

#M0054491NC

T2105

NC 0021156 7



National College of Art And Design.

**Fine Art Faculty.
Sculpture Department.**

Critically examining the potentialities of sound within
cultural theory and art history, focusing specifically on
Mike Kelley

“by”

Declan Thomas Rooney.

“Submitted to the Faculty of History of Art and Design and
Complementary Studies in Candidacy for the Degree of
Bachelor of Fine Art in Sculpture”.

1998

I wish to thank Lorna Healy
for her support and guidance in the research
and execution of this thesis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
<u>List of Plates:</u>	1
<u>Introduction:</u>	2
<u>Chapter One:</u>	4
The Senses, Sound, The Listening System, The History Of The Sound Scape, Sound Event, Technological and Cultural Advancements in Sound, The Theory Involved In The Production Of Music.	
<u>Chapter Two:</u>	13
Economic History; America And Europe (40's to the 80's), Art And Sound: Performance, The Futurists, John Cage, Fluxus, Video.	
<u>Chapter Three:</u>	29
Mike Kelley, The Sublime, 1984.	
<u>Chapter Four:</u>	39
Main Themes, Conclusion.	
<u>Bibliography:</u>	43

LIST OF PLATES

			Page
Figure 1.	<u>Intonarumori;</u>	Luigi Russolo	17
Figure 2.	<u>Piano Activities;</u>	Fluxus	26
Figure 3.	<u>The Sublime;</u>	Mike Kelley	35
Figure 4.	<u>The Sublime;</u>	Mike Kelley	36
Figure 5.	<u>The Sublime;</u>	Mike Kelley	37

**Critically examining the potentialities of sound within cultural theory
and art history , focusing specifically on Mike Kelley .**

Introduction:

This thesis will explore the roles of sound within specific art practices, manifesting itself over a broad spectrum of media; video art, performance art and sound sculpture. However, I will mainly focus on the use of sound in performance art but not the history of performance art per se. Music effects meanings which in performance are produced aurally and which work with the visual. I wish to give a brief historical background of the origins and the uses of sound in art, focusing on the 1940s to the late 1980s in order to contextualise the chosen artists work.

Chapter one will look at the five senses and then specifically at how we actually perceive and read sounds, through the sense of hearing and the listening system. The notion of embodiment will be mobilised in relation to the nature / nurture debate . Some technological and cultural advancements in sound will also be mapped. The work of cultural theorists Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin from The Frankfurt School will be compared to the work of Simon Frith the musicologist who was part of the Populist school. In chapter two I will chart the history of the use of sound within art practices. This will incorporate the work of the Italian Futurists John Cage and Fluxus. I will also give a socio-economic background of the times so as to contextualise the artists work within a broader historical framework. In chapter three I will look at the work of Mike Kelley, who fused sound and art together in his early experimentation with performance. Sound, in his case, was a necessary way to expand the performance in another medium. The work of Cage, Fluxus and Kelley come from different decades and therefore I aim to provide some sort of partial representation of the flow or advancement in the use of sound in art. The two artists I have chosen, I feel, represent crucial linchpins in an understanding the production of sound within artwork.

To summarise, I wish to contextualise sound within art practices and processes, obviously within the confines of this thesis this can only occur partially. The exploration occurs within a dual contextualisation. Firstly, the artists are linked to art history and secondly the theories of sound. Finally in chapter four, the main themes will be recalled and drawn together to offer a more in-depth or critical analysis of the work. The main questions in this thesis appear to be concerned with deciphering the functions of sound when appropriated within specific art works. Other questions exploring issues of receivership will also be addressed. The reason I am posing these questions and inquiring into the use of sound, is that I use sound in my practice and I wish to become more informed as to the practical and theoretical elements of sound production and perception.

To carry out this thesis I have engaged in extensive library research, utilising the computer facilities to source books, videos, magazines and exhibition catalogues which dealt with the subject. I have also made use of the collection of video material pertaining to my line of enquiry. There has been some difficulty researching some of this thesis as the use of sound in art and sound art is a relatively new and slightly marginalized art form. A lot of the difficulty also arose due to the lack of documentation of the actual performances by the artists in question, these being the primary sources of this thesis. The information needed has been acquired from written recollections of the artists themselves and from the witnesses to the events. I also visited and collected information from galleries and museums, examining other works which use sound as an art form or as part of an art work.

Chapter 1:

The Senses:

The senses are an important part of everyday experience, as they provide us with information about a world around us. The senses therefore, mediate that experience. First, we must look at the term 'sense', it has an important ambiguity. Sense as in 'making sense' refers to order and understanding, this being the sense of meaning. In this case, however, the word sense refers to 'the five senses' as in touch, smell, taste, sight and hearing. This is the sense of sensation or feeling caused by any of the bodily faculties being roused.

Everyday experience is multisensual, though one or more of the senses may be dominant in a given situation. Thus, sensuous experience is often complex, in that many of the senses work together offering a range of suggestions about the environment through which the body is passing. This environment is not a random set of stimuli, but gives sensory information that has been classified into constructs such as light, odours and sounds. This sensuous experience is grounded in previous experience and expectation, and depends on the capacities of the individual senses.

Each sense organ is receptive to particular types of environmental information - material surfaces, chemical compounds, ambient lighting, air vibrations etc.,

"A sense is a kind of message, or a distinct perspective on the world. Each sense organ, by its very nature is selective of the environmental information it gathers, so filtering and structuring the information into particular messages."

(Rodaway, 1994, p. 26)

The body is an essential and integral part of sensuous experience, as a sense organ in itself (as the skin is a sensory receptor in the action of touching) and as the site of all the other sense organs (ears, tongue, the eyes and the brain). It is also our primary tool for movement and exploration of the environment.

Traditionally smell and touch are described as the most intimate senses associated with the body. (Rodaway, 1994, p. 26)

Touch may not necessarily make direct contact with the body in the environment, but may be felt through the vibration generated in the materials in contact, or in reach of the body; a chair may fall over in one room, but is felt through the furniture in another room. It is also possible for the reach of one of the senses to be extended through various tools invented by humans, such as spectacles, hearing aids and many scientific instruments which amplify sensual stimuli. However, to describe a sense as a distant thing (as in a far away thing, in terms of physical distance) is to neglect its important intimate role. Some things can only be experienced from close range. Each sense operates over both intimate and distant ranges, though with different efficiency. "Furthermore, the distinction between intimate and distant senses is essentially a spatial classification and neglects important temporal characteristics of sensory experience." (Gold, 1980, p. 89).

I now wish to question whether the senses are natural and biological or socially constructed. Alan Whitehead appears to offer an answer to this. All sense perception is merely one outcome of the dependence of our existence upon bodily functionary. Thus, if we wish to understand the relationship of our personal experience to the activities of nature, the proper procedure is to "examine the dependence of our personal experience on our personal bodies." (Whitehead, 1938 p. 42). This quote may be read as saying that how we perceive the senses is culturally based, and that sense and perception is also based upon the body. According to Shilling, the senses are bodily and can be seen as natural and biological, but they are also cultural and involve change over time. (Shilling, 1997, p.13) Therefore the way we perceive and digest sensory input is very much culturally based. Shilling uses this concept of embodiment, when examining the senses and specifically hearing, in placing the mind in the body.

This chapter so far, has examined the role of the senses in everyday experience, this experience being multi-sensual and occurring constantly, with the body as a sense organ itself. This next section examines how the listening system in the body works, exploring how one actually hears, in the process of receiving and perceiving sound. I will look at some definitions of sound, deciphering its distinctions and unpacking its components. I will also map some of the cultural

studies discourse around sound which is necessary, as it is applied later to the work of the chosen practitioners.

How we perceive, read and interpret sound is as complex as how we receive visual images. The word 'sound' varies to the word noise, being that sound is by dictionary definition "a sensation caused in the ear by the vibration of the surrounding air or other medium, noise is defined as a type of sound, usually an undesirable, unpleasant, loud sound." (Allen, 1991, p 1162)

There are three acoustic properties of sound: loudness, which is strong audibility, pitch, the degree of highness or lowness of a tone and timbre, the distinctive character of a musical sound (Allen, 1995, pp. 702, 907, 1277). Sound is concerned with motion or activity, that is, with vibration and resonance of substances. The ear is a finely tuned mechanism for recording vibrations transmitted through the air. The listening system consists of two ears on either side of the head (this being binaural; meaning two) together with the muscles orienting them to the source of the sound. The ears collect these sounds and through the movement of the head acquire information about the character of sounds, their intensity and pitch for example, and their direction and duration. The vibrations collected in the ear are transformed into nerve impulses which the brain interpret. The ear is the focus of our auditory perception, but not exclusively so. As I have said the body can also receive auditory information, especially from solid substances. Other materials can conduct vibrations, for example a deaf person can 'hear' footsteps behind them through the feet, feeling the vibrations on the wooden floor.

