

*I Thought I Grew An Ear in My Stomach:*  
**The Phenomenological Experience of the Art Event  
as Sublime Encounter**

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## **Declaration**

The work presented in this thesis is the candidates own. No portion of the work in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification from this or any other university or other institution of learning.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Kathrine Sandys  
October 2012

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## **Abstract**

This research explores the potential for the sublime experience through encounter with the immersive, site-specific sound installation, in abandoned Cold War military sites. It defines the distinctiveness of sonic installation as a practice, its affinities with specific kinds of installation art, the particular somatic and visceral experience it affords, and its scope for engaging memory, feeling and imagination through the use of the abandoned site. The notion of the sublime is presented as a way of reading the visceral charge in the phenomenological experience of the encounter, as a yet unexplored narrative device in site-specific installations.

The text unfolds the journey from initially encountering large scale Earthworks in the landscape of the Mid-West American desert, subsequently explored through existing discourse, to the development of two original works and exhibitions that employ the outcomes of the field research. The installations created for this research offer an alternative reading on current discourse and practice within the field of site-specific installation, with particular emphasis on acousmatic readings of the sites. The thesis proposes that tactile phenomenological, sonic experiences of acousmatic sound remain largely absent within discourse of the sublime but offer the ineffable moment consummate with the sublime encounter, therefore offering a new reading on the sublime experience of the participatory performance event.

The role of the audience, spectatorship of the work and spatial identity of the sites serve as the historical, critical frame of context, explored through environmentally oriented art practice of Minimalist music and sculpture, Happenings and Intermedia. The installations explored within the research require considered journey to their location, which is questioned for its shifting property to frame the work or 'encounter', as an inherent attribute of the event. Finally, the problematic altered perception of the site-specific installation, through remediation in curated exhibitions, is explored through the last chapter.

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## Introduction

*In these works I am not trying to build a sound image for its listeners to hear; I am building a sound to bring this imaginary place or moment of mine alive.*

Max Neuhaus – Notes on Place and Moment 1992<sup>1</sup>

Over the last ten years, my practice has developed in format and media from predominantly light-based work in the purpose-built performance environment (theatre lighting design), to the increased integration of sound, as short-lived experiences or installations. My work has more recently revolved around the use of sound to animate abandoned spaces as sonic installations that engage memory, feeling and imagined narratives. This appears to sit within the discourse of sound art. As described by Max Neuhaus:

*'Sound Art' seems to be a category which can include anything which has or makes sound and even, in some cases, things which don't.*<sup>2</sup>

For the purpose of this body of research I am focusing on specific sites or spaces in which the sound is read as an extension of the purpose of the space. It is what Denis Smalley would refer to as a performed space<sup>3</sup>. My own reading of Smalley's Performed Space in the context of this thesis is one where the dynamic of that space is reliant on the body enveloped in the space and sound, not listening as a distant observer outside of the space. He defines this as a space where:

*A human agent, [...] applies energy to a sounding body, producing spectromorphologies*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Neuhaus, M (1992) *Notes on Place and Moment* (Online) P.1 [URL:http://www.max-neuhaus.info/soundworks/vectors/place/notes/](http://www.max-neuhaus.info/soundworks/vectors/place/notes/) (Accessed 12/8/2009)

<sup>2</sup> Neuhaus, M (1992) *Sound Art* (Online) P.1 [URL:http://www.max-neuhaus.info/bibliography](http://www.max-neuhaus.info/bibliography) (Accessed 20/7/2012)

<sup>3</sup> Smalley, D (2007) "Space-form and the Acousmatic Image". *Organised Sound*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Vol 12, Issue 1. P.41.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* P. 41.

Smalley defines spectromorphologies as: “the interaction between sound spectra (spectro-) and the way they change and are shaped in time (morphology).”<sup>5</sup> It is the perception of the sounding space as a performed one in the Smalley definition, which has started to identify my work within this discourse of sound art.

Positioning this range and shift of practice within a professional landscape has proved problematic in terms of the outward perception of my identity as a practitioner.

For me, I identify the works within a performance context, considering the following: 1) the subject witnessing the work as an audience and sometime participant, 2) the focus of the media – both light and sound – as an experience of the interpretation of waves on and in our body, 3) the notion of animating the space and environment within the overall construction of the work. Above all, what defines all the work ultimately within the context of performance, rather than galleried installation art<sup>6</sup>, is the durational quality as narrative<sup>7</sup> of the pieces. I therefore would consider my works in this thesis as performed installations. Where this is problematic in terms of identifying myself as a practitioner is also the basis for where it could be considered a new reading of the form and media I employ. It is with that consideration that I have undertaken this PhD research.

The notion of sound being the central focus of the work identifies it as a tangible object. The use of the word *object* in relation to sound has a very different connotation to its identity when explored through the seminal

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<sup>5</sup> Smalley, D (2007) “Spectromorphology: Explaining Sound Shapes”. *Organised Sound*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Vol 2, Issue 2. P.108.

<sup>6</sup> Installation art defined in the Oxford Dictionary of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art as: *The disposition of objects in a gallery but which also has the more specific meaning of a one-off work (often a large scale assemblage) conceived for and more or less filling a specific interior.* Chilvers, I (1999) *A Dictionary of Twentieth Century Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. P. 295.

<sup>7</sup> Narrative is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as: *An account of connected events, a story.* In *Oxforddictionaries.com [online]* <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/narrative?q=narrative> Accessed 25/7/2012.

essay on *Art and Objecthood* by Michael Fried<sup>8</sup> around the notion of the object within art theory. It is famously deconstructed by him in relation to the minimalist or literalist artists and will be explored further throughout this study. Within the discourse of sound, however, the *sound object*<sup>9</sup> is significantly defined by Pierre Schaeffer in his 1966 discourse on reduced listening<sup>10</sup>, beyond the source information, towards the acoustic properties of the sound. Both discourses on the object and objecthood (reduced listening and emergence of Schaeffer's *sound object* through acousmatic sound<sup>11</sup> and Fried's *objecthood* through the exploration of minimalist sculpture and land art of the late 1960's) emerge throughout this research and are explored further in order to present the notion of the object correctly within each context.

Taking object to be defined as a tangible entity, not within the Schaefferian or Friedian contexts, I explore the removal of the word *object* entirely, therefore foregrounding the holistic experience taken from the event and how the total sensory experience describes the work. Through this research I am trying to establish what happens to our sensory perception, within this reduced environment, where we are left to question the encounter with the environment in which we arrive, apparently devoid of the obvious point of focus or art object. It is the experience as the event that constitutes the work. For this reason it was appropriate to conduct this research *via* the discourse of phenomenology.

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<sup>8</sup> Fried, M (1967) "Art and Objecthood". *Artforum* 5.

<sup>9</sup> In Schaefferian theory the term sound object "*refers to every sound phenomenon and event perceived as a whole, as a coherent entity and heard by means of reduced listening which targets it for itself, independently of its origin or its meaning.*" Pierre Schaeffer in Landy, L (2007) *Understanding the Art of Sound Organization*. Cambridge: MIT Press. P.80.

<sup>10</sup> Schaeffer, P. (1966), *Traité Des Objets Musicaux*, Le Seuil, Paris.

<sup>11</sup> A Pythagorean term reintroduced in 1955 by Jérôme Peignot which considers *the distance which separates sounds from their origin*, and by Schaeffer as: *Indicating a noise which is heard without the causes from which it originates being seen*. Chion, M (1983) *Guide Des Objets Sonores: Pierre Schaeffer et la recherche musicale. Guide to Sound Objects: Pierre Schaeffer and musical research* (English translation by John Dack and Christine North, 2009). Paris: Editions Buchet/Chastel. P. 11.

All the work is site-specific<sup>12</sup>, although Miwon Kwon makes some significant observations on our understanding of site specificity. She suggests this term remains: “a problem idea, as a peculiar cipher of art and spatial politics.”<sup>13</sup> It is used across art genres to describe any practice undertaken outside of the institution allocated to that genre, ie, the museum, gallery or theatre. The site is key to the construct of the works within this research and therefore the notion of site-specificity within this research works beyond a *cipher*, into a gestalt construct of the works.

This research does not allow for the expansive discussion around the politics of what constitutes site specificity, which has been expanded on and can be read in Pearson (2010)<sup>14</sup>, Kwon (2004)<sup>15</sup>, Suderberg (2000)<sup>16</sup>, Oddey & White (2009)<sup>17</sup> as just a small representative selection. What is explored is “the two notions of site: a *literal* site and a *functional* site.”<sup>18</sup> as the journey of the research progresses. Meyer defines the *literal* site as one bound by the physicality of a permanent location and the phenomenological model, whilst a *functional* site is a temporary one, addressing the agenda of the site for a length defined by the work.<sup>19</sup> This is mapped in the different presentation formats explored throughout the research.

This research engages the acousmatic image<sup>20</sup> at the core. Acousmatic sound is defined as: “indicating a noise which is heard without the causes

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<sup>12</sup> The term site specific is often cited as having first been applied by Lucy Lippard in: Lippard, L (1977) “Art Outdoors: In and Out of the Public Domain”. *Studio International*, vol. 193, no. 2, Mar.-Apr.

<sup>13</sup> Kwon, M (2004) *One Place After Another: Site-specific Art and Locational Identity*. MIT Press. P.2.

<sup>14</sup> Pearson, M (2010) *Site – Specific Performance*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>15</sup> Kwon, M (2004) *One Place After Another: Site-specific Art and Locational Identity*. MIT Press.

<sup>16</sup> Suderberg, E (2000) *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

<sup>17</sup> Oddey, A & White, C (2009) *Modes of Spectating*. Bristol: Intellect Books.

<sup>18</sup> James Meyer in: Suderberg, E (2000) *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Pp.24 – 25.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* P.25.

<sup>20</sup> Denis Smalley suggests: *Acousmatic image is the only sonic medium that concentrates on space and spatial experience as aesthetically central*. He proceeds to extend the notion of acousmatic music across all sounds. Smalley, D (2007) “Space-form and the acousmatic image”. *Organised Sound*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. P. 35.

from which it originates being seen.”<sup>21</sup>. The Greek word was reintroduced by Pierre Schaeffer and Jérôme Peignot to describe the sound experienced with no visible source. This important re-introduction will be visited in chapter two. Within sonic arts practice, engaging the acousmatic image at the core (as this research does), the site being specific is a given and I have therefore directed the journey of this thesis from the sculpted visual landscape of the desert, to subsequently include the sonic landscape. It is the tensions and complements emerging with these media, throughout the journey of this research, that have opened up a new discussion around the framing of the site-specific.

The locations I have chosen, start in the United States with the expanse of the desert as a space carved by artists James Turrell and Michael Heizer, to the desert carved by scientific military development (the now abandoned Nevada Nuclear Test Site). This is explored by my own use of abandoned British military spaces (in urban London and rural Suffolk) carved by sonic intervention, to re-animate them. The role of the audience, their interaction with the work and spatial identity of these sites serves as the historical, critical frame of context for the works and their position within this research. I have used mid-twentieth century intermedia<sup>22</sup> and minimalist sculpture as a point of departure in this exploration.

This starts in the first chapter with the exploration and evaluation of two prominent examples of land art<sup>23</sup>: James Turrell’s *Roden Crater* (incomplete) and Michael Heizer’s *Double Negative* (1969) and the *Nevada Nuclear Test Site* as an equally audacious trace on the landscape of North West America, but with non-artistic intentions. These are examined for their

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<sup>21</sup> Chion, M (1983) *Guide to Sound Objects: Pierre Schaeffer and Musical Research* (trans John Dack and Christine North, 2009). Paris: Institut National De L’audiovisuel & Editions Buchet/Chastel. P.18

<sup>22</sup> Intermedia was proposed by Fluxus artist Dick Higgins in an article published in the first *Something Else* newsletter in 1965, entitled *Statement on Intermedia*.

<sup>23</sup> *In the late 1960’s, Earth Art – also known as Land Art - emerged as one of the many artistic trends that rejected the restrictive traditions of painting and sculpture and sought to expand the boundaries of art practice in terms of materials, disciplines and places to operate. Earth artists explored the potential of landscape and environment as both material and site for their work.*

Dempsey, A (2006) *Destination Art*. London: Thames and Hudson. P.8.

potential qualities of the sublime defined within the eighteenth century and twentieth century revivals and recorded using personal audio-video recordings, interviews and diary entries for the purpose of initiating my own practice responses, to test the findings.

The sublime discourse drawn upon is the revival that came in the mid – eighteenth century from John Baillie (1747), John Dennis (1704), Immanuel Kant (1764) and most famously Edmund Burke (1757). This period of European thought and art discourse<sup>24</sup> is often situated within the “natural landscape”, described, at times, through a hyperbolic, language:

*The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is astonishment. . . Astonishment, as I have said, is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree.*<sup>25</sup>

I have employed this hyperbole within sections of the text where I have undertaken a physical journey, for the benefit of this research and placed myself as the subject encountering the site under investigation, and for the first time. This decision comes from my journal entries and vocal recordings of journeys echoing similar qualities of the encounters taken by young men and women embarking on their Grand Tours of Europe in the eighteenth century. This intersubjective style is acknowledged through italicising the text with an accompanying footnote for reference.

Running throughout the research, the narrative thread has remained an important aspect of how the newly created works are received and how they are framed. With each of the pieces being site-specific, they therefore appropriate surrounding environments in order to re-tell their stories. They follow a narrative starting in the boundless landscape of the desert and conclude within the enclosed exhibition space. The rhythm of this

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<sup>24</sup> Broadly referred to as the Romantic period in Europe

<sup>25</sup> Burke, E (1990) *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Oxford University Press. p. 53.

accompanying, intersubjective commentary maps that journey, as a touristic pilgrimage:

*When we 'go away' we look at the environment with interest and curiosity. It speaks to us in ways we appreciate, or at least we anticipate that it will do so.*<sup>26</sup>

Adopting the essence of Urry's tourist gaze, this commentary takes the reader into discourse around the sublime through a similar gaze of the eighteenth century, the sublime within artworks of the twentieth century, to notions of the contemporary sublime as a phenomenological experience, and where that sits within my practice. Starting with concepts from Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant, John Baillie, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jacques Derrida and Barnett Newman and exploration of works by J.M.W Turner, Caspar David Friedrich, Barnett Newman, Mariele Neudecker, James Turrell and Michael Heizer, I was able to embark on the journey toward establishing ideas around what constitutes the notion of the sublime within the encounter with the art work. Some of these works are considered within the common discourse of the sublime, whilst some I am exploring here for the first time. These works employ a configuration of media - paint, earth, sound, light, glass and water – the respective chronological journey of their media mapping the change in discourse around the sublime.

