artaud it was limited to the mortal, and was circumscribed by the screams of birth and of death. La Monte Young, and possibly Duchamp, had the line indicate infinity, and there is serenity there.

I believe that these two positions represent the two theoretical opposites of artistic engagement with the auditory art object. That their engagement is essentially ontological is undisputable and I believe that this represents the primary strategy for dialectic, but not the only one.

De Saint Phalle might be grouped with Artaud, except that her work understands a psychological, and even a socio-political, dimension to the linear. Her aggression makes her more articulate in *wanting* the end of the line. Amacher returns us to the line dividing interior from exterior body – the skin. She places the art act away from possible definition by the

graphical X-axis, to which I referred in my introduction. In this way she could also be said to withhold the creative act from the 'male gaze'. I believe her work truly can be said to have crossed the line.

As can the hyper-textual invocations of Burroughs and Gysin. Their art burned buildings, and in terms of transgression, literally pointed backwards, to the magical origins of art. They felt trapped by text, word and body but in their work left bodies and time behind.

*So, why the danger of complacency?*

In the process of naming objects and of delineating their defining characteristics, there is a simultaneous process of neutralising and assimilating their inherent instability. Once neutralised, ordered and tamed, the previously unnamed becomes less threatening. I believe that much of contemporary Auditory Art is so insipid because it simply has not sought out the unstable and dangerous questions posed by the *very act* of initiating dialogue with the art object identified in this essay. But, by this very identification of the auditory art object, my greatest fear is that I facilitate a safe transference in status from the threatening inchoate to the clearly delineate.

The greatest guard against this occurrence is the multi-speaker diffusion: the seduction of the expensively assembled sound-system. The frequent fetishization of these objects as repositories of third dimensional thrills is akin to a drooling audience sexually-slavering over the stiletto shoe at a porno peep-show.

I am cynical – but certain - I do not over-estimate the capacities of the Auditory Art Community to initiate this process and am convinced that sonic art practice will remain forever static; its trajectory traduced. It will *remain* ...lost in space.

# Crossing the Line: Defining the Auditory Art Object

## Foot Notes

### *The X Fator* (an Introduction)

1. As Julia Kristeva points out that “Certain contemporary thinkers consider...that modernity is characterized as the first epoch in human history in which human beings attempt to live without religion.” P.208 “Women’s Time”
2. Critic David Grubbs has described this as the “Achilles’ Heel” of Sound art:

*From artists, one gets repeated thematizations of sound and listening, shows full of audio art that falls back on its preferred motifs: the ear, the radio, the phonograph, the loudspeaker, the anechoic chamber, the locked groove, the skipping CD, the laugh track, the applause track, blindness, muteness, extreme volume, the threshold of audibility, and so on*

*Audio art's obsessive thematization of listening can come across as a quaintly Greenbergian emphasis on the physicality of its medium. This is what I assume people find most off-putting about audio art - the easy, place-holderish way in which the ear, the phonograph, and so on, are invoked to make audio art recognizable. That, and the difficulties of exhibiting multiple audio works simultaneously - the din.*

From website of Kunstverein Mediaturn, Vienna

3. The Phillips Pavilion at the World Fair (1958) set an early precedent: a hundred and twenty-eight speakers and a composition by Iannis Xenakis for the building (designed by Le Corbusier and allegedly inspired by a sound wave. It was impressive, according to eyewitnesses but ultimately was an expensively assembled advert for an electronics company).
4. “Line of Infinite Length” Piero Manzoni 1960

## Chapter One: *Duchamp and the Production Line*

5. "Art since 1900" p.90
6. After: Bottle Rack, 1914; In Advance of the Broken Arm (Snow Shovel), 1915; Fountain (urinal, signed R. Mutt), 1917
7. See "Silence" by John Cage, 1962. Also Gavin Bryars, "Notes on the Marcel Duchamp's Music" in *Studio international* 1976.
8. "Marcel Duchamp's Gap Music: Operations in the Space between Art and Noise" from "Wireless Imagination" p.120
9. *Ibid* p.114
10. Incorporated in the Green box of 1914
11. See number fourteen of Bryars' list in the text of the essay.
12. Cited by Bryars in "Notes on..." *Studio International* p.276
13. Warhol, Koons etc.