Auditory phenomena penetrates us from all directions at all times, as opposed to the visual which relies on what is in front of the human eyes, one may not perceive visually what occurs behind us. The environment structures sensory information, letting us perceive this information, though it can be obstructed through such environmental components as weather, light and darkness, and the physical aspects such as the difference in urban and rural landscapes.

Rodaway cites the environment; with its openness and enclosedness, as influencing both the sort of sound that is actually heard, its intensity or volume

and the distance over which it is heard. The properties of the materials in the environment absorb, resonate and reflect these sounds. Therefore, sounds are emitted from many sources and are of varying intensities and different characters, being modified throughout the environment through which they pass. The wonder of the auditory system, is the way it manages to decipher and order the complex mess of sensory information, to create a sense of the world and of the people, places and spatial relationships. Sound is not just sensation, it is information. We do not merely hear, we listen; hearing is the first sense and the last to depart when we go under the anaesthetic (Pocock, 1988, p. 62).

Our experience of sound is not merely physical, it triggers off emotions and meanings. We cannot close our ears as one can close our eyes, we are therefore more vulnerable to sound. Emotions are coded, even though we feel emotions, we learn to attach and associate certain emotions to certain sounds.

In 1977, Schafer used the terms 'soundfield' and 'soundscape' to describe the sonic environmental surroundings. Firstly, the term soundfield refers to the acoustic space generated by the sound source, that is, the area spreading out from the sounding or voicing agent. It is generally characterised by a single sound, yet they may overlap across a given space. The term soundscape can be seen as drawing an analogy to 'landscape', being the sonic equivalent of landscape. The soundscape is the sonic environment which surrounds the receiver of the sound or sentient (this refers to the power of perception by the senses). The listener or subject is at the centre of the soundscape, which consists of the sounds coming from different directions and having different characteristics. There are two types of soundscapes, one composing of actual sounds, the other constitutes the soundscape of the mind. As pointed out by Sheppard, music, like reading, provides one with a sort of inner landscape to which one can retreat to from the bustle and pressure of daily living. For example, the walkman provides us with a vehicle for this private auditory experience.

The listener can create various tapes of different moods (noting certain emotions are linked to certain sounds), by mixing and creating tapes with atmospheres,

music from different genres and different countries . The walkman enables one to experience this private affair in the public space. In 'A Miniature History Of The Walkman', Iain Chambers views the walkman as in some sense an empowering or liberating piece of technology, in that it allows a person to escape the formal confines of the planned city, with its own particular soundscape. It lets the listener impose their own narrative, a customised story and soundtrack onto the cityscape. (Du Gay, 1997, p.19). Here one can see the complex nature of the empowerment involved in the use of a walkman by an individual, this encompasses a type of liberation through the escapism it provides. According to some theorists, sound technology can be seen as an empowering phenomena, which enables one to control and produce our own personal and private soundscape. This may appear to rival the thought that the walkman actually alienates the user from reality, causing the withdrawal of the user from the actual, natural and existing sounds and noises in the environment. (Du Gay,1997, pp. 20,21)

Despite the importance of auditory experience in our everyday lives, we may often consider ourselves to be primarily visual. This is due to the extraordinary emphasis placed on the visual in our modern culture. However, there has been an auditory revolution as well as a visual one. "The impact of the visual is so overwhelming that we sometimes forget that it has been accompanied by a cultural revolution almost as ubiquitous, this is the revolution in sound." (Du Gay, 1997, p. 19) As well as the great advancements in visual culture (photography, video, microscopes, telescopes, etc.), there has been dramatic changes in the use of sound. Amplification, recording equipment, playback facilities and the telephone are examples of this. To over emphasise the visual is to ignore the importance of the aural.

Human societies have dominated space with sound to differing degrees at different times in history. This may be intentional, like that of a church bell, but can also be more accidental. Industrialisation in the West is associated with the modern soundscape. The amplification of sound, not only fills space, it

obliterates it. New machinery and transportation, and increased urbanisation has meant the sonic landscape of our environment has never been so polluted. Since sound can be controlled and manipulated, it must be viewed as an historical question as it has been used to punctuate the day in different ways.

Music was bound by time and space, now music is everywhere, streaming through the interstices, between the lumpy material of life, filling the gaps in the continuum of human activity and contact, silting up in vast unchartable archives. (Spice, 1995, p. 3-6)

Modern sound media such as the record player, tape, c-d players and mini-discs have made us conscious for the first time of the self evidence of sound. From this I mean sound has been isolated from the natural environment in which it was created. For example, we can take the isolated sound of a dog barking, record the sound event, mix it into a musical track and listen to it whenever you want. This sound, when replayed after recording on a tape or c-d player is not created by the medium that appears to produce it, sound is transported from its original environment to the neutral space of the loudspeaker or walkman earphone. These elements dispose of the relationship between the sound and its source, and thus alienate the listener from the original source of the sound. Recorded sounds by their nature differ from real, original, or authentic sounds, they then merely become representations, despite the high degree of authenticity they suggest. One may argue that all sounds are representations, yet in this case the recorded sounds are representations. Through the continual advancements in technology, one may perceive mankind as becoming 'disembodied' (as in physicality becoming less important).

Ideas surrounding the complex area of postmodernism could be viewed as possibly relating to this new production of sound. Postmodernism concentrates on the way images and symbols shift or lose their meaning when put in a different context, revealing the processes by which meaning is constructed.

Signs have no fixed referent; any object can in principle take on meaning rather than representing some signifier; the sign is all that is left; we are left with society as pastiche, a play on signs with no reference beyond the commodity. (Baudillard, 1936, in Mackay, 1997, p. 5)

D-J's sampling and remixing use elements from the past and present, already existing sounds and new ones, are in a sense questioning the autonomy of an art form such as music. D-J's distort and possibly erode "all sense of continuity between past, present and future." (James, 1984, in Rutherford, 1990, p. 45) Through continual technical manipulation sound acquires the character of material matter. Tape looping and sampling are two ways in which various snippets of already existing sounds or pieces of music can be used like palpable objects, overlaying, distorting with effects, creating an almost collage effect. Whoever then has access to audio equipment can profoundly influence the world of natural sounds. This then raises issues of what happens to art or music in this case when it can be so easily manipulated and reproduced.

In earlier times, it was the uniqueness of the painting or work of art, or the enduring quality of a particular performance or piece of music which was unrepeatable, that gave it stature as an authentic piece of art. In the word of the c-d player and walkman, it is the infinite repeatability together with its variability that is most striking. The German critic Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), was part of the Frankfurt School, whose work denounced the idea of mass culture and consumption. They believed capitalism dupes the public into thinking consumption will fulfil their needs, and that this public has no forms of resistance. Benjamin's work, in part, dealt with art and its changing role due to the many advancements in mechanical reproduction. In 1936 Benjamin wrote an essay entitled 'The Work Of Art In The Age Of Mechanical Reproduction'. In this context we would now refer to the word mechanical as electronic, as in the infinite repeatability new technology can provide.

Benjamin had six main points in the essay and for my purposes they are in synopsis form;

- 1 Mechanical reproduction affects the uniqueness and authenticity of the work of art.
- 2 It destroys the art works' auru.
- 3 It shatters the traditional art making processes.
- 4 It changes our sense perception.

5 It replaces uniqueness and permanence with reproducibility.

6 It removes the work of art from the realm of ritual into that of politics.

(Du Gay, 1997, p.22).

Now I will offer some rivalling opinions in regards to audience reception. I will focus on the work of Simon Frith, who was part of the Populist school of thought which arose in the 1960's. This school of thought pertained to all aspects of everyday life and not just that of an elitist society, like the Frankfurt School. Frith is a major writer on the subject of music and popular music culture. I will also look to the work of Theodor Adorno, who was part of the Frankfurt School and who believed in an individualistic, independent and intellectual notion of culture. Culturally, the rise of 'pop' music in the 1950's was a defining moment in the development of sound, through advancements in its production quality and with its improved distribution all pertained to the expansion of popular music. Rock and Roll was the first unavoidable mass cultural commodity explicitly aimed at teenagers. Frith has looked to the functions of music and the ever growing debate surrounding the role of music in society. He criticises the theories of Adorno, who believed we are merely duped into our choice of products and consumption. Adorno's ideas concerning our true and false needs, according to Frith, fail to recognise the activity of popular audiences. Frith argues that the power of rock music lies in its use by the youth audiences as a "hedonistic, pleasurable leisure form." (Frith, 1981, p. 56)

I am offering this information as an example of a populist debate which raises issues of audience reception which contrasts with the views of Adorno. According to Frith, rock's vitality is contradictory in that it involves both escape and solidarity. Thus we can escape from the monotony of daily life and we gain solidarity from the knowledge that the music has the potential to unite its fans all over the world, encompassing many religious, racial and socio-economic differences, therefore forming new global identities. Frith, in contrast to Adorno, believes that audiences have an active role in consumption and not a passive one. This may also be linked to the debate on the function of the walkman as to whether it liberates the user or actually alienates them. It may be

perceived that this new technology may actually alienate, yet Frith argues music, in essence, is a form of solidarity.