During the process of this research there has been a revival of interest in the sublime. A number of projects and exhibitions have been funded through the Arts Council of England and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). Notably the Hayward Gallery presented a touring exhibition of works (1999 – 2000) within their collection: *Sublime: The Darkness and the Light*, and a new programme *The Sublime Object: Nature, Art and Language*, instigated by Tate Britain, in conjunction with the AHRC and London Consortium, curated into a final exhibition at Tate Britain in 2010

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<sup>26</sup> Urry, J (1990) *The Tourist Gaze*. London: Sage Publications. P. 1

by Christine Riding<sup>27</sup>. The Tate reports some of the re-emergence of interest in research into the sublime over the last decade:

*The experiences Tate's audiences have with art in the galleries and beyond are the outcome of the research that we undertake. The Sublime Object: Nature, Art and Language, a project supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), aims to understand how perceptions of the sublime in the external landscape are shaped by cultural experiences – art, literature and ideas communicated through history, philosophy, poetry, politics and religion. A spectacular Collection display entitled Art and the Sublime at Tate Britain originated in the research outcomes of the project. Notions of the sublime continue to be relevant to art and our lives today.*<sup>28</sup>

The subject has continued to be brought to a wider public attention through the retrospective of Damien Hirst's work at Tate Modern (2012) and Luke White completed his PhD research on the sublime focusing on Hirst's work in 2009<sup>29</sup>. The last decade has seen publications on the subject by Simon Morley (2010), Philip Shaw (2006), Gene Ray (2005), Bill Beckley (2001), Luke White (2009), Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe (2000) and Slavoj Zizek (2000). Through the late Twentieth Century Jean Francois Lyotard (1984) and Jacques Derrida (1987) (and Zizek 1989 in relation to film<sup>30</sup>) were the only points of reference for a reconsidered sublime, following Barnett Newman's

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<sup>27</sup> The project was a collaboration between Tate Britain, the Universities of Leicester and Cambridge, and the London Consortium. Christine Riding of Tate Britain was the principle investigator. Six Symposia were held, two artists were funding to work with the Cape Farewell project, seven films were produced, three publications have been produced and Douglas Gordon was commissioned to create a site-specific installation for Tate Britain. *The aim was to debate and collaborate on a series of interrelated events and research activities focused on the role of the sublime in our perceptions of the natural world.* Riding, C. (2010). *Art and the Sublime: Terror, Torment and Transcendence*. London: Tate Publishing.

<sup>28</sup> Christine Riding in: Tate Papers 13. (2010) *Nine Articles on the Sublime Object*. London: Tate Publishing. Spring 2010. [online]

<sup>29</sup> White, L (2009) *Damien Hirst and the legacy of the sublime in contemporary art and culture*. PhD thesis, Middlesex University.

<sup>30</sup> Zizek will not feature in this study as the scope of this study does not allow for the discourse around film and screen or lens based media, of which Zizek writes comprehensively on the sublime, with particular reference to David Lynch. See Zizek, S (1989) *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso and Zizek, S (2000) *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime: On David Lynch's "Lost Highway"*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

seminal writing in 1948: *The Sublime is Now*<sup>31</sup>, until Hal Foster's *Return of the Real: the Avante-Garde at the End of the Century*, in 1996.<sup>32</sup>

Significantly, *Apocalypse* (Tate Britain 2011) drew attention to how audio-visual technology has changed the way works referencing the sublime have been made or theorised, for example in Lyotard's 1984 discussions on the sublime within *The Postmodern Condition*<sup>33</sup>.

*Apocalypse* opened at Tate Britain in September 2011. The first retrospective of British artist John Martin (1789 – 1854), in the UK for thirty years, it aimed to highlight the influence Martin's work had on twentieth century film, music, video games, comic illustration, science fiction and artists. What it presents is a careful selection of works that created the Victorian spectacle of fantasy and fantastical worlds drawn from mythology and biblical tales. His work was hugely popular in the mid – nineteenth century for the scale of spectacle it presented and is now considered an example of the depiction of the sublime in both landscape and subject.

What is most apparent within the works is just how much a part of the Victorian notion of spectacle and the picturesque gaze, these images were. During the late nineteenth- century, many of the pictures were toured with associated lectures and lighting displays, using dramatic texts to highlight the apocalyptic subject matter often referenced in the paintings. Tate Britain chose to apply this theatrical mode of presentation to the triptych retained within the Tate's own collection – *The Last Judgement* (1853). The supportive text outside the room indicated there would be a “sound and light show”<sup>34</sup> every half hour. An enclosed area was constructed within one room of the temporary collections area. The three paintings were hung just above

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<sup>31</sup> Newman, B (1948) “The Sublime is Now” *Tiger's Eye* vol.1, no.6, December.

<sup>32</sup> Foster, H (1996) *Return of the Real: the Avante-Garde at the End of the Century*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

<sup>33</sup> Lyotard, J-F (1984) Bennington, G (trans.) *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

<sup>34</sup> Exhibition text

ground level along one of the long walls – a height much lower than the paintings have been honoured with when hung as part of any permanent display within the past twenty years. Along the opposite wall were three rows of auditorium bleacher seating.

As the audience settled on the purpose built seating, the ordinary, static display lighting dimmed, creating a theatre auditorium/performance feel about to unfold. A carefully structured, animated projection show unfolded, using text: “*from the pamphlet that contained a descriptive key to the paintings, published advertisements and reviews from the time of the original exhibition tour*”<sup>35</sup>, read by actors. The whole performance was created by Uninvited Guests, recognised for their performative interventions and “blurr[ing] the line between theatre and social festivities”<sup>36</sup> within the environments they apply their practice. The appropriation of the Victorian spectacle style presentation was potentially provocative as they re-created a very dramatic dialogue to accompany some equally dramatic reveals and manipulations of the paintings, through the use of superimposed imagery over the actual oil paintings. The rendering could be mistaken for a kitsch novelty as the heightened melodrama aims to bring the sublime experience into the gallery space. It could be considered to reference Philip James De Louthembourg and his moving dioramas of the late eighteenth century.

De Louthembourg’s *Eidophusikon*<sup>37</sup> employed percussive instruments, wooden hammers, beaters and drums along with silk belts to generate a soundscape of the forces of nature animating his static painted dioramas. Coloured lighting would have illuminated and visually animated the scenes.

Following similar notions but with contemporary technology, the *Uninvited Guests* presentation used digital projected animation and a complex sound installation to shift the focus of sounds around the space, introduce low level sounds under the seating and the separation of voices in a sequence of

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<sup>35</sup> Exhibition display text

<sup>36</sup> Uninvited Guests [online] *Who are uninvited guests?* <http://www.uninvited-guests.net/about/> Accessed 13/4/2012

<sup>37</sup> Monk, Samuel H (1960) *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in Eighteenth-Century England*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan.

conversations about the works, alongside shifting images projected directly onto the three paintings.

Having observed this audio-visual design first – hand, from a critical position, it appeared highly sophisticated in its construction and didn't suggest the mildest hint of parody within its format. The lighting of each painting, in their static state, remained illuminated by conventional gallery spotlight fixtures (recognised internationally in the non-daylit rooms we have associated our galleries and museums with for the past sixty years). Once these lights dimmed and the projected animations started to illuminate the paintings, the quality of animation superimposed over the paintings was of a high enough resolution to replace the detail in the painting without any ghosting. It enabled the saturation of colour in the painting to emerge with a fresh breath of life. Speakers placed around the room, including under the seating, gave a shifting image of the vocals and a rich musical soundscape to heighten the drama of the narrative. The relationship of all these production elements to each other created an overall *son et lumiere* presentation that offered a new interpretation of the sublime depicted within the triptych. The dramatic presentation was a spectacle and served to place the audience beyond the plane of the canvas, into an environment that immersed the audio and visual senses, presenting the audience with a heightened re-enactment of the paintings depiction of the apocalyptic end of the world.

The subject of *Apocalypse* is not an unfamiliar one within discourses on the sublime, certainly within the Romantic period when enthusiasm for the subject was at its peak. Destructive forces are a common theme in sublime discourse, predominantly as they ignite the ultimate sensation of terror. As Burke stated:

*Indeed terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently the ruling principle of the sublime.*<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Burke, E (1990) *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Oxford University Press. p. 54.

Terror describing the end of the world, as depicted in Romantic imagery was replaced in the twentieth century by terror depicted within war, following two world wars in Europe. War is the ultimate notion of terror and therefore potentially sublime. It was the futile nature of The Great War or World War I, in particular, that saw one of the most radical movements in the history of art occur – Dada. The introduction of a new representation of emotion through alternative expressions in sound, music and the visual arts continued on throughout the twentieth century; Barnett Newman being a significant interpreting artist in this respect.<sup>39</sup>

In the twentieth century, war was reviewed within the context of the sublime for the first time in Gene Ray's *Terror And The Sublime In Art And Critical Theory* in 2005.<sup>40</sup> By way of exploring this concept, the journey through this research runs via military installations as a vehicle for testing the notion of fear, terror through decommissioned military sites, specifically Cold War sites, as the departure point for each of the newly constructed artworks in this research. Artists in the UK and Europe including Louise K Wilson, Annelise Coste, Aleksandra Mir, Sabine Lang, Ryan Gander, Jane and Louise Wilson, Disinformation and Christophe Buchel have, in the last 13 years, started to appropriate these abandoned sites and Cold war contexts into their practice and across a range of media.

These military installations, rich with history, security and fear, yet secret, are rendered strategically useless and yet part of a sculptural landscape that animates the story of the Cold War, through their semi – concealed existence. Designed to outlast nuclear attack, through their defensive, modernist architecture the majority of installations remain in a good state of repair, leaving us even more unsettled by their refusal to decay at the same

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<sup>39</sup> Barnett Newman's seminal essay: *The Sublime is Now* was originally published in *Tiger's Eye* in 1948. It highlights the opportunity the American avant-garde artists considered they had over European artists, in being able to start a new history of modern art. The United States of America didn't have the same reliance on history and could form a new abstract art of emotion, not subject. This is the discussion within Newman's essay.

<sup>40</sup> Ray, G (2005) *Terror And The Sublime In Art And Critical Theory: From Auschwitz To Hiroshima To September 11*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

rate of the memory of the Cold War. However, as they adopt new functions, they cannot conceal the peculiar architecture that was only ever designed for one purpose. It is this unexplained functionality that draws out the symbol of them as modernist monument, beyond any other functionality of today.

*Anachronistic in normal periods, in peacetime the bunker appears as survival machine.<sup>41</sup>*

Throughout this research I have explored how such obsolete spaces can still hold a power and fascination, associated with the disconnected memories we have as non-serving civilians. They act as monuments to the period. Such monuments and the fictional memories, or myths, applied to them serve as the basis for two of the pieces of practice I have created for this research, to test these ideas: *Radioflash* and *Hush House*. I introduce and analyse the outcomes of the works in chapters two and three of this thesis.

*Radioflash* and *Hush House* are site-specific works: sound installations employing acousmatic sound to animate their respective military spaces. Myth and stories of the Cold War provide the backdrop. The notion of the myth, following Barthes' *Mythologies* (1972) is deployed in both the pieces I have made. For the purpose of the research Barthes' concern with myth as an ideological image is helpful in understanding:

*What must be firmly established at the start is that myth is a system of communication, that it is a message. This allows one to perceive that myth cannot possibly be an object, a concept, or an idea; it is a mode of signification, a form.<sup>42</sup>*

My research explores how the journey, encounter and experience of the space as an animated environment can be compared. The notion of the frame and how a journey creates a moving frame is incorporated into this exploration, enabling an application of the performance frame in relation to my practice in chapters two and three. This is explored through Allan

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<sup>41</sup> Virilio, P (1994) *Bunker Archaeology*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press. P. 39.

<sup>42</sup> Barthes, R (1972) *Mythologies*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Girou. P. 117.

Kaprow's *Happenings*<sup>43</sup> as a precedent for an environmentally - oriented art practice, enabling an introduction of the somatic to be drawn into the two new pieces of practice.

Within this research the frame serves as an important measure of where the subject steps in and out of what is considered the artwork and what is considered the everyday. This was the basis for Allan Kaprow's "Blurring of Art and Life"<sup>44</sup>. Goffman suggests that: "the type of framework we employ provides a way of describing the event to which it is applied."<sup>45</sup> The question of where this frame sits will become a recurring question and the perceived shifting or dissolving frame plays a critical part in how the works created for this study, are reflected upon by the participating audiences. Exploring Jacques Derrida's deconstructed *Parergon*<sup>46</sup>, the frame that sits outside the work, expands this on.

The works I have created for this research explore existing presentation formats in order to expand on the use of intermedia and sonic readings of the site. They are the vehicle through which to interrogate the potential for the sublime experience within the context of Twenty-First Century arts practice. It is this potential that drives this body of research *via* new works as experiment, as well as using existing works and existing critical discourse to explore this potential. The outcome is not a redefining of the sublime but a reading of the practice *through* sublime discourse, recognising the problematic nature of the discourse around subjectivity of the encounter with an artwork. The works test the discourse to establish where they might sit within it or whether shifting the frame and lightening the touch of the

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<sup>43</sup> Kaprow's *18 Happenings in 6 Parts at the Reuben Gallery, New York in the autumn of 1959*, was one of the earliest opportunities for the wider public to attend the live events that several artists had performed more privately ... Kaprow issued invitations that included the statement 'you will become part of the happenings; you will simultaneously experience them'. Goldberg, R (1979) *Performance: Live Art 1909 to the Present*. New York: Harry N Abrams. P. 83.

<sup>44</sup> Kaprow, A (1996) *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* London: University of California Press

<sup>45</sup> Goffman, E (1974) *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organisation of Experience*. New York: Harper & Row. P. 24.