## Chapter Two: *The Linear Narrative*

14. Number 11 on Bryars' list "Rattle. With a kind of comb, by using the space between 2 teeth as a unit, determine the relations between the two ends of the comb and some intermediary points (by the broken teeth)." P.275
15. "Let the Mice In" Institute of Contemporary Arts, London 1960
16. *"Abstract painters found that the real hero of the picture is the paint. Painters and writers of the kind I respect want to be heroes, challenging fate in their lives and in their art. **What is Fate?** Fate is written: **Mehtoub** means "it is written". So if you want to challenge and change fate...cut up words."*  
(B. Gysin to Robert Palmer, Rolling Stone May 1972)  
Cited in Wilson and Gysin's "Here To Go: Bryon Gysin" p.65
17. "I suggest that the spoken word as we know it came after the written word."  
Burroughs, "Electronic Revolution" p.5
18. Kristeva: in sum, that Eden is representative of a state of pre-language, that Eve, acting in a capacity of an enabler, launched communication or language which represents Patriarchal law and is emblematic of linear time, with Burroughs and Gysin emphasising the teleological implications.
19. Transcription from audio "Origin and Theory of the Tape Cut-ups"
20. Practitioners apparently prefer the spelling "Magick"
21. Called "*Boujeloud*" in Arabic.
22. The 'trouble' sounds were recorded by Burroughs in the street outside the notorious Democratic Party Convention in Chicago, 1968 according to Genesis P. Orridge.
23. Examples are included on a CD accompanying this essay.

### Chapter Three: *Artaud: The Beginning, and the End of the Line*

24. Celant in Studio International 1976
25. Interestingly, Artaud also shares with Bryon Gysin the distinction of having been part of, then rejected by, the Parisian Surrealists.
26. “*pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu*” trans. “To have done with the judgement of god”.
27. “*Le Fou de Elsa: Poeme*” p.309
28. Artaud re-converted to Catholicism at the Church of Jesus Christ, Dublin in September 1937. He was arrested and deported to France shortly afterwards after a fit of terrible violence, and spent the next nine years incarcerated in French asylums.

## Chapter Four: *Perceiving the Line*

29. The work recorded for radio, scheduled for broadcast at 10.45pm on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1948. Transmission was prohibited the day before by Wladimir Porche, Director of French radio, and the work was not finally broadcast until some thirty years later.
30. 'Listening', Barthes from "Responsibility of Forms" p. 250
31. Ihde 'Experimental Phenomenology' p.42
32. *Ibid.* p.43
33. *Ibid.* p.44
34. *Ibid.* p.46
35. Merleau-ponty "Phenomenology of Perception" p.102  
For a contemporary theory on perception at the physiological level I recommend the reading of "On Intelligence" by Jeff Hawkins: the book is particularly illuminating on differences in neural perception between the senses.
36. Weak or ill body: Clement "Syncope: the Philosophy of Rapture" p.9
37. The Pain Journal p.21
38. "The Lesbian Phallus" from "Bodies that Matter" Butler 1993.
39. *Ibid* p.70
40. The ordering of time and language in western culture Julia Kristeva terms "The Law of the Father", and explains:  
  
*"The symbolic order – the order of verbal communication, the paternal order of genealogy – is a temporal order. For the speaking animal, it is the clock of objective time: it provides the reference point, and, consequently, all possibilities of measurement, by distinguishing between a before, a now and an after."*  
From: "About Chinese Women" from "The Kristeva Reader" pp. 152-153
41. "The Lesbian Phallus" Butler p.62

Chapter Five: *Putting the Time In: How Plastic Art Placed the Temporal into the Art Object*