Many critics, including Frith, have questioned the role and value of music, and this system of values can be traced to conceptions of artistic activity formulated in the 19th century. These ideas were primarily located in literature and philosophy. Distinctions were made between 'mass' and the 'community' music; mass being associated with popular music and community meaning jazz, reggae and other folk music. Pop and rock music are associated with commerce and noncreative production, riddled in artificiality, as opposed to the authenticity of community based musical forms. (Frith, 1981, p. 78) . Therefore, the meanings and classifications systems society uses over history to create a discourse around music are hierarchical , yet open to change.

In this chapter, I have examined what actually makes up sound and how the body receives these sounds. Sound is both a natural and cultural phenomena, depending on space and time. New technologies have had an enormous effect on the world of sound, creating a distortion between the sound and the source of that sound, thus leading to an auditory disembodiment. We have seen how these technologies have increased sounds complexity in terms of receivership. We have mapped out the work of some cultural theorists, in order to apply their ideas to the work of Mike Kelley in chapter three.

Chapter 2:

In this chapter I will look at, what I consider to be the most important art work created within the context of sound. This involves the work of the Italian Futurists, the Fluxus group and John Cage, all under the banner of performance art. As art does not exist in a vacuum and is intertwined with socio / political concerns, I feel it necessary to also give a brief account of the state of affairs in America from the thirties to the late eighties.

Adolf Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany in January of 1933 , so began the turmoil of World War II and the gradual invasion by the Nazi's of many European countries. Many artists, poets and musicians fled from Europe, coming to America in search of a political asylum. The United States, however, was in the depths of 'The Great Depression' (1930's). Despite the unemployment and financial hardship, it gave to an abundance of utopian ventures. The artists who came to the United States, in the 30's and 40's helped to lay the foundations for a generation of American artists who thrust the United States into a position of international leadership in art during the 50's and 60's. (Kurtz, 1992, pp. 28,142)

In America, the 1960's was a decade of great change, in politics, society, science, technology, mass media, popular culture and the arts. It was the first decade to experience the widespread use and appeal of television. President John Kennedy's funeral in 1963 was probably one of the first globally watched events. The relative utopia of the 40's and 50's in America (after the Great Depression) gave way to a time of political and cultural upheaval. The Vietnam War erupted in the early 60's, thus calling upon a vast proportion of the American male population. The country itself was divided over the actual need for such a War, violent clashes between the law and anti-war movements broke out. It was also a time of racial unrest, with surges of race riots as histories of slavery and racism were disputed by leaders of the Civil Rights

movement such as Malcom X and Martin Luther King. About this time, there was the appearance of youth subcultures, and for the first time there was an intermediary stage allowed between childhood and adulthood. Music and technological advancements are central to the growth of youth subcultures. Stereos first appeared in the mass market in the early 1960's, spreading Rock And Roll around the country. This new type of music appeared to characterise the times.

The 1970's saw a continuation of the civil rights movements and saw public demonstrations for the equality of blacks, women and gay people, along with more protests against the Vietnam War. Despite the worst recession since World War Two, world-wide inflation and the declining US dollar, consumers in America had the greatest disposable income ever (Kurtz, 1992, p. 142). After the long, bloody and divisive Vietnam War, the United States withdrew without a victory in 1973. The worst recession in forty years occurred in 1974, leading to the predictions of world-wide economic collapse. The year 1975 saw the highest rate of U.S. unemployment since 1941 and the biggest drop in industrial production since 1973. The 1980's was a decade of considerable political change both in Europe and America due to factors like the continued Cold War and the rising debate around nuclear weapons oscillating. All these socio-economic and political factors are relevant in contextualising the developments in the art world and specifically within sound art. As we have seen, this century has given rise to new media, thus enabling and prompting artists to cross borders between traditionally separated disciplines. Many practitioners have found what they had to communicate could not be conveyed exclusively in visual art, or in music. The relations between sound and space have tended to grow more and more ambiguous in some spheres of recent artistic production.

I feel it is now necessary to look briefly at Performance art in order to understand the work of the artists in question. Performance has existed in

various forms for the past seventy years or so but really has only been accepted as a medium of artistic expression in its own right since the seventies. At that time conceptual art, which insisted on an art of ideas over product and on art that could be bought and sold, was in its peak period and performance was often a demonstration against those ideas. Performance art may be presented solo or with a group, with lighting, music or visuals made by the performance artist, or in collaboration with others. The performance may take place in various places ranging from an art gallery or museum to an 'alternative space' such as a theatre, café, warehouse, or outdoors in a forest or building site for example. The content rarely follows a traditional plot or narrative. The performance might be a series of intimate gestures or a large scale visual theatre, lasting from minutes up to days. It may be performed once, yet it may be repeated several times, varying in content and duration, with or without a prepared script, spontaneously improvised or rehearsed over months. Performance draws freely on any number of disciplines and media; literature, poetry, theatre, music, dance, architecture, sculpture as well as video, film, slides.

I will now take a look at what I consider to be some of the greater developments in Performance art concerning the use of sound. The earliest detected use of performance and sound art dates back to the 1910's. This was a time of great industrial advancement with the arrival of new machinery, factories and increasing urbanisation. Within the artworld, it was considered quite radical for any early experimental work to take place concerning sound. The early Futurist's work utilising sound was fronted by Luigi Russolo. This historical moment is placed as inaugurating avant-garde¹ experimentation with sound and its properties. He questioned how Western art music had treated musical sound in an unproblematic way.

¹ This complex term may refer to art movements considered to be ahead of the rest. The general understanding being that the artists feel above or outside the normal art of the time. (Duro and Greenhalgh, 1992, p. 51)

He also questioned why were certain sounds considered privileged, above all the other sounds which were possible (Wishart, 1996, p. 22). Russolo tried to address this question in his famous 1913 manifesto "The Art Of Noises", and through the 1916 book of the same title. He aimed to combine the noise of trams, explosions of motors, trains and shouting crowds. Special instruments (intonarumori) were built which at the turn of a handle would produce such effects (Fig. 1, Page 17). This became known as 'noise music' and performances were held commonly throughout the early 1910's. Elsewhere, in his manifesto, he proposed that because musical sound was self-referential and thereby had no link with the world and its sounds, music had stood still and had become self occupied, while everything else that happened around it was energetically advancing into the modern world. He believed in the new media and in the increasing significance of new channels of communication. He stated his goal was to open up music to all sounds, however this intention was still music based (Wishart, 1996, p. 134). Russolo targeted the 'stagnant' period in music production, where music being produced had become stifled and repetitious, concerning itself with the limited realm of musical production and not of sound or noise production.

Russolo's ideas were then taken one step further by the composer John Cage (1912-1994). Cage, a trained pianist proposed that any sound can be used in music, and that there need not be any intention to make music (as Russolo had believed also), for there to be music. The only necessary conditions of music making then was the willingness to attune to aural phenomena. In other words, sounds no longer required any grand authorial or intentional organisation, nor anyone to organise them, just someone to listen. The new definition of music served to extend the range of sounds that could qualify as musical raw material. Categories like dissonance and noise became meaningless, and the line between sound and musical sound disappeared, therefore, every sound had become musical .