<sup>46</sup> Derrida, J (1984) *The Truth in Painting*. (trans.) Bennington, G & McLeod, I, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

artist, aids in revealing ways of reading the sublime into works employing the sonic experience.

The research project concludes in Chapter four with a study of the effect remediation<sup>47</sup> has had on *Hush House*. This departure from the flow of the rest of the study enabled me to expand on the notion of the frame through the remediation of work, whilst also explore how the qualities of the sublime within the work are altered through this process. Un-anticipated events that occurred through the journey of remediation, for the benefit of three exhibitions (Cardiff 2011, Prague 2011 and London 2012), presented unexpected opportunities for concluding the study, with more tangible evidence and extensions of the study. One of these outcomes was the receipt of an international award given to *Hush House*. As this award was a new accolade, within the forum of a 45 year old, peer – assessed competition<sup>48</sup>, it demonstrates where my practice and study contributes internationally to a recognised new reading on sound installation, as a “performed installation”, within the discourse of sonic arts and scenography.

### Chapter Outline

Chapter one acts as the springboard to the whole thesis. I outline the nature of the sublime and how I have experienced it in the deserts of Arizona and Nevada through two major earthworks<sup>49</sup>, epitomising the break from the frame of the gallery into the dematerialization of the art object.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *In May 1996 ... Richard Grusin was reported to have coined the term ‘remediation’ as a way to complicate the notion of ‘repurposing’.* in: Boulter, J & Grusin, R (1999) *Remediation: Understanding new media*. Cambridge: MIT Press. P. viii. In this context I am adopting the ‘repurposing’ of Grusin’s definition as a way to describe how *Hush House* has been presented through the documentation in a new media in order to reach a wider audience. This audience is the exhibition audience.

<sup>48</sup> *International Jury Special Award for Excellence in Sound Design, International Competitive Exhibition at Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space 2011*

<sup>49</sup> Robert Smithson is considered to be the first of the late – 1960’s American minimalists to coin the use of *earthwork* as a genre of sculpture. In his 1968 *Artforum* essay: “A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects”, he discusses the use of the earth at its most elemental level and how that is applied in his own work and the work of Tony Smith, David Smith and Anthony Caro.

However it was my visit to the Nevada Nuclear Test Site that enabled the next stages of the research to be explored and where I aim to break down Joy Sleeman's suggestion that: "Land art and emergent technologies still have an uneasy relationship"<sup>51</sup>.

Chapter two provides the context for *Radioflash*, which is used to establish the Cold War frame as a narrative within the work. The notion of the wave and the Electromagnetic Spectrum (EMS) is taken up, which enables a shift from the allocentric, to the autocentric mode of perception, using sound as the more predominant medium within both the works. According to Schachtel: "In the autocentric mode there is little or no objectification; the emphasis is on how the person feels"<sup>52</sup>. We would consider taste, smell and touch as autocentric modes of perception, whilst vision is allocentric: "In the allocentric mode there is objectification; the emphasis is on what the object is like"<sup>53</sup>. We could also consider the aural sense as being split between hearing as autocentric and listening as allocentric. The chapter explores this potential and opens up the position of the frame as a perceptual device within this context, steering phenomenology and the sublime to be distilled and interrogated through *Hush House* in chapter three.

In chapter three, the phenomenological discourse starts to form a direct dialogue with the sublime discourse, exploring the sonic experience shifting from an allocentric sense, to an autocentric, tactile experience, drawing focus on the phenomenological experience of sound and our corporeal engagement with it.

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The first exhibition of *Earthworks* was held in the Candance Dwan Gallery, New York shortly after Smithson's essay was published, in 1968. This was followed in 1969 by a major *Earth Art* exhibition at the Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art at Cornell University, New York, showing the work of Walter De Maria, Jan Dibbets, Hans Haacke, Michael Heizer, Richard Long, David Medalla, Robert Morris, Dennis Oppenheim, Robert Smithson, and Gunther Uecker.

<sup>50</sup> Lippard, L (1973) *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*. New York: Praeger.

<sup>51</sup> Sleeman, J (2008) *Land Art and the Culture of Landscape, 1967 – 77*. AHRC funded research network meeting, Slade School of Art, 22/10/2008.

<sup>52</sup> Schachtel in: Rothenburg A, Hausman C R (1976) *The Creativity Question*. Durham: Duke University Press. P. 154.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* P. 154.

Chapter three explores the metaphysical reading of *Hush House*. The journey through phenomenological discourse, draws on Edmund Husserl's reductionist model, to his more open *Life-world* (1936), to the perceptual theories of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945) and Jacques Derrida (1967). Finally the chapter concludes with reference to *Neue Phenomenologie* as considered within the last twenty years by Hermann Schmitz and his new phenomenology of feeling, emotion and corporeality. My work: *Hush House* explores and illuminates some of these connections between perception, emotion, feeling and duality of perception and the corporeal.

Chapter four examines the outcome of *Hush House* as it was remediated and transposed to a set of different gallery environments as a profiled work within a series of three exhibitions, each becoming increasingly larger in profile. This concluding chapter returns the research to the discourse of the sublime through exploring the relationship between the work, its form of presentation and how the re-reading of the work impacts on the experience of the work for the audience. This chapter leads into my conclusion.

The remediation of *Hush House* has proved valuable as a conclusion to this thesis. The journey *Hush House* has made from its original incarnation, to the subsequent stages of presentation has worked as a vehicle to read the journey of my thesis through. It describes the process of exploration and revelation, which informs the shift in media that I have used throughout, from open landscape to an introduction of acousmatic sound, "that concentrates on space and spatial experience as aesthetically central"<sup>54</sup>.

The shift in media has therefore had a direct impact on my own practice and the forum in which this practice is now being presented. It is only through the process of this research that this could have been revealed.

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<sup>54</sup> Smalley, D (2007) "Space-form and the Acousmatic Image". Organised Sound. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Vol 12, Issue 1. P.35.

The value of this research has been how the integration of sound into decommissioned Twentieth Century military spaces, as short-lived experiences, is perceived as a performed installation event. The position of this research, within the discourse of the sublime, offers an alternative reading for the performed installation as neither an intervention within the natural landscape, or an entirely abstract notion of the “other”<sup>55</sup> as pure emotion. Integration of acousmatic sound, journey and framing re-animate these sites, presenting the phenomenological experience as an extension of existing readings of the sublime.

### Thesis Format

This thesis is trans-disciplinary and is submitted as two parts. The first is a set of four DVD’s consisting of documentary films, photographs, working diagrams and sound recordings of work created and documented. The second part is this text. The text is not to be read aside from the documents. The thesis has four chapters, each chapter is to be viewed alongside it’s corresponding DVD.

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<sup>55</sup> Lyotard, J-F (1984) *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Manchester: University of Manchester Press.

## **Chapter 1 - The Journey into the Desert**

This chapter looks at the notion of where the sublime can exist as an agent for experiencing the sensation of presence through encounter with large – scale twentieth and twenty first century art works. By exploring it as agent, it enables the problematic nature of sublime, as discourse, to be foregrounded. This chapter will explore the *sticky*<sup>56</sup> nature of the sublime whilst opening up a potential new dialogue in relation to the visceral encounter and unexplainable sensation experienced in the presence of certain works.

The sublime can be experienced in different situations and scenarios but fundamentally relies on our failure to comprehend something greater than our imagination. It may be experienced as the infinite, a scale of colossal distance, height or depth, the darkness or overwhelming brightness of light or a concept beyond our own comprehension. Immanuel Kant's *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764) unravelled the notions of delight into what is specifically sublime or beautiful. He suggests that the predominant difference lies in the degree of emotion that one experiences. Kant describes the sublime as “something that arouses enjoyment but with horror, while Beautiful is a pleasant sensation, making one joyous and smiling”<sup>57</sup>. “Night”, according to Kant, “is Sublime while day is Beautiful; tall oaks and lonely shadows are Sublime while flowerbeds, low hedges, and shaped trees are Beautiful”<sup>58</sup>. The notion of the beautiful is associated with the immediate aesthetic driven by taste, analysed well by Jean Francois Lyotard in his *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*<sup>59</sup>. I have chosen to discount the relationship between the beautiful and the sublime from this discussion, as the aesthetic associated with beauty

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<sup>56</sup> Beckley, B (2001) *Sticky Sublime* New York: Allworth Press.

<sup>57</sup> Immanuel Kant, “Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime”, first published in 1764, translated into English in 1960 by J. T Goldthwait, University of California Press. p.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid*, p.47

<sup>59</sup> Lyotard, J. F (1994) Rottenberg, E (trans.) *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

presents a more picturesque<sup>60</sup> viewing of the works; I will be concentrating on the sublime experience drawn from sensation in encounter.

A sensory judgement is made through experience, not a judgement of taste, but one of association and memory, through our phenomenology of perception. Articulation of *what is the experience* of the sublime generates debate in discourse. The main argument appears to come from defining the difference between experience, discourse and theory of the sublime.

Artist Mariele Neudecker employs discourse within her work<sup>61</sup>, in order to embody the notion of the sublime and does not attempt to suggest that her work is embodying the experience of the sublime. In a discussion with her in Zurich, in October 2009<sup>62</sup>, she suggested that she deconstructs nineteenth century depictions of the sublime in the works of artists like Caspar David Friedrich. She explained how she: “Became interested in photographic representation of representation used by Friedrich”<sup>63</sup> and that within her works contained within vitrines the “sublime [is] broken down into how it would work today. A desire to escape into them but a failure to be able to as it is a glass box”<sup>64</sup>

“Forest Tank is a more unusual scale and easier to place oneself in it although the glass prevents it. At Spike Island the glass is removed so the viewer is closer but still viewed from a distance. Landscapes are all about humans in relation to the landscape.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> See Bois, Y. A (1984) “A Picturesque Stroll Around Clara Clara”, *October*. Vol 29, (Summer 1984). Pp. 32 – 62. as example of this context for the picturesque gaze.

<sup>61</sup> See Lores, M, McKee, F et al (1999) *Mariele Neudecker*. Colchester: First Site. And Blayney Brown, D & Young, D (2004) *Mariele Neudecker: Over and Over, Again and Again*. London: Tate Publishing.

<sup>62</sup> Whilst both presenting at *Space and Desire* Symposium, Zurich University of the Arts (ZhdK), Zurich, 9<sup>th</sup> October 2009.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Neudecker. Sandys, K (2009) *Interview with Mariele Neudecker*. *Space and Desire* Symposium, Zurich University of the Arts (ZhdK), Zurich, 9/10//2009.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid*

<sup>65</sup> *ibid*



Fig. 1

Guy Sircello has argued that “ only the sublime experience properly motivates sublime discourse and therefore that only sublime experience is the proper and ultimate subject matter of talk about the sublime. [His] impression is that this assumption is, or would be, widely if not universally shared by those who produce talk about the sublime. “<sup>66</sup>

More recent works produced by Neudecker use flight recorders to capture the experiences she refers to as having a “silent relationship with the soul”<sup>67</sup>. The silent black box offers the potential for stories that we, as the audience/listener, are forced to imagine, having no way to access the first-hand data of the discussions about every manoeuvre of the aircraft. The very fact that the data could potentially be first hand, rather than a representation of the data moves the work into a different realm with potential for the *experience*, rather than through text or discourse.

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<sup>66</sup> Sircello, G (1993) “How is the Theory of the Sublime Possible?” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51:4 Autumn. P.542.

<sup>67</sup> Discussion with Neudecker 9<sup>th</sup> October 2009, in Zurich



Fig. 2

The use of implied sound in these works evokes a different relationship between the audience and the work as we consider the potential for ‘what might be possible’ to experience.

In chapters two and three I will return to this inherent belief that sounds connect us directly to the moment of experience, unlike the power of the visual image to pervert what it represents. I try to define where the experience of sound becomes an experience of the sublime that visual representation fails to project, as Edmund Burke suggested: “The eye is not the only organ of sensation, by which the sublime passion may be produced. Sounds have a greater power in these, as in most other passions.”<sup>68</sup>

The sublime *experience* has been associated with the natural landscape and natural phenomena since its re-discovery in eighteenth century discourse, through first hand experience as well as the theorising of this experience. The earliest theory was the 1<sup>st</sup> Century treatise *On the Sublime*, published by

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<sup>68</sup> Burke, E (1990) *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Oxford University Press. p.75.

Greek critic: Dionysius Longinus (or Psuedo – Longinus as there is uncertainty in his name). It became the treatise on public speaking and rhetoric, setting out “to teach those oratorical devices that enable a speaker to move or persuade an audience.”<sup>69</sup> It is hard to draw the connection with the ancient notion presented by Longinus other than his teachings on oratory were presented in a way as to suggest the art of oratory was unteachable. The political speech as propaganda or performance was however weighted with a power we still recognise in successful public orators today. It is this power that Longinus suggests exhibits the sublime:

*Grandeur produces ecstasy rather than persuasion in the hearer; and the combination of wonder and astonishment always proves superior to the merely persuasive and pleasant. This is because persuasion is on the whole something we can control, whereas amazement and wonder exert invincible power and force and get the better of every hearer.*<sup>70</sup>

This sense of power, astonishment and overwhelming of the spectator was not picked up in any other new treatise in modern language until the eighteenth century, by John Dennis, who examined the sublime object and its effect on the mind of readers.<sup>71</sup>

Dennis was interested primarily in the place of emotions in poetry, and not the sublime exactly, yet many of his ideas cross over into the area of the sublime:

*The greatest enthusiastic terror then must needs be derived from religious ideas: for since the more their objects are powerful, and likely to hurt, the greater terror their ideas produce; what*

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<sup>69</sup> Shaw, P (2006) *The Sublime*. London: Routledge. P. 12.

<sup>70</sup> Longinus (1965) *'Longinus' On Sublimity*. (trans. D A Russell). Oxford: Clarendon Press. P.2.

<sup>71</sup> Translations of Longinus were published by Despreaux Boileau in France in 1674 and William Smith in England in 1739. Boileau wrote a preface in his last translation, published after his death in 1710 suggesting the sublime: “cannot be taught, and didactics are thus powerless in this respect; the sublime is not linked to rules that can be determined through poetics; the sublime only requires that the reader or listener have conceptual range, taste, and the ability to ‘sense what everyone else senses first’.” Benjamin, A (1989) *The Lyotard Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers. P. 201

*can produce a greater terror, than the idea of an angry God.*<sup>72</sup>

Dennis presents an interest in the power of God, coupled with the obscurity surrounding the limits of His power and His capacity to inflict pain, but he is also describing what I will refer to as the ineffable moment. This moment is the point at which these heightened emotions of fear; pleasure, pain, terror and ecstasy are experienced as a short and fleeting instant – a pinnacle of the experience. The moment is fleeting and leaves an after effect but is potentially impossible to experience again due to the unique qualities associated with the initial encounter. This sensation escapes coherent explanation and becomes the ineffable moment.