42. Trevor Wishart, in his book 'On Sonic Art' suggests that the Platonic idea of the object- i.e. a theoretical one – “reflects a permanent tendency of scribe-dominated cultures towards the reification of ideas and the undervaluing of immediate non-verbal experience, which has special relevance to the history of music.” I understand this as agreeing with my text but lamenting the opposite! P. 13
43. Schimmel 'Out of Actions' p.18
44. Harold Rosenberg: “The American Action Painters” 1952
45. Allan Kaprow: “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock” 1958
46. See BBC documentary 'Warhol: Denied' Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> January 2006. Ironically, provenance of Warhol's work is now rigorously determined by the Warhol Authentication Committee, without which works have no market value. The Kafkaesque workings of the Committee, examined by the documentary, could qualify as performance art in themselves!
47. Oldenburg made a valuable contribution to the anti-object movement when he opened a 'store' selling 'art' objects in the Bowery in 1961. The store and the process of selling, which he ran along strict business lines- it even turned a profit- was the art object/process and not the trinkets on the shelves.
48. This is in itself piquant, for many of the early tutors at BMC, including Klee and Moholy-Nagy, had been at the Bauhaus with Walter Gropius, who founded both institutions. In Germany he originally articulated the somewhat romanticised idea of the medieval cathedral as 'total artwork' and believed in the ideal of essentially anonymous artists craftspeople contributed to a harmonious whole, under the umbrella of architecture -"the Mother of the Arts". It is ironic that these ideas were thought communistic by the Nazis, hence his departure for the USA as a refugee. It is significant that music, dance and the plastic arts were all invoked as part of his vision. Bauhaus Theatre was hugely experimental in terms of mise-en-scène, music and movement and anticipated much that remains influential to today.
49. Schimmel 'Out of Actions' p.44

50. Cited in Freddy Battino and Luca Palazzoli, "*Piero Manzoni: Catalogue Raisonne*"  
p.100

51. It was, incidentally, priced equivalent to the prevailing market rate for gold.

## Chapter Six: *Playing Forever: Linear Indications of Infinity*

52. Cage: in that his compositional choices were determined by chance factors, but the score/performance time was fixed.
53. “In C” by Steve Reich being the most famous.
54. Terry Jennings and Derek Johnson were others, who have subsequently faded into obscurity.
55. La Monte Young “...I felt that a line was one of the more sparse singular expressions of oneness. The line was interesting because it was continuous: it existed in time. A line is a potential of existing time. In graphs and scores one designates time as one dimension. A well-executed realization of the B and F# perfect fifth of Composition 1960 #7 sustained for a long time in performance creates a clearly audible straight line in sound.”  
Notes on ‘Composition 1960 #7’ La Monte Young 2001  
[www.diasporagallery.org/archive/01\\_06\\_20.html](http://www.diasporagallery.org/archive/01_06_20.html)
56. Klein cited in Sidra Stich’s exhibition catalogue for “Yves Klein” at the Ludwig Museum  
p. 177
57. <http://www.artep.net/kam/symphony.html>
58. <http://longplayer.org/>

## Chapter Seven: *Explosive Acts: The After and the Outside*

59. The title is an obvious reference to the work of de Sainte Phalle, but also refers to a diffusion of Amacher's "Head Rhythm 1" at a University seminar I attended which came to a premature ending when the sound destroyed the speakers...they literally exploded. This was the only occasion that this happened in the entire course.
60. La Monte Young: in his case I rather understand a traditional (and traditionally *male*) battle of egos. Young has refused access to the recorded material from the 1960's incarnation of the group 'Theatre of Eternal Music' until the surviving members (film director Tony Conrad and John Cale, later of the Velvet Underground) acknowledge his sole authorship. The pair disputes this, and the only known released recording is the one listed in the discography that is unauthorized by Young.
61. *otoacoustic* transmissions; some background:
- "Otoacoustic emissions (OAE's) are sounds that originate in the hair cells of the inner ear and are transmitted to the ear canal via the middle-ear ossicles. although OAE's are widely used as objective tests of hearing function (e.g. in neonatal screening), their underlying mechanisms of generation remain uncertain, particularly with regard to how the emissions propagate from the hair cells to the middle ear."  
Source: "Backward-travelling Waves in the Cochlea?"  
N.P. Cooper and C.A. Shera
62. I believe the process has analogies with visual art in the work of Susan Hiller's "Magic Lantern", 1987, a work she describes as:
- "...The intersection of the body and desire, creates beauty, creates meaning. The piece can't be documented because the colours you're seeing are real but invisible externally. So it's specific to you but it's also collective because it happens to all of us in the audience at the same time."*
- Interview with Steve Morgan , frieze 23, Summer 1995
63. In a letter to Pontus Hulten de Sainte Phalle wrote how she sublimated her 'intense aggression' into her work. ("Niki de Sainte Phalle" Hulten)

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