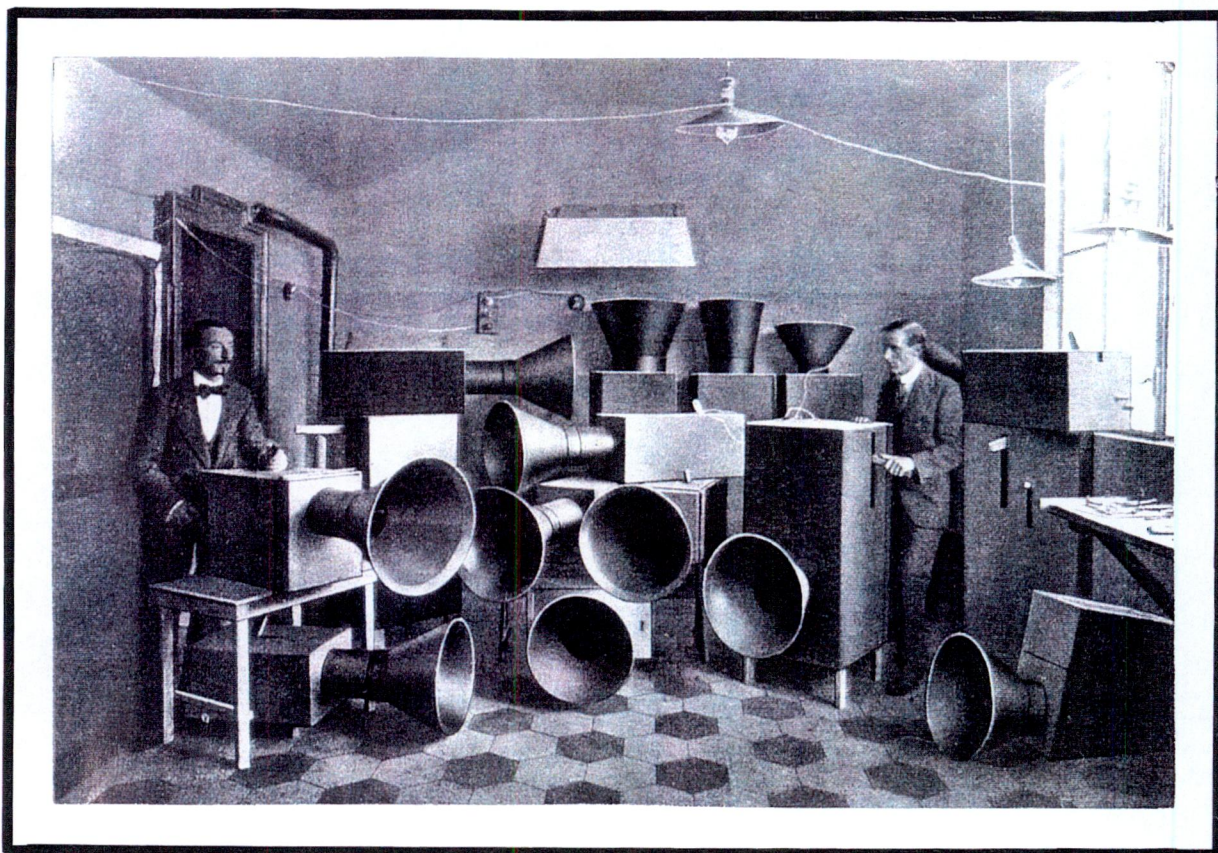


Figure 1.

Luigi Russolo (left) with Intonarumori, or noise instruments,
1913.

He manipulated sound aiming to decrease or destroy its recognisability and any context that might make a sound sensible in any other way than musical.

Despite the expansiveness of his theoretical program, he had to keep sounds from referring to phenomena too far afield from the restricted realm of sound. In other words, Cage had to work within the realms of signification in order to communicate and would appear to be not completely 'free'. In the early 1940's Cage became involved in the New York art scene, coming into contact with many influential artists including Marcel Duchamp. Duchamp was one of the many artists fleeing Europe and World War Two. Cage was inspired by his Duchamp's 'ready-mades', which renegotiated preconceived notions of what fine art was. Duchamp used everyday objects as art pieces thus blurring the edges of artistic production that had preceded him. Cage looked to the senses as Duchamp had looked to the everyday object. Both regarded the everyday experiences as a varied source of art. (Kostelanetz, 1988, p. 32). This leads us to look at Zen Buddhism which I feel is necessary in an understanding of the work of John Cage.

It must be noted that the visual arts of the 1950's in America had a preoccupation with art that had a distinct preference for dealing with direct emotional experience. A number of artists were aiming, not so much at individualistic art but believed that by expressing their personal experience they could produce art of a universal nature. After World War Two, questions arose as to man's existence and to the nature of reality. Many artists looked to the East and their religions as a source of inspiration, Zen Buddhism was one of these. Zen appears to be a highly complex area, but for this context it may be divided into several albeit crude sections. Firstly, there is the search for Enlightenment; this may be seen as a way of transcending rational experience. Secondly, the feeling of unity with nature is very important. This primarily amounts to an awareness of man as part of nature. In regards to the production of art, Zen requires man to make him or herself free, so therefore the practice of art should be a way of awakening or liberating the self. Zen's roots are in the

here and now, and this awareness of the present may manifest itself through meditation². Some of the ideas of Zen Buddhism manifested themselves in what Cage called his 'chance' principle. This chance principle pertained to the idea that everything (sound in this case) was art and this creation of art was not a preconceived notion, but that it existed everywhere. This relates closely to Schafer and his ideas on the soundscape discussed in chapter one. Schafer believed that sound is around us at all times and is everywhere. The knowledge of this chance principle is the chief factor in the generating of work by Cage, the understanding of this is made clear in 'The Future Of Music' (1973), "wherever we are; what we hear is mostly noise.....whether the sound of a truck at 50 mph, rain, static between radio stations, we find noise fascinating". Cage intended to "capture and control these sounds, to use them, not as sound effects, but as musical instruments" (Cage, 1973, p. 25). Cage began applying the sound event and soundscape to the ideas of Zen, thus trying to engage his audience to become more active participants rather than passive ones. This relates to the dialogue between the ideas of Adorno and Frith concerning audience reception. Cage was engaging an activity, thus asking an otherwise passive audience to become more involved and active. The usual reception of an audience, at a musical concert is to watch and to listen, however Cage felt he had to activate more of the audience's senses, encouraging the audience to become participants. This aspect of Cage's work will become more crystalline when I look at the 'Theatre Piece No 1' later in this chapter.

During the 1940's Cage came into contact with Merce Cunningham, who was a choreographer, and who had similar concerns about music and sound. They began to work on the notion that what was common between music and dance was time. Music and dance both took place in the same length of time, but they did not have to cut it up in the same way. This appears to mirror the theories offered in chapter two, that sound (music and dance) is very much

² Meditation in this case refers to concentration, centering on respiration and on the awareness of the now (Westgeest, 1996, p. 13).

bound up in space and time. In their collaborative work there were certain structured points at which they would meet in a piece, in between they were free to do as they pleased. Each would do their rehearsing. Cunningham would almost never hear the music Cage had written until the performance (Kostelanetz, 1993, p. 84). During the early 1950's, both Cage and Cunningham organised a tour around America, visiting many colleges, in the hope of exploring their new ideas within art colleges. One of these colleges was The Black Mountain College.

The Black Mountain College was set up in 1933, on a small hill side overlooking the town of Black Mountain in the United States. Its small community comprised of artists, writers, dancers and musicians. The interdisciplinary nature of the college was led by director John Price, who brought many artists to the college including Joseph Albers. Albers was a former teacher at the Bauhaus³ prior to its closure by the Nazis' during World War Two. An important part of the colleges curriculum was its 'stage studies', which looked to aspects of space, form, colour and light. Tutors would spend days and nights in each others company, which would easily turn into brief improvised performances.

The College welcomed both Cage and Cunningham, and in 1952, the first 'happening' took place, called 'Theatre Piece No 1'. This has now become a seminal event in the development of American theatre. Cage's definition of theatre was that it "engages both the eye and ear, the two public senses, seeing and non public situations; the reason I want to make my definition of theatre that simple is so one could view the everyday as theatre" (Kostelanetz, 1993, p.10).

³ The Bauhaus was a design school set up in 1929 in Weimer, Germany by Waler Gropius. Its aims were to end the fine art / craft division and to intergrate all the arts under a broad canope of design, functionalism and a deep rooted interest in architecture (Duro and Greenhalgh, 1992, p.57).

Of the 'event' or 'happening' of 1952, Cage recalls that he conceived the performance one afternoon and it was presented that evening. Cage felt the happenings came about through circumstances of being at the college where a number of people were present and thus a number of possibilities were presented. Each performer was assigned a time bracket determined by chance procedures within which he/she was to enact a particular activity. Although Cage had an idea of what each person would do, specific assignments had not been made. Each person was simply himself or herself rather than a fictional character, there were no rehearsals, script or costumes.

The seating arrangement was a square composed of four triangles merging in the centre, but not meeting, leaving four aisles for any impromptu activity to occur in. The centre was a large square that would also allow movement. The audience could see itself, which of course is the advantage of any circular theatre. Not being confined to the centre, the activity took place in the aisles and outside the circle. In each of the seats was a cup and it was not explained to the audience as to what they could do with it, some used it as an ashtray. When people began to arrive for the performance, some asked where the best viewing position would be, Cage in reply said that everyone would have the best seat. Thus the traditional hierarchical seating division of the theatre was abandoned along with the privileged focus point, the stage.