It is clear that from these beginnings, the extremes of emotions, especially terror and pain, were definite attributes of the sublime, through discourse and theory – this discourse being that which describes the experience, rather than pure theory; the separation between discourse and theory was then established by John Baillie. It was Baillie's *Essay on the Sublime* written in 1747, which suggests a tackling of the theory of aesthetics and criticises Longinus for never actually questioning what the sublime is. It could be due to this criticism that Baillie was firstly responsible for writing the basis of what we now refer to as the definition of the sublime, although he never undertook the experimental approach to the phenomenological, pursued by Dennis. Baillie comments on a broad scope of explanations, but was frustrated with no apparent single style of description. He suggests, “the sublime no sooner presents itself than we are affected by it; [...] but that we generally form accurate and distinct ideas upon this subject, is by no means true... Hence it seems, that the rules for the sublime should most naturally result from an enquiry what the sublime is; and if this is an enquiry which Longinus has entirely passed over, there is still room for further

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<sup>72</sup> John Dennis from “*The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry*” 1704, reprinted in Ashfield and de Bolla (ed.) (1996) *The sublime: a reader in British eighteenth – century aesthetic theory*. Cambridge University Press. p. 36.

speculation.”<sup>73</sup>. This is exactly what Baillie proceeded to do. Baillie was concerned with the kind of sensory experience stimulated by the Sublime object and was fully aware of the difference between the sublime experience and a representation of the sublime. He chose to use nature as his inspiration.

Baillie, most prominently believed that vastness and uniformity were qualities that produced the Sublime. The idea of vastness was introduced by Longinus, but its combination with uniformity most likely inspired Edmund Burke's idea of the “artificial infinite”<sup>74</sup>: an attribute more commonly recognized of the sublime in order that the objects do not appear complete and coherent within the imagination. Burke may have also been inspired by Baillie’s suggestion that “by seeing part, the least glimpse gives the full and complete idea of the whole and thus at once may be distinctly conveyed the vastest sensation. On the contrary, where this uniformity is wanting, the mind must run from object to object, and never get a full and complete idea of the whole.”<sup>75</sup> Burke’s ideas around the artificial infinite introduce an early phenomenological awareness of visual perception, as “in order for the visual vibrations of the eye to repeat into the distance where the eye must strain to receive the same information that it is not actually able to comprehend but is making assumptions about the information it believes to be receiving.”<sup>76</sup> Here we see the shift from external visual experience to an internal kinaesthetic one. This could be considered the shift from the allocentric to autocentric mode of perception and the start of a distinction for the sublime to be explained as an experience of physical multi-sensory stimulation.

The completion of Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, first published in 1757, remains the

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<sup>73</sup> John Baillie, *An essay on the sublime*, published 1747, (Printed to R. Dodsley, London, 1747), reprinted in Friday, Jonathan (2004) *Art and Enlightenment: Scottish aesthetics in the Eighteenth Century*. Exeter: Imprint Academic. p. 86.

<sup>74</sup> Burke, E (1990) *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. p. 88

<sup>76</sup> ibid pp.126 - 127

defining thesis behind sublime discourse, throughout the height of its perceived pinnacle of importance – the Romantic period. It remained unchallenged until the mid - Twentieth Century.

The sublime was readily *depicted* or *represented* visually by Romantic painters and poets: Caspar David Friedrich, William Joseph Turner, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge who considered the sublime to only be truly *experienced* in nature (later maintained by Jacques Derrida). Wordsworth depicted the visceral experience of the landscape and sounds, descriptively. *The Prelude* (started in 1798 but published after his death in 1850), as a semi-autobiographical poem, being a prominent example. Gerhard Richter did argue of Friedrich that:

*A painting by Caspar David Friedrich is not a thing of the past. What is past is only the set of circumstances that allowed it to be painted: specific ideologies, for example. Beyond that, if it is any 'good', it concerns us – transcending ideology – as art that we consider worth the trouble of defending (perceiving, showing, making). It is therefore quite possible to paint like Caspar David Friedrich 'today'.<sup>77</sup>*

This statement remains also true of many Turner paintings that represent such enduring images, they do not preserve a particular point in time, as captured by the artist, but introduce a cascade of nature that suggests a heightened emotional sense within the subject, scale and application of paint and colour but clearly move toward an abstract interpretation of experience and perception and potentially capture a reading of the sublime.

They offer a fragmented representation of the subject, with the action and outcome left to the imagination of the viewer. There is reference to an experience beyond the image, be it an incomplete fragmented one. This notion of capturing small fragments of the whole: Burke's "artificial infinite", in order for the mind to form an imagined larger image of the total idea is the basis for all the examples of works explored or created

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<sup>77</sup> Obrist, H-U (trans.) David Britt (1995) *Gerhard Richter: The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings and Interviews 1962-1993*. London: Thames and Hudson. P. 81.

throughout this research study. I use them to illuminate Burke and Baillie's notions where the sublime experience and discourse exists in some contemporary art works.

### Newman and the 'other'

A renewed interest in the sublime in the mid - late twentieth century, through the work and writing of Barnett Newman, particularly within his seminal text *The Sublime is Now*<sup>78</sup>, positioned the sublime as an experience that changed "the elements of sublimity in the revolution we know as modern art, [...] in its effort and energy to escape the pattern rather than the realisation of a new experience."<sup>79</sup> It no longer relied on the authority of scale and vastness, or the "artificial infinite" through the divine but as something "other"<sup>80</sup>. This 'other' was positioned within the human mind and therefore an attempt to somehow rationalise the sublime as the missing part of concept, with the void as a product of nothing other than our own human irrationality. The uniformity of geometry and structure, combined with immense scale was embodied within the work of Newman, Mark Rothko, James Turrell and Michael Heizer. All resonated with Newman's ideas of the sublime as something other than relating to the greatness of a deity. In this respect, the sublime was brought closer to reason by removing the unknown deity. The weaknesses in the human condition became responsible for failing to rationalise the sublime experience.

Barnett Newman was singularly aware of the creation of a presence of some other unknown within his work. He did not leave us to make the decision for ourselves. His own writings and presentations offer us with the most lucid descriptions of the sublime, in relation to his own work. He was not interested in representation but in embodying an experience within his works.

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<sup>78</sup> Barnett Newman "The Sublime is Now" *Tiger's Eye* vol.1, no.6, December 1948

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.* P. 53

<sup>80</sup> Lyotard, J-F (1984) *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Manchester: University of Manchester Press. P77.

At the Tate Britain conference *The Sublime Now*<sup>81</sup> in October 2007, Peter De Bolla<sup>82</sup> illustrated the scale depicted in Newman's work. De Bolla described his paintings, using a slide show of full scale images, in first person present, with his back to the audience. The images were projected at approximately 45 cm from ground level, enabling De Bolla to walk the length of the projected paintings as he described them. Over ten minutes he described how the work felt and changed in experience as he spent the time moving in order to view it. This demonstration of taking in the scale of the work illustrated Newman's understanding of the position his spectator would adopt when viewing the paintings. His recognition of the grand scale, which cannot be absorbed in an instant, embodied the sublime experience. It is this that makes scale such an important attribute within the encounter of the sublime and one I found repeated in the works I encountered and made, as the research developed.

Newman was highly critical of the European artists of the early twentieth century, suggesting that they were unable to break from depiction of the object. "The failure of European art to achieve the sublime is due to this blind desire to exist inside the reality of sensation (the objective world, whether distorted or pure) and to build an art within a framework of pure plasticity.... In other words, modern art, caught without a sublime content, was incapable of creating a new sublime image, and unable to move away from the renaissance imagery of figures and object except by distortion or by denying it completely for an empty world of geometric formalism"<sup>83</sup> He was insistent that European artists were at the disadvantage of having too much history of depicted deities, as a burden to progression of expression within their artistic practice. He believed America had a new history to re-write and could be re-defined through the epic landscapes as a human failing rather than divine creation. The experience of Rothko's paintings as

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<sup>81</sup> Tate Britain (2007) *The Sublime is Now*. Symposium. AHRC funded project: *The Sublime Object: Nature, Art and Language*. 20/10/2007

<sup>82</sup> Ashfield, A & DeBolla, P (1996) *The Sublime: a reader in British eighteenth-century aesthetic theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

<sup>83</sup> Barnett Newman "The Sublime is Now" *Tiger's Eye* vol.1, no.6, December 1948, p. 53

they elevate the viewer into another state of failure to comprehend his planes of colour are described here by Violetta L Waibel:

*The frame underscores the experience of an enclosed wholeness, it works like a fence that the viewer captures in the internal motion of the paint, and she is thereby released from the space of phenomenal reality, and lets herself forget that which is happening around her in the Tate Modern Gallery in the moment of concentration. The soft contours of the horizontal and vertical colour boundaries strengthen the experience of a quiet, peaceful, pulsating of life that has an effect on the condition and consciousness of the viewer, which extends itself within the borders of her body. The concentrated observation of the image produces an interplay between her location in the exhibition space, the space in the painting, the space in her consciousness, and finally, the space within her body.<sup>84</sup>*

As Rothko said of his own (latter) work:

*I am not interested in relationship of colour or form or anything else, I am interested in expressing only human emotions. If you are moved only by their colour relationships, then you miss the point.<sup>85</sup>*

He was interested in expressing human emotions of tragedy, ecstasy and doom – those profound emotions of the sublime<sup>86</sup>.

Initially, Barnett Newman's writings commented on his own work until a growing interest from Jacques Derrida, Jean – Francois Lyotard, Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Zizek, created a discourse of the modern, followed by postmodern sublime, extending Newman's notion of the other, stripping back the hyperbole of the Romantic sublime. The other is explored by Derrida in his 1987 *The Truth in Painting*<sup>87</sup> and significantly in Lyotard's 1984 *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*<sup>88</sup>, by placing

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<sup>84</sup> Violetta L Waibel in: Parry, J.D (ed) (2011) *Art and Phenomenology*. London: Routledge. (p.85)

<sup>85</sup> Mark Rothko in Sophie Klein, *The Nature of The Sublime*, 2000, Glasgow University, Glasgow, p.12

<sup>86</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>87</sup> Derrida, J (1984) *The Truth in Painting*. (trans.) Bennington, G & McLeod, I, Chicago: University of Chicago Press

<sup>88</sup> Lyotard, J-F (1984) *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Manchester: University of Manchester Press.

beauty alongside the sublime and drawing comparisons between them as a tangible and non-tangible entity, respectively. This study of the sublime and beautiful suggests the sublime should no longer be considered in relation to the higher figure of God, of the divine, but a sensation that is without form. It should be considered something other to us as the human. This other is denied any tangible form that we may associate with an imagined force. It is absolutely impossible to conceive of, therefore causing us the mental agony identified in the Enlightenment and Romantic sublime.

With the deconstruction of Derrida's sublime, however, the transcendent delivery is denied. For Derrida, the sublime was not about an other that was higher than the human faculty, but a product of human consciousness (he considers consciousness as the ultimate boundless place), a sensation that was experienced as a void of knowledge within our consciousness of the world. This void manifests itself as an emotion experience of the pain referred to by Kant.

It is this oscillation of experience creating a sense of the other I pursue further throughout this study, to establish whether it can be accessed and manipulated through a phenomenological understanding of our consciousness.

The journey through this research has an intentional starting point of the vast, Romantic, sublime landscapes re-imagined visually through land art. These large-scale works defy conventions of the gallery scale. I move into the movable scale of imagined worlds through introducing sound as a value to change sense of scale, place and physiological understanding, in the attempt to explore the position of the other, as an emotional experience, described by Derrida.

### The Sublime in the Manmade Landscape

From the point of early modernism to the present, the progressional development of electronic and digital technology has contributed to the

making of and how we experience art work. This includes works that employ simple mechanical devices of theatrical illusion or integrated electronic or digital media from *Pepper's Ghost*<sup>89</sup>, through to digital video projection but also works that employ mechanics and technological tools for the making and presentation of the works: powered vehicles, precision cutting, synthetic chemical formulas and the neurological advances that enable a deeper understanding of our perception of the experiences we undertake in the viewing or spectatorship of artwork. This deliberate hand of the artist and the artist's tools position the artist clearly as the creator of the work. There exists an obvious position from which the artist wishes the work to be experienced. We are conscious of the status of our gaze, as a spectator, as an objective one, whether it is a piece of music or sculptural object. Within this research I am considering where the intervention of technology is introduced with an apparently 'invisible' application, as *inconspicuous media*<sup>90</sup>, removing the obvious hand of the artist, leaving what could be perceived as a natural phenomenon of space, sound or light, manifesting itself as the experience. This deconstruction of the conventional gaze on the artwork relies on virgin landscape within which the phenomenon, or event, may appear to emerge.

James Turrell's *Roden Crater* appears to loom from the Painted Desert in the same form as it remained, after its last eruption, untouched by human hands for thousands of years. It appears impossible that the views from the roads can be entirely constructed for the benefit of the spectator? However Turrell controls every aspect of the approach and experience as much as possible. The notion of encountering *this* virgin landscape sits within the

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<sup>89</sup> A Victorian stage illusion employing a glass sheet angled at 45 degrees, invisible to the audience. The performer would stand hidden from the audience in the wings or the sub-stage. When lit, the performers reflection would appear as a ghostly image reflected on the glass, giving the illusion of a ghost.

<sup>90</sup> I have adopted this expression in order to describe predominantly the media of light and sound, those areas of the electromagnetic spectrum we are able to experience through our visual and aural senses when describing a tangible entity of an object, surface or sound, but as energy, remain "invisible" until converted into the tangible entity. However, the physiological relationship we have with this direct energy, beyond it describing the tangible object, can be as powerful through the unexplainable phenomenon of the corporeal experience of this energy.