In this 'event' of 1952, Charles Olsen read poetry from a ladder, Robert Rauschenberg's 'white paintings' hung overhead in the shape of a cross . Records by Edith Piaf played on a phonograph, while another musician from the college, David Tudor, performed on the piano. Merce Cunningham danced in and around the audience, sometimes chased by a barking dog. Coffee was served throughout the performance by four boys dressed in white, whilst Cage himself sat on a step ladder for the duration of the performance (about two hours) sometimes reading a lecture on the relationship of music to Zen

Buddhism , sometimes he would just sit and listen, silently. (M.C. Richards, 1968, in Rose Lee Goldberg, 1979) Everyone did whatever they chose to do during certain assigned intervals , the entire experience was so full of sensory input that no two accounts of it sound much alike, indeed the individuality of each observers experience was central to Cage's aspirations. However, there is considerable disagreement about what did happen in the performance, a circumstance that is as much a measure of its success as of the faulty memories of those involved in the piece and of the audience who saw the piece. There is no concrete recording of the event, therefore disabling one from a closer analysis. I have relied, however, on the recollections of Cage himself and on M.C Richard's, a faculty member at The Black Mountain College. It may be possible that those at the Black Mountain College did not want the piece recorded in adherence to the ideas of Walter Benjamin. Since the performance had not been reproduced the 'auru' is kept intact and is redefined to the actual experiences of the participants and audience of 1952. This therefore challenges the gallery system which encourages and promotes the art object to be available for contemplation at the viewers will. Another problem here is also the difficulties of recording the performance, visually or aurally, as the technology would not have been developed or readily available at the time.⁴ There is also the problem of documenting performance art in regards to the limitations of the equipment . Microphones have limited pick up ranges, therefore the sounds that occur in the immediate area would be the only sounds received, thus neglecting all of the other possible sounds . This would mean the recording would be inaccurate and perhaps misleading. The same problem applies to the use of video cameras, they can only focus on the activity taking place in front of the lens. Therefore the camera ignores the other possible activities in a performance that may be taking place outside the range of the lens .

The importance of this piece in terms of the use of sound is quite evident in that the whole experience was indeed multisensual, utilising all of the senses to

⁴ The video camera was not available to artists until 1965.

complete the performance. Sound in particular was used in an elaborate way, as records were played (pre-recorded and musical sound), David Tudor played the piano (live, performative, and musical sound) and there was also the actual sounds from the surrounding environment. An exciting part of the piece was the acceptance of chance, in that it incorporated any sound or noise, inside or outside the venue. This therefore relates to the ideas of Schafer, whose soundscape, with its random accumulation of sounds within the environment, comes from all directions at all times. Cage chose to utilise these ideas and appropriate them into his work. Since performances are given within a specific time span and in a particular place, such sound art is therefore contextual.

Sounds have always carried a multiplicity of physically real yet imaginary associations and codification's, changing at different times in different contexts. Thus, sound is actually culturally constructed and is an historical phenomena. With the advent of the acoustic and electronic mass media, the number of sounds and their associations accumulated, showing that what once was considered a natural sound, might now be electrically or digitally provided and thus removed from its original context. This trend towards disembodiment was the state of aurality in the 1950's, for there already had been more than two decades of sound film and radio broadcasting preceding this. This time served as somewhat of an incubation period for the Fluxus artists that followed. At the beginning of the 50's, particularly in the United States, artistic production became more interdisciplinary. 'The Happenings' provide an example of the new collaboratory nature in art.

After the first happening at the Black Mountain College in 1952, multimedia works increased in popularity. However, this began to create problems of categorisation. It could not be put neatly into any art boxes or technology. Happenings themselves did not develop out of any clear cut intellectual theory about theatre or fine art. On the surface, Happenings had certain theatrical similarities in terms of stylistic detail of production in the use of a stage or

platform, the utilising of props and the occasional use of backdrops, and sometimes very dramatic lighting. (Henri, 1974, p. 145) All of the 'Happenings' took place indoors (except the later outdoor productions), in lofts and stores, in limited spaces for limited audiences. It may be said at this point that a lot of this new work was actually understood by the art world elite. So it could be said that there was a contradiction and an element of failure in the use of sound in art. Many artists tried to make sound or music less elitist by breaking the rules of music, yet they failed to relate or make sense to most art audiences, thus they provided an elitist art form themselves.

On a similar collaborative and challenging note Fluxus emerged in the early 1960's with intermedia work consisting of performances, concerts, street events, film, music, sculpture and poetry. Although Fluxus never constituted a definite movement, it did however exemplify a certain attitude. This attitude of questioning long-held cultural assumptions about artistic quality, value and meaning has left a mark on the production of art today. They strove to downplay reverence for the creative genius and the role of the artist in society. The group was propelled by the boundlessly energetic George Maciunas who saw Fluxus objectives in social terms, against the wasting of materials and human resources and against the art object as a saleable, non-functional commodity. (Maciunas / Armstrong, 1993, p.16). Like Cage and Duchamp, Fluxus tried to link art and life, being in opposition to the modernist's belief of 'art for art's sake'. A lot of the Fluxus was highly conceptual, the emphasis being on the idea and not specifically the medium or physical form. Some of the artists included in Fluxus were Nam June Paik, Terry Riley, Yoko Ono, Joseph Beuys and Jackson MacLow.

John Cage's influential classes given at The New School For Social Research in the late 1950's were studied by many of the Fluxus artists, appropriating his ideas and the ideas of Futurists into their own work, thus engaging with the

history of sound and art practices. Fluxus artists broke down their ideas concerning music and sound into two general, often related categories. The first was concerned with the sonic materials of music and the second examined the relatively unexplored territory of musical practice and performance. The first strategy that informed the Fluxus aesthetic was a response to the difficulty of conjuring up and recuperating into music the amount or plenitude of sound that exists on the outside of music, (sounds that are not classified as musical). Fluxus explored the margins of musical sound, therefore separating these sounds from their normal connections. In a musical performance the making of a sound is always connected with a task. They departed from this logic concerning themselves with the actual task of sound production. They did not need to produce musical sounds with each and every task. Some sounds were produced incidentally, again an idea that Cage engaged in (his 'chance' principle). Fluxus therefore went to say that any sound could be music as long as the existence of sound was conceivable. I would propose however that music should exist per se, whether the limitations of the human ear can conceive of it. For example, certain frequencies exist yet cannot be heard by the human ear but can be heard by dogs.

The second aspect of Fluxus' work with sound and performance work was based on sound production. There are a number of pieces by Fluxus in which instruments are wrapped in one manner or another. Here, the instrument is isolated as an object in itself away from the act of producing the music. The artists then began to violate the instruments as in Piano Activities, 1962 (Fig. 2, p. 26). These acts may be understood solely as an offence or insult to music. I would like to propose that their acts were an embodied resistance to historical or marginalised tendencies within Western hierarchies of musical taste. Violence also works as sacrifice, sacrificing the old for the new. This sound of the destruction of the instrument was fleeting and cannot be repeated, recalling the intrinsic ephemeral property of all sound.



Figure 2.

Fluxus, Piano Activities, Wiesbaden, 1962.

L-R: George Maciunas, Dick Higgins, Wolf Vostell, Ben
Patterson, Emmett Williams and Phil Corners.

So on a larger scale, "the act of violence also reasserts the reconnection between body, action and sound that had been severed with the blinded media of the phonograph and radio." (Kahn, 1993, p. 114) Fluxus served to make music embodied again and they were considered to be against disembodiment due to technology. Their work could be seen as a call for the 'auru', a term I have referred to in the previous chapter.

Fluxus and other artists started to work with video around the early 60's. Trying to integrate video into the intermedia experience of art was an anticipation of, or a projection towards, what had become an indispensable feature of everyday life to us in the form of television. I say this because video exists in a field of overlapping representational forms and our understanding of it necessarily derives in part from its relationship to the other modes of representation. No technology develops autonomously, it is always a direct or indirect product of their technologies, which leave their imprint on it. Therefore, video is connected in chain of meaning to television and cinema. Videos invention, innovation and diffusion, occur after that of the cinema, implicitly suggests a technological progression of sorts. Video can be seen as a sound technology rather than an image technology. The term video (to see) can be problematic in that it suggests seeing, this is in contrast to audio (to hear). Loosely defining Video art would be to say that it consists of works produced by the manipulation of video as a medium. This can be through monitors in the gallery space, through special video installation pieces or through the experimental play with pre-recorded material or with synthesised images through film like documentaries which may be broadcast on television. It can also be used as a recording device for an artist's own work and performances, or through the production of original works on video to explore the nature of the medium. (Belton, 1996, p. 131) This is a very complex area and there are many diversities to its uses.

In this chapter I have looked at the role of sound within the Futurists, John Cage, Happenings, Fluxus and in the work of performance and video artists which resulted in two areas of artistic intervention emerging. The first is to challenge social constructions of music and other areas of society and the second involves a challenging of the traditional art object, dematerialising it through various interdisciplinary art forms.

Chapter 3:

Mike Kelley:

Mike Kelley was born in 1954 in Wayne, a working class suburb of Detroit, Michigan. Detroit was at that time a declining automobile city. He was born into a Catholic working class family. He was a teenager in the late sixties / early seventies, this as we have seen was a time of great upheaval in the United States. The musical sound of Detroit was raw, and primal, in essence, with bands like 'The Stooges' and 'Alice Cooper'. These provided "a voice to white, confused teenager kids who felt alienated from their sexual identity." (Gordon, 1994, p. 54) Kelly himself was plagued with acne, and retreated into the world of music and rockstars as a form of escapism. Kelley joined an experimental noise rock band while still at school, called 'Destroy All Monsters'. He played various found instruments such as vacuum cleaners, squeeze toys etc. He studied later at the University Of Michigan until he was twenty four, where again he joined another band called 'The Poetics'. He then went on to take a degree course in The California Institute of the Arts (Cal Arts), in Los Angeles. After graduation he did not go to New York like most of his fellow artists, he remained in Los Angeles, where he is still a practising artist today.⁵

Kelley was never interested in Pop or Minimal art forms, he was more concerned with ravaged excess that characterises the interdisciplinary work of people like William Burroughs (writer, poet and painter; 1914-1997). He took influences from the films of Jack Smith, the theatre of Richard Foreman and the 'Happenings' of Fluxus and Allan Kaprow. He had a special interest in Body Art⁶ and experienced the work of body / performance such as Laurie

⁵ The above information comes from interviews with the artist in 'Catholic Tastes', (Sussman, 1993, p. 5-20).

⁶ Body art is an art form utilising the body as a vehicle for artistic expression, unlike performance art, it did not rely on the participation of an audience(Duro and Greenhalagh, 1992, p.63).

Anderson and Bruce Nauman live. Kelley has always been drawn by those art forms that are eccentric and close to life, so the happenings, assemblages and environments created by artists in the late fifties were to provide Kelley with an early source of inspiration. Kelley's first works were primarily performance pieces, which utilised a variety of media, sculpture, drawings, video and painting. His early performances were installation like, using the sculptural pieces as props, the drawings and paintings acted as backdrops and himself as the 'carrier', the epicentre of expression in the performance. He did however use other people in his performances. "I like people to make up their own minds, so my work is not clear, it has a schizophrenic presence in that you can tell what the issues are but not what my stand on them is." (Kelley in Duncan, 1994, p. 86-87)

Duncan in the same article tries to define a consistent theme in Kelley's work, "Kelley's art is generated out of a probing scepticism, a distrust of all hand-me-down assumptions about the forms and values of aesthetic experience." (Michael Duncan, 1994, p.85)

He appears to challenge what art can and should be, making work for a society that may have less reverence for the art object than at any other time in history. He then seems to be mocking a lot of cherished values, for example the notion of art bringing the viewer an aesthetic education. The work questions what one may consider to be of quality and value in art.

Kelley's work may be read as unpacking social and cultural beliefs from America's history, recontextualising these beliefs for modern times. He seems to have an acute awareness of popular culture and its icons, combined with an over the top visual style quite unique to him. His work may appear disorientating at first. Confusion, it would appear is central to his work. "Almost everything Mike Kelley touches gets turned on its head, it is initially disorientating, even utterly confusing." (Knight, 1983, p. 35)

There is the standard cliché that art should make order out of chaos, yet it appears in Kelley's case it seems to be the opposite " His language is coarse , his art seems evil and his aesthetic works, with the explications of caricatures or graffiti on school desks and lavatory walls." (Kellein, 1991, p.7-8) He addresses the American social and psychological condition with such precision that it may frighten or bewilder the viewer. He dissects the emblems of common belief systems, from religious banners to college sport memorabilia. His work has dealt with rubbish and human excrement, commenting upon what is left in a human, when all of the good is extracted. "Skewering basic assumptions of philosophy, psychology, politics and art." (Duncan, 1998, p. 45) Kelley appears to challenge prevailing notions of taste influence, moral authority and possibly social responsibility.

As I have said, the majority of Kelley's work of the late seventies and early eighties was performance based, and the objects and drawings that Kelley has created in response to these long and very complex performances are difficult to understand in isolation. However evocative the documentation of the individual pieces are they can not act as replacements for the actual performances. Unfortunately Kelley's most important performances have not been videotaped or recorded aurally, this therefore poses a problem when trying to analyse the work, one has therefore to rely on the people who have witnessed the performances in person and on Kelley's own recollections. Descriptive wall labels have been used by Kelley, in collaboration with Timothy Martin, in gallery presentation of the undocumented performances. These provide crucial guidepoints for the understanding of these individual performances and their role in Kelley's larger projects.

The early performances began as trance-like events using dance as "an idea, deteriorating in the process or being revealed, changed, getting caught up in the world, mixed up and mitigated that is, its improved." (Kelley, 1997, p. 22) This quote appears to be saying that through the performance process an idea is

worked out, possibly not in the preparation leading to the actual performance but in its execution. A high level of complexity appears to occur through these performances, and this is something that will become more apparent when I come to analyse an actual example of his performance work in a later part of this chapter. The use of dance appears in nearly all of his later work, the styles of dance have similarities with that of 'pop' or 'folk' dance, this however is supposedly not a formal concern of Kelley, the 'low' connotations of popular dance merely appealed to him. "When I first saw Kelley perform, he had, as he does now, a wiry, electrified, androgynous presence, his gestures were both vaudevillian and rock'n'roll." (Gordon,⁷ 1994, p.177) We can see the influence of rockstar Alice Cooper, himself an androgynous creature with a woman's name, garish makeup and glam and glitter stage clothes. Cooper's inclination to aggravate the audience is a 'stage persona' which Kelley has appeared to have adopted in some of his later performances. (Gordon, 1994, p.177) Kelley has always had a fascination with the idea of being a musician or rock-star, making known his interests in both high and low culture, utilising both in an attempt to create something new.

Kelley continues to attract a double audience. Cognoscenti follow the development of his idiosyncratic philosophical and art-historical ideas; kids see him as a kind of rock-star iconoclast, milking American low culture for all its worth (Duncan, 1998, p. 47).

Generally Kelley's performances do not fit the profile of usual performance art, it is neither ritual based nor exclusively body orientated. Frequently it is purely word driven with the gradual reworking and reiteration of words and is in my opinion reminiscent of Samuel Beckett. According to Kelley himself, the performance work was about "belief systems characterising them as propaganda gone." (Kelley, 1994, p. 7) His early experimentation with sound, whilst in school and college bands, can still be seen as an influence on his

⁷ Kim Gordon is a member of experimental noise group from New York, called 'Sonic Youth', who have collaborated with Kelley on various performances during the eighties (including 'Plato's Cave, 1986, Artists Space, New York, p. 22).

performance work. I will now examine an important part of Kelley's performance history, that of 'The Sublime' (1984).

'The Sublime' took place for the Museum Of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles in March of 1984. As I have said the majority of work has not been documented therefore I will rely on the words of Timothy Martin and Victoria Cohen, who both saw the performance first hand and Mike Kelley himself. Historically the essential claim of the sublime has been that man can in feeling and in speech transcend the human state. In this performance Kelley spotlights the little banalities that show up in everyday life such as, the day to day relations and encounters with family members, and the inconsequential behaviour acted out towards each other. He then carries the use of the sublime, to contrast and link the banalities of art and theatre, such as repetition involved in art making. 'The Sublime' as a piece of work is so deeply researched that most of its images are derived through extensive reading and writing by Kelley himself. The performance lasted in total over two hours. It took place in a former police garage leaving the acoustics of the space to be vast and hollow. To start all three performers (Kelley, with Ed Grierke and Mary Woronov) are lined up according to height with their backs to the audience so that they appear to be one figure (Fig. 3, p. 35). Kelley furthest down the line points to a series of shapes which appear to be like a bar graph, hung from the rafters. "The family line goes down in size, male bigger, female smaller, until the stage of preconception, then there is a reversal female larger now." (Kelley, 1994, p. 78). An image of a sperm dwarfed by an enormous egg is projected on the wall, Kelley, (the son) bends Grierke (the father) over a stool and spansks him with a plastic baseball bat as he lectures him on the pleasures of the moment, and of the pleasures through time. To the beat of a drum he makes the same point about music as he did about the family line, "Six descending movements with a crescendo at the end caused by a sexual inversion in size, an allegory where size designates importance." (Martin, 1994, p. 79) This is the biological explanation for the sublime, in that its definition encompasses the

impressiveness of big things. Kelley acts it out by dancing with a partner too big for him, Mary Woronou, standing a foot taller than Kelley (Fig. 4, p. 36). An argument between art and nature turns to a battle of the bands with Gierke and Kelley each manning one of the two drumkits in the performance (Fig. 5, p. 37). Each try to outdo the other, the acoustics of the space are both harsh and booming, making the drum beats seem painfully loud. After this, there is a long sado-masochistic routine between the two, involving bootlicking. Gierke then goes on to read 'The World's Biggest Flower's' story about a search for a giant flower specimen in Borneo, an island in South-East Asia. The story is extracted from an article from 'National Geographic' which uses flowery, romantic language, setting up fictitious characters. With the addition of Kelley's piece and its sexual energy, the article sounds like soft-core pornography. The romance of the story is in its phoney sublime nature, this however is obliterated by Kelley's interruptions, who paces back and forward loudly reciting aphorisms. After the story Woronov narrates a slide show of sublime banalities, including photographs of sunsets and a number of the worlds biggest things, troll dolls etc. Coming near the end Kelley washes the feet of the front row of the crowd whilst singing "oh dear! what can the matter be?" in a slow acapella voice. Unhappy with this ending Kelley proceeded to one of the drum kits where he began to cap the event off with a loud, long drum crescendo, again echoing the ideas of the family line and its comparison to music.