Romantic tradition of the sublime although entirely reconstructed within the postmodern conceptual landscape.

The aircraft hangar of *Hush House* is apparently encountered exactly as it would have been on the day the last of the military work force left. The ghost of the sound resonating within the space is an unsettlingly tactile experience and could be assumed to be naturally occurring within the subject's body as a response to the presence of the environment, as no external party appears to be directly controlling the spectator's physical experience of the sound?

Throughout this research, both examples are constructed to challenge the human understanding of what apparently exists as part of the landscape and what is contrived and fabricated. It is the point where the experience confounds comprehension of logical explanation and therefore beyond the explainable, with potential for the other. The major argument from this then forms – can we call it the other, or the sublime experience if it is constructed? Where does the challenge to the fabricated and constructed sublime lie? As suggested, we still regard the post-Enlightenment and Romantic writings<sup>91</sup> on the sublime as those that define our current definition of the sublime. Even the postmodern Derridean re-examination still surmises that the boundaries exist in nature but only where lack of reason enters comprehension.

*If the sublime is announced in raw nature rather than art, the counterfinality which constitutes it obliges us to say that the sublime cannot be merely a “natural object”... All we can say is that the natural object in question can be proper, apt (tauglich) for the “presentation of sublimity”. Of a sublimity which, for its part, can be encountered as such only in the mind... The sublime cannot inhabit any sensible form.*<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Kant, Burke, Baillie, Coleridge and Wordsworth

<sup>92</sup> Derrida, J (1984) *The Truth in Painting*. (trans.) Bennington, G & McLeod, I, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. P. 131.

He suggests the sublime is encountered in art less easily than the beautiful, and more easily in “raw nature”<sup>93</sup>. There can be sublime in art if it is submitted to the conditions of an “accord with nature”<sup>94</sup>. The return to nature is still evident.

Derrida suggests that human scale is relied upon to examine everything against and that when it “exists by over spilling”<sup>95</sup>, it is measured as sublime. This over spilling is what he considers the prodigious, or a difficulty in comprehension of the overflow: the *Ungeheuer*, literally translated as enormous, immense, excessive, astonishing or unheard of. He suggests the lack of possibility for us to be able to create beyond our own scale means “There is no good example, no ‘suitable’ example of the sublime in the products of human art”<sup>96</sup>. His suggestion is this is due to our incapability of creating work without creating some platform or frame in which it is presented. It is this framing that removes the potential for the sublime, as it is once again within a tangible boundary. So this is where the postmodern sublime notion of being truly unrepresentable becomes problematic. The presentation is in a deliberately formless way but the conscious decision to present any construct automatically renders itself void; the Malevich white square that Lyotard suggests is a good example of the presentable unrepresenting itself in its effort to become intangible<sup>97</sup>. It is still an object, a painting, even though the content of the image is removing itself from being identifiable. What we identify is the object of materials and the texture of paint and material that remains distinctly tangible; the phenomenological visual space is not enough of a challenge to our visual perception to cause the agony of incomprehension. The structure of paint and canvas does not form an illusional space to be grappled with. The canvas is stretched on a frame; it does not appropriate the surrounding environment in order for us to move beyond Derrida’s frame, or *Parergon*.

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid. P.127.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. P.127.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. P.122.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. P.122

<sup>97</sup> Lyotard, J-F (1984) *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Manchester: University of Manchester Press. P.78.

The stretched canvas creates a clearly defined boundary to the work. If we are to reflect purely on the image and excuse the presence of the canvas, paint and frame, we are presented with a sensation that we can then explore as the abstract space that we call the artwork. The concept of whiteness is the challenging void.

Turner explored the challenging void or infinite void in his later works through his depiction of perception of experience. Although the metaphysical is a predominant subject in the later works of Turner, it is possible to suggest recognition of the phenomenological with his swirling shape and undefined light sources resembling the after-images received in a darkened space. They depict an infinity that focuses on no horizon in reality and a sense of something almost *ganzfeld*<sup>98</sup> - like. This is best shown in *Snowstorm: Steamboat off a Harbour's Mouth* (1842). The criticisms presented of his later works depicting nothing distinct enough only fuelled Turner's desire to depict the experience rather than the representation. His *Snow Storm* depicted his own rough departure from Harwich, an experience he relished as his inspiration and he proudly retold the story of insisting the sailors lash him to the mast in order he was able to endure the full experience.

The move to the infinite and undefined qualities of the sublime became more and more prevalent in Turner's last works. Lawrence Gowing sums up this quality of infinity and light when he suggests "the dispersal of light by an infinite series of reflections from an endless variety of surfaces and materials" offers us no conclusion to draw over location or time.<sup>99</sup> We remain unable to locate any fixed point of reference and find ourselves within the realm of Burke's artificial infinite. This is un-presentable, as it remains a concept of emptiness and space that remains in our mind and is part of our individual consciousness.

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<sup>98</sup> *Ganzfeld*: German for a total or entire field. The Ganzfeld effect is a phenomenon where a person of normal sight is unable to see anything after staring at any featureless field. The brain is starved of any distinct stimuli.

<sup>99</sup> Lawrence Gowing (1966) *Turner: Imagination and Reality*. New York: MoMA. P.51.

James Turrell has explored this state of consciousness and the un-presentable work in his *Perceptual Cells* series<sup>100</sup>, with *Gasworks* (1993) and *Alien Exam* (1991). The head or complete body are placed in tank, surrounded entirely by a complete sphere of light, denying the spectator of any horizon on which the mind can visually land and connect the body with spatially. Without being able to make this connection, the spectator is conscious of the spatial void, allowing for the ineffable moment of the sublime experience.

Turrell's preoccupation with the notion of infinite spaces comes from his experiments at Pomona College, from 1968 – 69, whilst studying perception. However, the experience of the infinite spaces created in his work, whether the seamless rooms of his structural cuts in the *Prado*, *Danae* and *Phaedo* (1976 – 1989) or his *Skyspaces* (1975 – present) challenge the visual brain beyond the contemplative and meditative state he suggests, into one on the brink of the pain. This presentation is an example of the sublime Kant would claim “to be ill-adapted to our faculty of presentation, and to be, as it were, an outrage on the imagination”<sup>101</sup>. This outrage of imagination is the state in which we are no longer dealing with the safety of contemplation but are aiming for a judgment that may be unobtainable, impossible to present or painful in striving for this goal. The pain or terror that both Kant and Burke discuss holds major dominance in much contemporary descriptive use of the sublime and may indicate something of a tangible essence in what we are able to redefine as the more contemporary notion of the other in this work.

The feeling of pain, followed by elation or relief, experienced with the sublime is not one that relies on conscious thought and may even remain invisible to monitored neural activity and the possibility of brain-mapping. This leaves us in a position of it being truly unidentifiable.

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<sup>100</sup> Noever, P (2002) *James Turrell: the other horizon*. Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Verlag. P. 142.

<sup>101</sup> Immanuel Kant (1978) “Critique of Judgement”, Oxford: Oxford University Press, translated into English by James Creed Meredith. pp.90-91

So Derrida's suggestion that: "there are no suitable examples of the sublime in the products of human art"<sup>102</sup> is based within the notion that there: "Cannot, it seems, be a *parergon* for the sublime"<sup>103</sup>. This is true as long as we apply the *parergon*, or frame, to the work. However, if the frame is a moveable one, that does not identify the boundary, we are left with the "prodigious"<sup>104</sup>, that which: "overflows its end and its concept."<sup>105</sup> Derrida makes it clear that this exceeding of the boundary is still the "characteristic of an object, and of an object in relation to its concept."<sup>106</sup> So we are sure that the concept cannot be a purely abstract concept, it must have some grounding from which to overflow. In the context of this research, I propose this overflow as the presence of the work, as an exchange between the Derridean object and the internal experiencing of the subject. I propose the experience of hearing and the expanded notion of sound, space and its impact on the body has a place as the prodigious. The experience of the work as prodigious, only qualifies, however, if the *colossal* frames it. The *colossal* is the "putting on stage or into presence, the catching-sight, rather, of some thing, but of something which is not a thing, since it is a concept."<sup>107</sup> The *colossal* is the frame therefore. Only the mere suggestion of the concept is required to create the *colossal*.

Within his *Perceptual Cell* series, James Turrell explored the perception of the ganzfeld space through our hearing as well as visual system. *Soft Cell* (1992) was a small anechoic box chamber, with a chair inside. The subject would enter, via a door, into the box and sit in the chair, facing forward. Once the door was shut, the box was entirely silent and the light switched off. With no visual or aural focal point, the subject is reliant on the neural transmitters generating their own signals. After ten minutes, these manifest themselves as a nebulous red blush of colour, slowly pulsing and an

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<sup>102</sup> Derrida, J (1984) *The Truth in Painting*. (trans.) Bennington, G & McLeod, I, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. P.122.

<sup>103</sup> *ibid.* P.127.

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.* Pp. 124-125.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.* P.125.

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.* P.125

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.* P. 125.

awareness of heartbeat and breathing<sup>108</sup>. These sounds of the body become the only point of focus within the experience of the work and the body's sensory functioning becomes the focus of the work. With the cell as *colossal*, the visual and aural experience is the prodigious. It is beyond comprehension of the everyday corporeal sensory experience.

In treating the body as a receiver for sound, Jean – Luc Nancy describes it as "before any distinction of places and functions of resonance, as being, wholly (and without organs), a resonance chamber or column of beyond meaning ... to treat 'pure resonance' not only as the condition but as the very beginning and opening up of sense, as beyond-sense or sense that goes beyond signification."<sup>109</sup>, drawing on similar concepts to Derrida's *colossal* and *prodigious*.

Nancy continues to treat the process of listening as an abstract experience of receiving resonant frequencies that are shaded and shaped by how the body receives them and what colour the body gives to the sounds<sup>110</sup>. It is this autocentric notion that enables body to be considered the agent through which the work is experienced, rather than as a separate entity to the body, at a distance.

The consideration of the mind and consciousness in contemplating the sublime brings us closer to ideas around the phenomenological encounter. If the sublime is independent of judgement of the senses, our phenomenological experience is exactly that: how we form our conscious experience of life through our sensory perception. The combining of our perceptual experience of the absolute and everyday, with the anticipation of the as yet unknown encounter removed, offers us another vocabulary with which to explore further explanation of the sublime artwork. The judgement

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<sup>108</sup> Also famously described in 1951 by John Cage in his first experience in the Harvard University anechoic chamber. In the silence, he described how he "heard two sounds, one high and one low. When I described them to the engineer in charge, he informed me that the high one was my nervous system in operation, the low one my blood in circulation." Cage, J (1961) *Silence*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press. P. 8.

<sup>109</sup> Nancy, J-L (2007) *Listening*. New York: Fordham Press. p.31.

<sup>110</sup> *ibid.* Pp 30-34.

of sense, according to Kant, is considered to be an empirical judgement retaining a quantifiable quality. This leaves us with no judgement for the sublime – it cannot be judged. It is this failure to draw any judgement that Lyotard has wrestled with and drawn conclusions over within *The Postmodern Condition*, as the sublime experience appears to defy the linguistic foundation of postmodernism he uses to try and define it. It may be his concern with linguistics and lack of attention to the phenomenological angle that created his dissatisfaction with which position to judge from.

The emphasis on the sublime, within artworks, generally comes from some external mediation of the work (often curatorial decisions<sup>111</sup>), not often applied or embedded within the works concept, by the artist him or herself but through the framing of the work and how the audience/work relationship controls the experience for the encounter, be it a painting or sculpture that is dissatisfied with its threshold of the object frame edge and appropriates the building or light in which it is presented<sup>112</sup>, or enveloping acoustic space that requires the full participation of the listening subject within the space, turning them from a spectator to participant within the work<sup>113</sup>. There is an augmenting of a new experience in this constructed environment that, although still embodying the qualities of the sublime, is self-conscious of its own effect. The work of art is itself not the sublime experience, but the effect on the viewer is. The experience is still, therefore not presentable but the initial stimulus is and is not a sublime object but an agent in the construction of that experience, through a fabricated process. Derrida's *Parergon* remains present by the very nature of the experience being an artwork rather than an accidental encounter. The requirement within the artwork to engender the experience that we wish to call sublime, is the

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<sup>111</sup> At Tate Liverpool in Autumn 2000, a selection of Turner's late seascapes from 1830 - 1840 were removed from their frames and placed as open canvas on the white walls of the bright space, illuminated by daylight, with the reflective properties of the river behind the gallery and the dock in front of the gallery adding to the shifting quality of light in the gallery space, throughout the day. With the dark colours sitting in the centre of the canvas and the pale colours bleeding off the edge, merging with the pale, sunlit walls, it was presented as an experiment to see how they would have looked as new in Turner's studio.

<sup>112</sup> Seen through the work of the Minimalists to be explored here presently.

<sup>113</sup> In examples such as LaMonte Young's *Dreamhouse* installations.

further study of this chapter. I will explore how an understanding of our own sensory perception and physiological relationship with our visual, aural or kinaesthetic encounter shapes this experience for us.

As an experience that renders all our faculties incapable of comprehension, the sublime is one that does not reside purely with the visual although this superior, allocentric sense is considered primary in the language of Derrida and Lyotard in their analysis of the sublime artwork. The notion of aural and kinaesthetic sensations are underprivileged to the extent they become the agent through which we find ourselves *more* overwhelmed with the pleasure of the sublime ineffable moment.

The very basic principle of the darkened ghost train is a perfect example of the reliance on visual deprivation and aural and tactile sensory privation. This combination instils an anticipatory sense of the sublime within us almost before the experience begins. As described by Damien Hirst in reference to his own work: *The Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*:

*I think it is a lot easier to get people to frighten themselves than it is to actually frighten them.*<sup>114</sup>

Burke would suggest that fear or terror can be an apprehension of pain or death and creates a “*feeling in the body [...] an unnatural tension of the nerves, [...] an unnatural strength, [...] followed by an extraordinary weakness*”<sup>115</sup>. This rather exaggerated description of the anticipated fear of death certainly demonstrates the powerful effect of fear; but that fear is not present when confronted by a piece of Hirst’s work. Instead the suggestive title offers us the moderated version of fear. According to the principles of Burke’s enquiry what we should be experiencing are the feelings of terror with the sense of imminent danger removed. This leaves us with a similar

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<sup>114</sup> S, Lyall (1995) “Is It Art, Or Just Dead Meat?”, *New York Times Magazine*, (ed. 31) 12/11/95

<sup>115</sup> Burke, E (1757) *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 1990, Oxford University Press, Oxford. p.119.

passion we translate into a sense of delight. Burke “distinguishes the pleasure of secondary privation from positive pleasures, and he baptises it as *delight*”<sup>116</sup>.