A lot of this piece seems at times to be quite complex, in that the artist draws on a lot of ideas, using imagery that may appear unconnected, yet for my purposes I merely wish to examine the role of sound in this piece. In this case we can see Kelley has used musical instruments as an extension of the piece, using in this case, drums as a way of echoing the underlying theme. Sound has not been used for shock or startling impact but to make auditory gesture marks, puncturing the performance, changing the texture and flow of the actions. Kelley has chosen carefully the site in which the performance is to

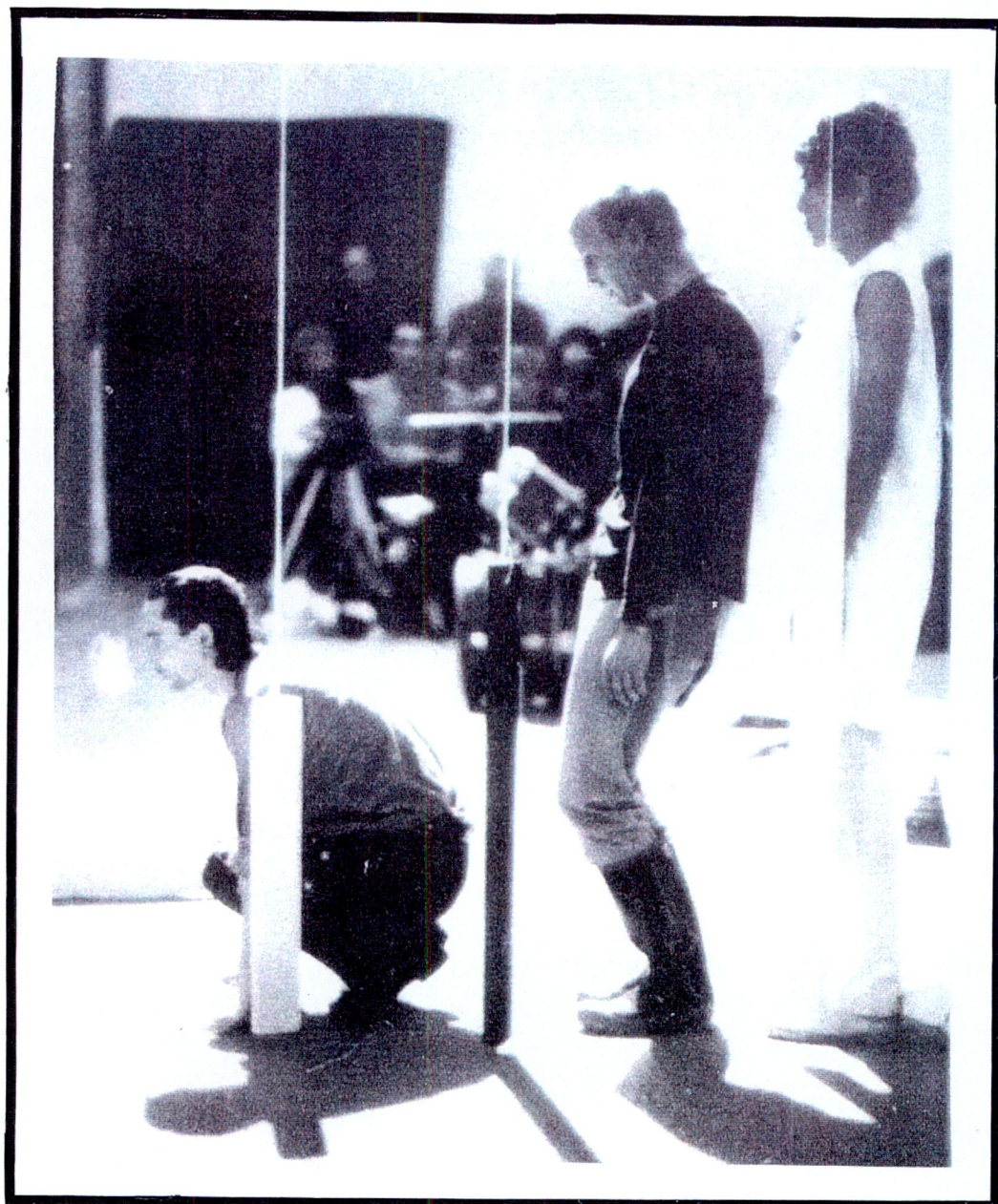


Figure 3.

The Sublime, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles,
March 1984.

L-R: Mike Kelley, Ed Gierke and Mary Woronov.



Figure 4.

The Sublime, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles,
March 1984.

L-R: Mary Woronov and Mike Kelley.



Figure 5.

The Sublime, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles,
March 1994.

Mike Kelley.

The large unused police garage is ideal for the bombasting, full take place. sound of two trashing drumkits, a smaller venue would not have been suitable due to the high volume involved.

In offering an overview of Kelley's work it may be proposed that his early experimentation with sound, in the noise bands whilst at college, has had a lasting effect on his work. He appears to have a fascination with noise and its many connotations. Unlike Cage's belief in the unstructured assortment of sounds in the environment, Kelley seems to have utilised these sounds or noises in a specific order or collection. Like Cage, there is a lack of documentation of Kelley's performances. Thus, there is a difficulty in fully researching the work and again I must rely on the artist and on witnesses to the events. As I have said, Kelley appears to be using sound as an extension of the performance, utilising it as another medium for expression, thus sending the pieces off on aural tangents.

Chapter 4:

Conclusion:

Throughout this thesis, I have tried to offer a dual contextualisation of the potentialities of sound within cultural theory and art history. We have encountered many ideas about the use of sound, from its production, to how it is received and perceived. As opposed to synopsising the thesis chronologically, I would now like to draw these threads together and discuss them under what I have identified as the most useful thematics.

1: The Theme Of Accessibility: There appears to a common thread running throughout this thesis regarding the accessibility to the work in question . On the public's behalf, there seems to be a lack of understanding as to what the sound / performance work was about . This points to a stereotypical conception as to what art should and should not be. The specific artists have chosen to question how art is made, what constitutes an art work, how the art work is presented, received and understood. The art work did not necessarily take place in an art gallery, and it seemed to be more accessible to the general public, bridging the gap between the artist, artwork and the audience. There is an inherit irony here, as the work initially strove to bridge the gap between the art work and the general public. The work was quite complex and conceptual, thus alienating the audience even more.

2: The Lack Of Documentation: ‘Theatre Piece No. 1’ and ‘Sublime’ both lack sufficient documentation. This is perhaps by choice. A reproduction is a separate piece of art work, quite distant from the original art work, due to reproduction quality (sound or image). With video the possible documentation would only be able to focus on one particular area of the performances at a given time, thus neglecting the many things that occurred simultaneously during them. To aurally record the pieces, the equipment would merely pick up the most prominent of sounds, again neglecting the numerous noises and sounds possible

at such events. By creating such a fleeting art piece it could be said that they were challenging the timeless aura of authenticity that exists around the material and modernist 'object d'art'. Thus the lack of documentation helped to dematerialise the art object. It is possible the artist chose not to have the piece documented fully to avoid giving the work any modernist authenticity, thus relying on the ephemeral quality of performance art in general. The original performance would therefore always exist as a 'unique' event, set in a particular place in space and in time. There is a problem in regards to the work, one has to rely on the witnesses of such events and on the actual artists' own recollections. This lack of the art object raises the debate surrounding the text by Walter Benjamin, who believed the art work radically changes as a result of reproduction. This lack of documentation refers to the previous point as it would appear to make the artwork more elitist, as it is difficult for one to access the information.

3: The High And Low Debate: The artists in this thesis have had a relationship with music and musical production. John Cage trained as pianist, and Mike Kelley played drums for many experimental noise bands while in high school and in college. This link with musical production from an early age would appear to have an important influence on the choice of work the artists created in later years. This early exploration possibly provided them with the ground work for their art work, appropriating popular music and sound within the more elitist context of the fine arts. This connects to the debate raised in chapter one surrounding high and low culture between that of Theodor Adorno and Simon Frith. I think that the Populist Simon Frith made a preferable argument, that as consumers we do have an active role in what we choose to buy and listen to. This element of consumption can also be applied to an art setting, such as a gallery. Classical music has been perceived high culture music whereas rock or dance music would be seen as popular culture. Mike Kelley has introduced popular music into performance art through his use of drumkits. A consideration of the popular connotations associated with rock music therefore ignores the

previous existing high culture connotations of the fine arts and its production. The Fluxus group have made attempts to change the Western world's ideas of music thus rivalling the preceding years of musical production. This links with the rejection of 'high art' and its modernist concerns with elitism and authenticity and keeping 'art for art's sake'. Fluxus, was a new spirit of experimentation which was needed to revitalise what they viewed as the otherwise stagnant and faltering world of music. John Cage chose to open up music, beyond that of recognised musical instruments and equipment, therefore embracing all sounds and noises, claiming all could be music. He claimed that music was happening all around us, all of the time and everywhere.