This concept has been utilised well by Felix Barrett in the work of his promenade theatre company: *Punchdrunk*, fostering the human capacity to generate imagined anticipation and potential fear, based on our own past experiences. Similar to Hirst’s presentation of the potential for imminent but removed danger, *Punchdrunk* prey on the childhood fears and anxieties. Their inclusion of darkness, isolation, labyrinth-like spaces and puzzles bring out the requirement for play and participation within the audience. With all their productions driven through physicality of movement and space more than dialogue, the works are sensual and visceral.

Sound, smell, touch and sight are all considered within how the audience will experience the work and what appear to be voluntary decisions, made by the audience. The company carefully considers all potential decisions, with specific reactions anticipated. As Maxine Doyle, choreographer of the company, states: “All of the audiences are forced to work instinctively and respond emotionally, rather than intellectually, and often when people take an intellectual approach to the work that’s when their frustrations come through”<sup>117</sup>. The navigation of *Punchdrunk*’s worlds is carefully constructed as journeys for adventure. Although the outcomes are already considered, the allowance for play and seeking the next chapter in the story is generally left for the audience to experience in their own time. This allows an important belief in the autonomy of their decisions:

*People are really proud when they make a conscious effort to leave the crowd, or avoid them, and that’s some minor epiphany for them. In doing that, they really owned their journey and the*

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<sup>116</sup> Lyotard, J-F (1984) “The Sublime and the Avante-Garde”. *Art Forum*. 22/8 (April 1984). P.40.

<sup>117</sup> Machon, J (2009) *(Syn)aesthetics: Redefining Visceral Performance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. P. 89.

*moments of performance they found are all the more powerful for that.* <sup>118</sup>

Therefore the surprises based on fear and anxieties, encountered along the journey become even more terrifying. These works offer us the extreme end of realism (regardless of the theatricality of the spectacle) of such visceral quality that engages every sensory experience at such a level that the divide between the danger of reality and the safety of spectatorship is blurred. Burke argues that our sense of the sublime is rooted in the instinct for self-preservation and our innate fear of death. Being participant within an experience in an almost voyeuristic capacity defines that barrier of self-preservation. The terror of the close proximity to the experience of the artist blurs the potential of the art penetrating our own life<sup>119</sup>, moving beyond the boundary of the role of passive spectator into an area that starts to introduce a sense of terror at the prospect of any consequences that this penetration might present, this border of terror being the territory where the sublime is propagated.

The potential for experiencing a first hand reality invokes a fear of the unknown and the associated terror of fear or pain. The theories that Burke presented as far as terror and pain are concerned, are equally present in our 21<sup>st</sup> century experiences. According to Burke, terror and pain are the source of the sublime. Beyond terror, delight is also closely related to the production of the sublime. In his *Enquiry*, Burke was convinced that the idea of pleasure is the key to unravelling the mystery between the sublime and the beautiful, Burke designated two types of pleasure: that of a positive and independent nature, as opposed to pleasure resulting from a diminution of pain<sup>120</sup>. The former, Burke considered pleasure and the latter delight and since delight stems from the idea of self-preservation, whatever arouses this delight is sublime. On the other hand, pleasure is related to society and produces ideas that Burke classified as Beauty. Kant was able to draw

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<sup>118</sup> *ibid*, p.91.

<sup>119</sup> RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance: Live Art Since The 60's*, 1998, London, Thames and Hudson, p.99

<sup>120</sup> Burke, E (1757) *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 1990, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p.30-33

similar conclusions in his reference to negative pleasure. He describes this experience as follows:

*The sublime does not so much involve positive pleasure as admiration or respect, i.e. merits the name of a negative pleasure*<sup>121</sup>

The negative pleasure comes from the knowledge that the viewer is witness to the experience rather than subject of. Burke argues that there is a difference between the removal of pain and any positive pleasure:

*For when we have suffered from any violent emotion, the mind naturally continues in something like the same condition, after the cause which first produced it has ceased to operate.*<sup>122</sup>

After the terror has subsided we mentally shift back to the state prior to the experience with a memory of the experience, with any pleasure removed. Burke refers to this state of semi-indifference as delight. The threat of pain or danger is removed from the experience and the feeling of the being witness to is a sensation of delight, closely associated with fascination and what Roland Barthes would later describe as *Jouissance*<sup>123</sup>.

*Jouissance*, untranslatable in English, is the closest we may come to understanding what Kant's notion of negative pleasure may be. It is clearly at the threshold of pain where *Jouissance* is experienced. As Burke suggests:

*When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful.*<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, (trans.) J C Meredith, 1978, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p.108

<sup>122</sup> Burke, E (1757) *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 1990, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p.32.

<sup>123</sup> From Barthes' *Le Plaisir du Texte*, published in 1973. Written in two parts, part one being *Plaisir*, or pleasure and part two being *Jouissance*. *Jouissance*, in French, denotes "pleasure", "bliss" or "enjoyment." but has a sexual connotation lacking in the English word "enjoyment", and is therefore left untranslated in English editions of the work.

<sup>124</sup> Burke, E (1757) *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 1990, Oxford University Press, Oxford. Pp.36 – 37.

This threshold is neither a fearful or content state but one with more passion suppressed by Burke in his choice of language. But the subsequent choice of the word in Barthes' *Le Plaisir du Texte*<sup>125</sup> demonstrates a suggestion of an identical connotation. In a preface to the English translation of *Le Plaisir du Texte*, Richard Howard writes: "Pleasure is a state, of course, bliss (*jouissance*) an action, and both of them, in our culture, are held to be unspeakable, beyond words."<sup>126</sup> The nature of this pleasure of the unspeakable and beyond words is a reminder of Burke and Kant's own similar suggestions<sup>127</sup>. It is this indulgent loss of explanation that promotes a surrender to *jouissance*, knowing the negative pleasure is a threshold sensation, which is where the thrill lies.

This same thrill is found in the sense of terror in self-preservation. As described, terror can connect us with the sublime in defence of this strongest of the human emotions, not necessarily in relation to the higher presence, or the divine, but considering human failing and the post-Enlightenment, early modern power of man harnessing nature. What I wish to present as the basis for the first example in illustrating how the man-made art work can possess this potential for the sublime, is through the journey and frame. Maxine Doyle considers this one of the key starting points within the *Punchdrunk* experience: "What the building gives me is framings, so I start to see things in relation to framings."<sup>128</sup> Felix Barrett uses his instinctive sense when deciding how a building is to be used: "The most crucial part of the process in terms of building the show is the first time the team walk around it, because it's then, when you're wary of a certain corridor and you're tempted by a certain staircase, you know your body is talking rather than your mind. That's immediate, that's what your sense pick up on. The challenge with the space is to log those feelings and then fix them and

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<sup>125</sup> Barthes, R (1975) *The Pleasure of the Text*. (trans. Miller, R) New York: Hill and Wang.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. P. vi.

<sup>127</sup> Burke, E (1757) *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 1990, Oxford University Press, Oxford. Pp149 – 161.

<sup>128</sup> Machon, J (2009) *(Syn)aesthetics: Redefining Visceral Performance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. Ibid, P.92.

accentuate them so that we can guarantee for any audience member that they'll feel the same impact. All we're doing is harnessing the power of the space, making the building work to its potential"<sup>129</sup>.

It is this capturing of journey, power and presence of the site that is embodied within Turrell's construct for *Roden Crater*, his most adventurous work to harness human perception, to date. He has made the location, and site work for him. Even the selection of the specific crater, for the work was carefully measured in order to gain full impact on the approach, as well as within the work.

#### From Roden Crater and the Allocentric Encounter to Radioflash and the Autocentric Encounter

*Places are chosen to be gazed upon because there is an anticipation, especially through daydreaming and fantasy, of intense pleasures, either on a different scale or involving different senses from those customarily encountered.*<sup>130</sup>

The experience of journey through an expansive landscape, of proportions beyond human scale, is overwhelming for us. It is this scale, as we've seen that serves as such an important attribute in the canon of the sublime:

*Greatness of dimension is a powerful cause of the sublime... Extension is either in length, height or depth... an hundred yards of even ground will never work such an effect as a tower an hundred yards high or a rock and mountain of that altitude... and the effects of a rugged and broken surface seem stronger than when it is smooth and polished.*<sup>131</sup>

The vastness and difficulty of this landscape gives us the sense of the *epic* derived from classical storytelling of difficult journeys<sup>132</sup>. The scale of open landscape in relation to human form presents us with a difficulty of

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<sup>129</sup> *ibid.* P.92.

<sup>130</sup> Urry, J (1990) *The Tourist Gaze*. London: Sage Publications. P.3.

<sup>131</sup> Burke, E (1757) *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 1990, Oxford University Press, Oxford. P. 66.

<sup>132</sup> See Homer's *Odyssey* as the defining epic voyage.

comprehension Derrida referred to as the *prodigious*<sup>133</sup>. We are able to position ourselves according to the immediate, identifiable, objects around us such as stones, grasses or the transport we may be using to travel a vast distance faster than on foot. These objects can be measured in relation to our own body. We can try and imagine the distance between us and the next landmark in front of us, by measuring it against identifiable objects within the scope of our vision - animals, plants or man-made objects. To try and contemplate the distance beyond the point we can identify these objects becomes a challenge to our own sense of scale and our imagination fails to take in the experience as a complete picture. We are rendered helpless in our explanation of what is beyond comprehension and the overwhelming experience reminds us again of Kant's "negative pleasure"<sup>134</sup>, the feeling of helplessness in trying to contemplate the totality of the infinite landscape before us becomes relieved by our knowledge that our life is not endangered by this failing. We are left with a feeling of respect for what we can't contemplate and remain satisfied that this is not a failing in our own perception but something beyond our imagination.

This is our attempt to harness what we feel internally and therefore what is being experienced externally. By doing so we have conquered the natural phenomenon before us and are satisfied in our superiority to this challenge. By conquering without necessarily understanding the challenge, our superiority is asserted although we have not reasoned to reach this result. This void between contemplation and resolution is what we experience as the sublime.

This sense of the infinite landscape can be experienced in the large open spaces of mid-west United States, namely Arizona and Nevada. It is within these open landscapes that two examples of land art exist as two examples I chose to adopt for their potential to illustrate the sublime experience in the

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<sup>133</sup> Derrida, J (1984) *The Truth in Painting*. (trans.) Bennington, G & McLeod, I, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pp.124 - 125

<sup>134</sup> Immanuel Kant, "Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime", first published in 1764, translated into English in 1960 by J. T Goldthwaite, University of California Press.

artwork. These examples are James Turrell's *Roden Crater* (1977 – present day) and Michael Heizer's *Double Negative* (1968). Turrell's work has already been identified as having all the potency and possibility for engendering the sublime experience, but I chose *Double Negative* for the reason that the little attention to the work has not fostered a similar discourse and therefore offers a different level of anticipation. It is also, most importantly, adopted but not publicly profiled, by *The Museum of Contemporary Art*, Los Angeles. It is this lower profile that ultimately became a useful characteristic in defining where the ideal site for work with the potential of the sublime, could exist.

What followed was a journey from one site to the other, across the desert, documented and identified in shaping the early stages of this research, through the framing and journeying to the works. Within the journey to *Double Negative*, the experience of the *Nevada Nuclear Test Site Archive* cemented earlier research ideas around military spaces and their potential for the myth and storytelling already emerging within the work I wished to produce, to test my theories. *The Journey into the Desert* became not only a means of research but also another work and encounter in its own right.

### Roden Crater – The First Journey into the Desert

James Turrell's *Roden Crater* provides an exemplary model both of how the performative properties of a journey may be engineered to introduce anticipation to the experience of the work and of the adoption of performance practice, into large scale installation, offering the potential for my performed installation<sup>135</sup>.

As a highly excavated land-form, *Roden Crater* has been built primarily as a device for experiencing our visual perception. *Roden Crater* is an extinct cinder cone that has been rebuilt to incorporate precisely measured viewing

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<sup>135</sup> See reference in introduction.



Fig.3

chambers<sup>136</sup>, enabling the viewer to witness the phenomena of nature beyond the structure itself. The potential scope for viewing both external celestial light and internal phenomenon of light (as previously illustrated in some of Turrell's earlier gallery-based works) extends beyond any walls and bounded spaces previously created by Turrell. It offers up the spectacle of natural phenomena, within an entirely but sensitively reconstructed location. The reach of these experiences extends from the desert edge on the horizon line, to distant stars. The structure of the cinder cone itself has been dramatically disrupted and carefully re-built, following plans and photographs, in order to return it to its original form and once again return to the landscape, apparently untouched apart from two sympathetically built protuberances. The landform will not appear to have changed, at a distance. Turrell has, however, slightly re-shaped the edge of the crater in order to perfect its elliptical shape for his intended viewing experience. He has "shaped the earth in order to shape the sky"<sup>137</sup>. The scope for the spectator or viewer clearly does offer the potential for the sublime experience, regardless of the theatricality involved in the engineering of the crater.

Turrell insists, and it is clear to see why when visiting the crater, that there is no theatricality in the presentation of the experience though, "the

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<sup>136</sup> In conjunction with Astronomer – Dick Walker.

<sup>137</sup> Descriptions by Turrell given by Nancy Taylor – Director of the *Skystone Foundation*, The Project Manager's of *Roden Crater*, formed by Turrell in 1982. Interview conducted by Sandys on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2008.

experience presents itself, it changes everyday”<sup>138</sup>. The theatricality however could be the sense of staging we derive from Michael Fried’s definition of the theatrical in the terms of minimalist or ‘literalist’ art<sup>139</sup>. The experience of Turrell’s work is born out of our own necessarily protracted anticipation of it and our encounter with the landscape in which it is located. The event of our experience of the work may be informed by our knowledge of what we are about to experience, where anticipation may exist or just pure surprise in the encounter. The total event is therefore cyclical and self – perpetuating in its personal outcome. It may also include works that deliberately reduce the obvious framing of the work in order to facilitate the experience that Allan Kaprow pursued – the assimilation of art into life<sup>140</sup>.

*Roden Crater* is not made for the gallery space and therefore does not have the framing of the gallery, nor any sense of the journey being to the gallery. It is a managed work however and is framed as a work within the domain of the art world. It is the cultural organisation as host that presents the framing of the work prior to the experience of the work itself. In this instance *The Skystone Foundation* through whom I was able to access and visit the incomplete work. As a work that exists within the landscape of North Arizona, there is no restriction to its visibility from the road but restrictions apply to its access. The work is the ultimate ‘epic’ work of art, because of this journey required to experience it. The stories and reports<sup>141</sup> that have built around it over its decades of construction only helps fuel the anticipation of what it might offer as an example of the sublime artwork.

The work has been under construction since 1977, originally funded by the Dia Foundation. With the Dia no longer funding the project and its

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<sup>138</sup> Sandys, K (2008) *Interview with Nancy Taylor*. Skystone Foundation, Flagstaff, Arizona, U.S. 4/3/2008.

<sup>139</sup> The theatricality described by Michael Fried in *Art and Objecthood* published in *Artforum* 5, 1967, is a description of the relationship between artwork and beholder where the beholder is no longer divorced from the work and the experience of viewing existing within the work, but an experience where the beholders presence becomes a part of the work as they become subject in relation to the object within the work.

<sup>140</sup> Kaprow, A (1965) *Assemblages, Environments and Happenings*. New York: Harry Abrams.

<sup>141</sup> See [www.rodencrater.com/connect](http://www.rodencrater.com/connect)

completion reliant on sponsors and private donations, the due completion date is no longer published. Access to the site is currently restricted until Turrell is happy with this completion. This restriction on entering, but not viewing, offers an interesting perspective on what experience of *Roden Crater* we may currently have. Invited to visit by Nancy Taylor, the Director of the *Skystone Foundation*, my own journey to the crater and entry to the site and journey to the top unfolded with a sense of Fried's theatricality, during the drive:

*The crater exists within its landscape, appearing much as it may have done for thousands of years. Viewed across the San Francisco Field, it nestles on the edge of the plain with the Painted Desert as its neighbour. The easiest journey to it is twenty minutes from the main Interstate I-40 running the width of the country (the original Route 66) and therefore not a particularly obscure route.*

*Leaving the snow-topped peaks of Flagstaff, the plain spreads out and within ten minutes, the tall pines are replaced by shorter Ponderosa Pines, shorter Juniper trees and then low, squat succulents and bone dry tumbleweeds. The altitude drops an unrecognisable 1000 feet over the 15 miles of this journey. This amazingly rapid transformation in the landscape already offers the viewer an opportunity to wonder what else, along this journey, could transform so quickly. But it is impossible to predict, without prior experience of the journey, just how the landscape is going to map out as the ground turns from dusty sandstone and limestone, to black lava scorio and the angular sides of the San Francisco Peak, above Flagstaff, becomes a flat plane dotted with over 300 volcanic cinder cones. The cinder forms the peaks as perfect cones, as though poured through an egg timer. The stability of these cones is 'as light as sand through an egg timer'. All the peaks have the same velvety texture and shoot up from the vast, flat land in the most incongruous way although all remain uniform in their shape.*

*The only variation is within the top edge of each as it poured forth its volcanic cinder and collapsed on one side or other, or sent out a second burst from lower down its body – the fumarole. All are shades of red or black cinder shale with low, scrubby bushes dotted over them.*

*Whilst weaving through this field of peaks, the distant horizon, over the flattest landscape reveals a couple more peaks, the shape of cooling towers, over 60 miles away. This immense sense of distance is usually only ever viewed at the ocean shore and never with any sense of scale of distant objects, like this experience. The lower edge of the Grand Canyon on this horizon line gives the only sense of scale across the shifting colours of the Painted Desert, laid out in front. This view is one that can be seen, as a bend of the road reveals the Roden Crater for the first time. Its position on the edge of the Painted Desert, with this view stretched out ahead, increases the feeling of immense scale of this country whilst laying out a perfect viewing platform for the crater.*

*The dusty managed road off the main tarmac road will eventually become the preferred access road to Roden Crater, once open to view and the specific journey (defined by Turrell) along this road will offer the viewer a very particular series of vistas. This includes high views, low views, views through apertures that suddenly open to reveal the crater and views of the short side and long side of the crater.<sup>142</sup>*

This experiencing of the work from varying angles and over a temporal progression has been judged and decided by the artist. Although Turrell has not been instrumental in deciding the route of this road, he has appropriated it as the only official access route to the crater. This does not prevent any visitor witnessing the crater from the North road from Sunset Crater, or the Navajo road from the Grand Falls, although this is a more precarious route.

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<sup>142</sup> Sandys, K (2008) *Personal journal entry of visit. 3/3/2008 and 5/3/2008.*

Whatever direction the viewer approaches from, the terrain will inform the experience as either a safe, maintained and navigable one from the south, one with a touch of the artists hand; or a more treacherous and unprotected one from the north, that remains only as an access road for dwellings on the Navajo reservation that this road crosses.

Both experiences offer a different context for the initial encounter with the work and may affect the outcome of the whole experience. Therefore, it is understandable that Turrell wishes to control the access route in order to establish a particular sensation for the viewer when experiencing the work. What this controlled approach does not diminish is the overwhelming impression of the surrounding landscape. It was this desire that drove Turrell to spend so long selecting the correct crater for this work.

Standing on the crater's edge of Turrell's *Roden Crater*, looking out across the Painted Desert to the edge of the Grand Canyon and the Great Colorado River is very much a real experience. I became very conscious of the vast landscape spread out of my view to the East and felt totally immersed within it:

*There was no distraction from any fabricated object to remove me from this environment. The shift between the different colours of the lava and limestone across this 60-mile stretch is breathtaking and seemingly deliberate as a view purposely appropriated and presented to us, as we would expect in a constructed artwork. The landscape of this location and view is untouched by the artist but he appropriates the viewpoint in order to frame the experience of his work.*

*The medium itself is the landscape but one that already exists. We have been orientated within this landscape to witness our own experiencing of it in a certain way. The natural landscape*

*is presented to us in order that we experience the extension of our individual encounter.*<sup>143</sup>

Although the environment is set up for us, we experience what Fried described as: “an important sense in which the work in question exists for [us] alone, even if [we are] not actually alone with the work at the time.”<sup>144</sup>. Although not stated in relation to this work, his comment summarises the experience of *Roden Crater* – the extension of the immediate environment of the work is deliberately constructed or appropriated. There is a sense that the audience are observed in their act of pilgrimage to the site, or as Lawrence Durrell suggests: “All landscapes ask the same question: ‘I am watching you – are you watching yourself in me?’”<sup>145</sup>. It is this conscious recognition of the construct that reduces the overwhelming sense of the sublime anticipated with *Roden Crater*.

Marshall McLuhan’s notion that our environment is not natural but constructed is an accurate way of analysing an interpretation of *Roden Crater*. “Environments are not passive wrappings, but are, rather, processes which are invisible.”<sup>146</sup> McLuhan’s suggestion seemingly emphasises our mind forming conclusions, rather than the medium deciding our experience for us, when we are confronted with a series of phenomena that we will formulate into a conclusion that transcends our own framing. This framing may be presented for us in the first instance but its extension will be controlled by us as far as our imagination and memory will allow in respect of that particular moment. It is the subconscious framing that might allow the environment in which it is presented to be contributing factors within the experience of the work. The city, the journey to the work or even the country may form the narrative leading up to the point of encounter. The journey to *Roden Crater* is an unavoidable part of the experience of the

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<sup>143</sup> Sandys, K (2008) *Personal journal entry of visit*. 5/3/2008.

<sup>144</sup> Fried, M (1967) “Art and Objecthood”. *Artforum* 5. p.20.

<sup>145</sup> Durrell, L (1969) *Spirit of Place*. New York: E P Dutton, P.158.

<sup>146</sup> McLuhan, M (1967) *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* San Francisco: Hardwired. P.68.

work. This is something Turrell is aware of and he has attempted to control as much of this as possible, as far back in the journey as possible.

The initial viewing of the crater from such a distance immediately poses the question of where the experience of the work has started. Is it at this point of first spotting it or has it happened already through the appropriation of the surrounding landscape by default, because it is one of many extinct volcanoes in the San Francisco Field. The journey to the crater will always have an intention behind it for any visitor to the work. In this respect, the journey becomes a form of pilgrimage as it involves more than a convenient journey that can encompass several tourist trips in one day. It is a privileged excursion: staying at the site, in the purpose built lodge, for at least 24 hours and cannot be experienced in any other way than by recognising the context in which it has been made. Even the limited number of visitors, at any one time, will control the sense of ‘oneness’ each viewer will have with their own experience of the site, landscape and perceptual experience. The whole event is considered; It offers a five star experience of perception, in the same mode as the scenic tourism established in the nineteenth – century “romantic Grand Tour”<sup>147</sup>, enabled by guides, guide books and a sense of destination.

The journey, knowledge and framing create the sense of anticipation and expectation of the work (the length of anticipated construction time included) will always add impact to the experience but how far and how difficult does this have to be in order to emphasise the artist’s intentions? How knowledgeable of the geography of the surrounding landscape are we required to be and does it draw any reference on humanity or is it a purer abstract reference to environmental circumstances only? If so, what do we read into the fact that the artist’s hand is present within the work as a manipulation of a natural land condition?

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<sup>147</sup> Urry, J (1990) *The Tourist Gaze*. London: Sage Publications. P.4.

### Double Negative – First Encounter

With such examples of remote earthworks or environmentally oriented art practices, journeys of pilgrimage are clearly important to the artist as they enable a completely exclusive encounter with the work, not possible within the confines of gallery or museum collections.



Fig.4

Michael Heizer's *Double Negative* (1969), near Overton in southern Nevada, is clearly an intervention in nature:

*The two, hundred foot long and fifty foot deep cuts into the top of the mesa are the obvious hand of the artist (although they have started to erode and crumble into their own chasm over the last thirty years), unlike the surrounding undulating crests along which this is carved. The work cannot be viewed from a distance on land, only from the sky, as there is no road on the east side of the mesa. This side of the mesa undulates in and out, obscuring any view that might be gained from further along the top. The absolute flatness of the mesa top also obscures any approaching view that might be glanced in the rise and fall on the approach. Approaching what might be the location, it is only seen it as its edge is reached, with a sharp drop in front. It is the combination*

*of the surprise arrival with no lead up and the scale of the work  
that forces the spectator to enter it in order to witness it.*<sup>148</sup>

Entry to the work is self-conscious of not just the subject in relation to the man-made cuts in the ground, but the isolated position of the subject, in a hostile and almost un-navigable landscape. This participation in or ‘inhabiting’ of the work immediately places us in the non-hierarchical position of the spectator within the minimalist or *literal* works, where there is nothing else in the field of vision, but the work and this experience of arrival becomes a part of the work, we dissolve the threshold of the work. In “reflecting a perception of the site as unique, the work itself is unique. It is thus a kind of monument.”<sup>149</sup> Krauss remarks: “the image we have of our own relation to our bodies is that we are centred inside them; we have knowledge of ourselves that places us, so to speak, at our own absolute core;”<sup>150</sup>. However, more than the artist’s cuts occupy the field of vision. The earthwork occupies the centre of the gaze but the plateau top, the cliff edge, the steep slope down and the valley beyond, takes up the peripheral. The spectator is also conscious of the symmetry in the work that compels them to acknowledge the reflection of their own position in the opposite cut as effectively as any set of crossed beams by Robert Morris or Ernesto Neto, in a gallery. Is the incorporation of our peripheral vision into the work, an intention of the artist also, or is it only for the moment, we are encountering the work, the reflection and the peripheral surrounding? Is it the orientation of the gaze in lining up the two cuts in order to form a geometric shape in the natural landscape that defines this as the artwork and the misaligning of the two, causing a reintroduction of the cuts, back into the surrounding landscape, that renders it no longer the artwork. Once the viewer leaves, the work returns to the landscape. It has no human presence against which it may be judged; it has no signposting, no landmarks indicating its presence; only a perilous road by which to approach it. This inaccessibility destroys

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<sup>148</sup> Sandys, K (2008) *Personal journal entry of visit*. 9/3/2008.

<sup>149</sup> James Meyer in: Suderberg, E (2000) *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. P24 in reference to the nature of the *literal* site.

<sup>150</sup> Krauss, R (1981) *Passages in Modern Sculpture*. Cambridge: MIT Press), pp.280.

the possibility of any convenient viewing of the work. There is no natural ideal viewpoint from which the artist wishes the audience to look backwards at the work. It doesn't have the scenic overlook, or what Lucy Lippard would offer as somewhere "to stare off into another place where we can't go or won't go... The scene beckons you in, but just so far. This is comforting. You don't have to go there"<sup>151</sup>. It removes the informed gaze but therefore does it also remove the framing or does the framing remain, due to our very knowledge of its existence and the pilgrimage required? This framing is strengthened by the work's assimilation into the landscape, meaning that the journey to the site must be willed, not a chance encounter. The difficult journey certainly ensures a unique one for every observer of the work.

#### The Difficult Journey = The Sublime Encounter

*After spending a day driving around the top of the Mormon Mesa, with no map and no navigation device, searching for Double Negative, my options were to leave, with the work having fulfilled the role of the unframed (undiscovered) and therefore with no basis for suggestions of the potential sublime, or return to the hotel in Las Vegas to retrieve a Google Earth satellite image, I had tried to memorise directions from. With the night ahead about to gain an extra hour of daylight, having just slipped into the first Sunday of the North American Daylight Saving Time, my decision was to get the map. This required a fast, 108 mile round trip drive, with my arrival back at the top of the mesa, just within the last half hour of daylight. The last part of the journey required one left turn, at a gate enclosing nothing. This journey across the scrub, with no distinct trackways brought me abruptly to the edge of the mesa and the drop into one of the two large cuts of the artwork. The encounter was so abrupt, my tyres came close to the edge with*

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<sup>151</sup> Lippard, L (1999) *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art and Place*. New York: The New Press. P. 139.