This leads us to another theme, being that of the influence of Zen Buddhism. Marcell Duchamp, believed everyday objects were art. Cage carried this on to the world of the audible, all sounds being music. Fluxus celebrated the menial tasks of daily life in their performances. Kelley himself chose to make reference to the little banalities of life. These ideas are central to that of Zen Buddhism, in that their belief systems incorporate the idea that all the inconsequential things a person may do are actually meaningful and of extreme importance. This may also be seen as being against the pre-existing idea that certain paintings and art objects are of greater worth than others, therefore challenging artistic hierarchies.

6: Technology: Technology has an extraordinary part to play in how we receive and perceive sounds. Sounds can now be disembodied from their source. A post-modern idea of disembodiment prevails that we as humans are becoming less connected and more alienated to the physical self. This disembodiment from the original source of sound can be viewed as liberating. The case of the walkman for example, provides the user with a private soundtrack for a private world, the idea is that through this escapism comes liberation. I am in agreement with the notion of the liberating quality of new technology, although I do acknowledge the dangers involved. One has to only look at the influence of television, which in fact does alienate a lot of its users, disengaging them

from the 'real' world. I do feel that we, as intelligent human beings, have control and choice over how we receive this technology utilising it for our own needs and appropriating it into our own lifestyles. These artists took control of new advancements in technology and placed them into a new context.

7: Sound Art Problematics: I must also acknowledge that sound art is a relatively new art form and its meaning can be highly problematic. The way it is received and presented to the public is under constant renegotiation in a world where there is still the tendency to perceive painting and sculpture as the dominant art forms. This has been changing with the rise of alternative art forms such as installation art, site specific art and land art since the 60's and 70's. Video art, once problematic in its content and in its receivership now fits relatively comfortably in the long tradition of art making. Sound art thus, is still in a state of flux as to its positioning within the history of art.

8: The Influence of The Artists: Partly due to the work of John Cage, Fluxus and Mike Kelley, our conceptions of the art object today, have become less fixed and more multiple. All the artists have played with the notion of what constitutes art. Historically, the history of art has been associated with painting, sculpture, music and literature. These newer and more interdisciplinary art forms employed by Cage and Kelley, stress that art practitioners and processes are often hybridised and depend on the specific intention and strategy of the artist within each art practice.

This thesis was initiated within the sound art category, aiming to explore the meaning of sound in art practices. Within the confines of this thesis, I have learned that it is a highly complex and problematic terrain. However these problematics are fruitful as it indicates that sound art has not yet been enshrined and fixed within a pigeon hole of western art history. This fluidity points to difficulties in understanding, however it does also points to the potentialities of sound to be used within future interdisciplinary practices and processes.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ALLEN, R.E. The Concise Oxford Dictionary
University Press, Oxford, 1991.
- ALTMAN, Rick Sound Theory, Sound Practice
Routledge, New York, 1992.
- ARMSTRONG, Elizabeth In The Spirit Of Fluxus
Walker Arts Center, 1993.
- ARNOLFINI GALLERY A Noise In Your Ear : An International
Exhibition Of Sound And Sculpture
Bristol, 1986.
- BATHES, Roland The Responsibility Of Forms : Critical
Essays On Music, Art and
Representation
Hill and Wang, New York, 1985.
- BELTON, John "Looking Through Video"
in SUBEBURG, Erika and
RENOV, Michael
Resolutions : Contemporary Video
Practices
University of Monnesota Press,
Minneapolis, 1996.
- BENJAMIN, Walter "The Work Of Art In The Age Of
Mechanical Reproduction"
Translated by H. Zohn in H. Adrendt
(Ed.) in Illuminations
Cape, London 1970.

- BURNS, William
Noise And Man
William Clowes And Sons, London,
1968.
- CAGE, John
The Future Of Music
Limelight Editions, New York, 1937.
- CHAMBERS, Iain
“A Miniture History Of The Walkman”
In DU GAY, Paul
Doing Cultural Studies
B.B.C. Press, 1997.
- DUNCAN, Michael
“Kelley’s Junk Shop Pop”
Art In America, June 1994,
pp. 85-89.
- DUNCAN, Michael
“A Trip Down False Memory Lane”
Art In America, January 1998,
pp. 45-47.
- DURO, Paul and Greenhalgh
Essential Art History
Bloomsbury, London, 1992.
- FRIEDMAN, Ken
Fluxus Virus : 1962 - 1992
Temporares Museum Moltkerei, 1992.
- FRITH, Simon
Sound Effects
Panteon, New York, 1981.
- FURLONG, William
Audio Arts
Academy Group Ltd., London, 1994.
- GOLD, John
An Introduction To Behavioural
Geography
Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1980.

GOLDBERG, Rose Lee

Performance Art : From Futurism To
The Present
Thames And Hudson, London, 1988.

HARRIS, Mary Emma

The Arts At The Black Mountain
College
MIT Press, Cambridge, 1987.

HAYWARD GALLERY

Double Take : Collective Memory And
Current Art
South Bank, Parkett, London, 1977.

HENRI, Adrian

Total Art : Environments, Happenings
And Performance
Thames And Hudson, London, 1974.

HET, Appolohuis

Interviews With Sound Artists : Echo
Festival : The Images Of Sound 2
Eindhoven, 1993.

HULL, John

Touching The Rock
SPCK Publishers, London 1990.

JAMES, Fredric

A Place Called Home
Johnaton Rutherford Publishers,
London, 1984.

JOHNSTON, Jill

"Flux Acts"
Art In America, June 1994, No 6,
pp. 71-78.

KAHN, Douglas

Wireless Imagination : Sound, Radio
And The Avante-Garde
MIT Press, London 1992.

KELLEIN, Thomas

Mike Kelley, Is Evil Really Evil?
The Institute Of Contemporary Arts,
London 1991.

- KNIGHT, Christopher "Mike Kelley Turns Confusion Into Art"
Los Angeles Herald Examiner,
27 March, 1983.
- KOSTELANETZ, Richard Conversing With Cage
Limelight Editions, New York, 1988.
- KURTZ, Bruce D. Contemporary Art, 1965 - 1990
Prentice Hall Publishers, New Jersey,
1992.
- LANDER, Daniel Radio Rethink : Art, Sound And Transmission
Walter Philips Gallery, Banff Alberta,
Canada, 1994.
- LEPPERT, Richard The Sight Of Sound
University Of California Press, London,
1993.
- LEWIS, James "Beyond Redemption"
Art Forum, Summer Edition, 1991,
pp. 71-75.
- MCLUHAN, Marshall The Gutenberg Galaxy - The Making of Typographic Man
University of Toronto Press, Toronto,
1962.
- MCLUHAN, Marshall Understanding Media : The Extensions Of Man
T.G. Press, Cornwall, 1964.
- MODELSKI, Tania Studies In Entertainment
Indian University Press, Indianapolis,
1986.

- POCOCK, D.C.D. Humanistic Approaches To Geography
Department of Geography,
University of Durham, Durham, 1988.
- RODAWAY, Paul Sensuous Geographies
Routledge, London, 1994.
- SHILLING, Chris The Body And Difference
in WOODWARD, Kathryn
Identity And Difference
Sage Publications, London, 1997.
- SMITH, Roberta "Fluxus Redux : The Whitney Pays
Homage To Irreverence"
The New York Times : Living Arts
Section,
July 16, 1993.
- SOLICE, A. Ruth Musicology And Difference : Gender,
Sexuality In Music Scholarship
University Of California Press,
California, 1993.
- SPICE, Nicholas The London Review Of Books
July Edt, QP Publishers, London 1995.
- STARKINGS, Dennis Religion And The Arts In Education
Hodder And Stronghton, Kent, 1993.
- STORR, Robert "An Interview With Mike Kelley"
Art In America, June 1994,
pp. 90-93.
- SUSSMAN, Elizabeth Catholic Tastes
Whitney Museum Of Modern Art,
New York, 1993.

WALKER ARTS CENTER

"Walker Art Center Celebrates Fluxus
In All Its Manifestations" (Press
Release)
June 15 1993, No 7.

WESTGEEST, Helen

Zen In The Fifties : Interaction In Art
Between East And West
Wanders Uitgevers, Zwolle, 1996.

WHITEHEAD, Alan

Modes Of Thought
Macmillan, New York, 1938.

WILLIAMS, Emmet

My Life In Fluxus And Vice Versa
Thames And Hudson, New York, 1992.

WISHART, Trevor

On Sonic Art
Harwood Academic Publishers,
London, 1996.

WOOD, Paul

Modernism In Dispute : Art Since The
Forties
Yale University Press, London, 1993.