*the cut lined up at a perfect extension of my journey, offering me an immediate view right across both cuts, to the other end.*<sup>152</sup>

My experience of returning to *Double Negative* at dusk was one that really draws to mind the point of theatricality at the heart of Fried's suggestion of the minimal as theatrical. Michael Heizer has never described any attempt to present a feeling of the sublime in his work, and yet the open landscape of Nevada forms a background and environment with the potential of the undiscovered sublime. Sited on the top of a mesa, but only an hour from Las Vegas, *Double Negative* offers a set of contradictions in its seemingly civilised proximity to a major city. It is only the last 5 miles of the journey from Las Vegas that suddenly change the perception of this being an easy and accessible piece of work. *Double Negative* relies on a sketchy knowledge of its location, not readily offered up by any texts or the museum itself. It is this quality of a required pilgrimage that imbues it with lure and desire. The knowledge (or lack of) of the surrounding, desolate landscape adds to this lure as the work has appropriated this backdrop as part of the experience.

*Having arrived with the sun just dipping below the mountains in the far distance, the experience of nearly driving into the work itself was brought sharply back as a certain feeling of danger that this landscape in daylight is a hostile and remote one, let alone in darkness. With no distinguishing features to speak of apart from the low scrub bushes, the odd cactus and sharp limestone gravel top surface of the ancient mesa, the navigation of this large plateau of steep sides was a delicate and dangerous one.*

*The sun dropped quickly leaving only my headlights to navigate my way out of the work, back to the only road off the mesa. With the knowledge, from daytime, of the sheer drop of the cliff face looming back and forth as it undulated to and from me, the*

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<sup>152</sup> Sandys, K (2008) *Personal journal entry of visit. 9/3/2008.*

*experience of the landscape became non-visual and powerful presence of the surrounding darkness pressing in, reduced the sense of location from a vast landscape to a claustrophobic world that didn't exist beyond the extent of my headlights, from the experience of the infinite visual and aural horizon, to one only visible within the reach of the headlights, but aurally infinite within the blackness. A wider experience of another sensation emerged at this point, a sense of danger within the landscape, an experience not witnessed during the daylight but heightened by the darkness.*<sup>153</sup>

I was reminded of Fried's reference to Tony Smith's description of his night car ride journey on the unfinished New Jersey turnpike<sup>154</sup>, cited by Michael Fried in *Art and Objecthood*. In his describing the sense of isolation from the outside world when his vision is limited to only the objects collected by the headlights in front, Fried describes Smith's sense of experiencing the journey where - "he seems to have felt, no way to 'frame' his experience on the road, that is, no way to make sense of it in terms of art, to make art of it at least as art then was. Rather, you just have to experience it - as it happens, as it merely is. (The experience alone is what matters.) [...] the situation established by Smith's presence is in each case felt by him to be his"<sup>155</sup>.

This self-framing capacity left my experience of the work one that started to remove any aesthetic concept and introduced a new consciousness of self-preservation. The blackness of the sky "that occupies the whole compass of

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<sup>153</sup> Sandys, K (2008) *Personal journal entry of visit*. 9/3/2008.

<sup>154</sup> Smith's text reads: "When I was teaching at Cooper Union in the first year or two of the fifties, someone told me how I could get on to the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike. I took three students and drove from somewhere in the Meadows to New Brunswick. It was a dark night and there were no lights or shoulder markers, lines, railings or anything at all except the dark pavement moving through the landscape of the flats, rimmed by hills in the distance, but punctuated by stacks, towers, fumes and colored lights. This drive was a revealing experience. The road and much of the landscape was artificial, and yet it couldn't be called a work of art. It did something for me that art has never done. It seemed that there was a reality there which had not had any expression in art."

<sup>155</sup> Fried, M (1967) "Art and Objecthood". *Artforum* 5. P. 18

the sight”<sup>156</sup> and engulfs vision in a sense of infinity whilst also being aware of the dangerously close cliff edge as a threat to survival can truly be called sublime in every aspect of the definition, with the sense of terror moving almost beyond the threshold of Burke’s definition<sup>157</sup> and tipping beyond any sense of *jouissance*.

The experience of journey through this landscape, of proportions beyond human scale, is overwhelming for us in daylight. The darkness of night extends the infinite sense of vast landscape with “darkness ... more productive of sublime ideas than Light”<sup>158</sup>.

### Constructed Land of the Artist to Deconstructed Land of the Military

The final leg of the journey into the desert was to the *Nevada Nuclear Test Site*. This vast area of the Nevada Desert, nestling up to the suburbs of Las Vegas, covering 1375 miles of desert and mountainous terrain was one of the largest of the U.S Cold War nuclear test sites from 1951 – 1992.



Fig. 5

<sup>156</sup> Burke, E (1990) *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Oxford University Press. P. 135

<sup>157</sup> *ibid.* pp 35 – 36.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.* P. 73

The true spectacle of the site cannot be seen from the ground, aside from the remainders of buildings, once mock-ups of American suburban towns, testing “the effects of atmospheric blasts on different window designs and glazing thicknesses”<sup>159</sup> now scorched timbers and unidentifiable piles of molten plastic. Any sense of the destructive force on humans has been removed. At both the test site and the museum, all text and description is carefully shrouded in the important role nuclear science played in the advance of American and Western society and development. This includes the validation of all experiments through published notices such as this example of the definition of *Subcritical Experiments*, from the appendix of the Nevada Test Site Guide:

*These are scientific experiments to obtain technical information in support of the U.S. Department of Energy’s responsibility to maintain safety and reliability of the U.S. nuclear weapons stockpile without nuclear testing. They involve chemical high explosives to generate high pressures that are applied to nuclear weapons materials, such as plutonium. The configuration and quantities on explosives and nuclear materials will be such that no nuclear explosion will take place. Thus, the experiments are consistent with the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.*<sup>160</sup>

These subcritical experiments were carried out underground and have created collapsed landscapes of perfect craters across the site. Viewed from above there is a sense that this is an otherworldly place. The vast scale and unnatural, man-made forms, in the epic natural landscape offer the key to the next stage of research, in the assimilation of the man-made and the natural landscape, in search for the sublime within this combination. It comes from the combination of the unknown quantities of power at play within military operations and how these remained a secret and hidden series of manoeuvres throughout the Cold War. It is the scale of potential destruction, portrayed through the romantic, fictionalised world of

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<sup>159</sup> Anonymous editor (1999) *Nevada Test Site Guide*, Nevada: National Nuclear Security Administration. P. 26. Printed for all employees of the U.S Department of Energy’s National Nuclear Security Administration.

<sup>160</sup> Anonymous editor (1999) *Nevada Test Site Guide*, Nevada: National Nuclear Security Administration. P. 63.

espionage, spying and war, whilst tempered with the terrifying propanganda of *Protect and Survive* or *Duck and Cover*<sup>161</sup> as a subcurrent to everyday life. The invisibility of information reflecting the invisibility of the sonic band of the electromagnetic spectrum is the starting point for *Radioflash* and the notion of the frame, illusion and the position of the spectator within this configuration.

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<sup>161</sup> Public information literature and films issued by the UK and U.S. governments during the highest periods of nuclear threat, from 1964 – 1980 in the UK and 1951 – 1980's in the U.S. This information was designed to advise the general population what to do in the event of a nuclear blast, followed by fallout.

## **Chapter 2 - Radioflash: Spectatorship and Framing**

Until this point I have used the word object to describe the sense of tangibility in examples. My notion of the sound object is defined as a sound with tangibility, meaning the source being visible or having a clear connection between what is heard and what it represents. Pierre Schaeffer's definition of the *sound object* is entirely different<sup>162</sup>:

*In his Traite des Objets Musicaux (1966), as well as devising a typology and morphology of sound, he proposed a means of composing music with sounds themselves, rather than with abstract notation on a manuscript which represented the blueprint for sounds that were to be realised by a performer. He called this new kind of music musique concrete. With the agency of audio media Schaeffer and his colleagues at the GRM (Groupe de Recherches Musicales), recorded sounds and consequently divided them into distinct units called sound-objects (objet sonore), isolating them from the environmental context, or chain of events, from which they recorded them.*<sup>163</sup>

His *sound object* is grounded in his concept of acousmatic sound, the source of sound being unseen. It was this removal of the source that inspired Schaeffer's exploration into reduced listening or the "sound for its own sake"<sup>164</sup>, the sense of disembodied sound, drawing attention to the perception of the sound, rather than the source, or what Schaeffer referred to as the *sound object*.

Schaeffer's notion of the *sound object* returns its quality to that of music as abstract and self-referential, after the revolution of early twentieth – century musical exploration of Luigi Russolo, Edgard Varese and Charles Ives, amongst others, brought sounds of the everyday into the concert hall. As Douglas Khan observes:

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<sup>162</sup> It presents a problematic terminology conflict for my use of the expression. For that reason I will refer to *Schaeffer's Sound Object* in reference to Schaeffer or 'sound object' in reference to that with tangibility.

<sup>163</sup> Drever, J (2001) *Phonographies: Practical and Theoretical Explorations into Composing with Disembodied Sound*. [PhD Thesis] University of Plymouth.

<sup>164</sup> *ibid.* P.18

*Musical sound was self-referential and thereby had no link with the world and its sounds, music had stood still and become self-occupied, whilst everything that happened in life all around it had energetically advanced into the modern world.*<sup>165</sup>

In this respect it could be considered that Schaeffer's *sound object* positioned sound as music and therefore introduced disembodied sound back into the musical class. It is this disembodiment of the sound as a perceptual entity rather than recognisable and associated sound or 'sound object'<sup>166</sup> that is central to the next stage of this research, as both medium within the works, but also as analogy for a continuing discourse around the notion of the frame and dissolution of the frame.

This chapter questions the framing of the experience of site-specific installation appropriating the sonic experience, starting with the notion of the journey, following my *Journey into the Desert* and extending this experience to the art event away from the epic landscapes, but still with the sense of pilgrimage. Through creating a new, durational work that appropriates environment and time-based phenomenological experiences to inform perception of the work, I have explored consciousness of the corporeal experience as a continually moving and dissolving frame. This has been informed by the shifting frame I experienced with James Turrell's *Roden Crater* construct and the invisibility of the Nevada Nuclear Test Site, within the desert. The new work inspired by this and used to illustrate notions of acousmatic sound, site-specific work and framing, is *Radioflash*.

*Radioflash* will be used to illuminate some of the ideas around the dissolved frame, transforming the subject into what Alison Oddey would refer to as the "spectator – performer – protagonist."<sup>167</sup> I have explored this shifting position of the subject through both the physical relationship with the work and the nature of the media (sound, journey and site) and where it may be

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<sup>165</sup> Douglas Khan in: Armstrong, E & Rothfuss, J (eds) (1993) "The Latest: Fluxus and Music": *In the Spirit of Fluxus*. Minneapolis: Walker Art Centre. P. 103.

<sup>166</sup> This example being one that I earlier defined as something with tangibility, closer in definition to Fried's notion of object than Schaeffer's.

<sup>167</sup> Oddey, A (2007) *Reframing the Theatrical: Interdisciplinary Landscapes for Performance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

possible to apparently blur the threshold of the frame, as the artist, whilst remaining in control of how the subject encounters the work.

The blurring of what is considered to be the Art Event and the periods of time pre and post-event, form a loose frame that shifts for every subject when the event is centred about object-based work. When the work is of time-based media, i.e. sound, light, landscape or other non-plastic arts, the frame shifts even more dramatically as it is even more subjective. This is experienced through no better example than when acousmatic sound is the key component in the artwork; a sonic experience with no locus. Without the clear focus of a sound object, only experience, the subject is forced to question ‘what the art is?’ and the frame of the work is blurred. Does it become easier to accept a blurred frame as part of the overall experience or does the confusion undermine the work and leave the subject feeling dissatisfied by lack of defined art object?

Our experiencing of art events is framed by the invitation, which we assume will be concluded by a reveal<sup>168</sup> of the work, at the point of our journey’s destination. When experiencing the visceral *as* the work, the lack of obvious object or reveal moment moves the art event to an extreme beyond high – minimalism, to a pure phenomenological experience. In the key example in this chapter, this is experienced through sound waves. It is a perceptual sensation that denies the subject any critical distance from the work, but penetrates the sensory boundary of the body. It moves through an auditory horizon, from the allocentric sense to an autocentric, tactile sensation that denies us the opportunity to either turn our gaze away or close our ears to the work.

If the reveal is not an allocentric spectacle external to our bodies, but an autocentric, internal experience, where do we assume the frame of the work to sit?

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<sup>168</sup> Reveal in this context referring to the concluding experience of gazing upon or listening to the work of art.

## Shifting the Listening Experience from The Concert Hall to the Everyday

Following the *early* twentieth – century composers previously mentioned, key experimental composers and sound artists from *mid*-Twentieth Century (John Cage, Murray Schafer, La Monte Young and Max Neuhaus) created a sound experience that shifted listening and aural aesthetic from the narrative object, played as a composition of abstract notes, to a listening experience of the everyday unheard environment, described by Murray Schafer as “the history of aural perception, a reversal of figure and ground, a substitution of garbage for beauty”<sup>169</sup>. They encouraged a new listening inside and outside the concert hall. Brandon LaBelle describes this point of emancipation of sounds through the work of Max Neuhaus:

*“Such a possibility for Neuhaus exist[ed] outside of a territory defined by his own musical education and tradition, however experimental, and inside a larger set of terms given the currency within the domain of the visual arts. For the visual arts, and, in particular, its cultural atmosphere around New York in the 1960’s, makes explicit modes of addressing a public, producing objects and events in conversation with the bodies and spaces, thereby undoing the art object for a more integrated and live experience.”*<sup>170</sup>

Equally, minimalist sculpture shifted from the external object to gaze upon, to an internal experiencing. We, the subject, were confronted with a position of us in relation to the work and environment, not a distant spectator, as already encountered through Michael Fried’s notion of the “theatrical”<sup>171</sup>.

This “dematerializing”<sup>172</sup>, aided by the emerging discourse of phenomenology, challenged perceptual experience. It allowed the subject a visceral, free narrative and a somatic response to the entire environment,

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<sup>169</sup> Schafer, M (1977) *The Tuning of the World*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. pp. 111

<sup>170</sup> LaBelle B (2006) *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art*. Continuum International Publishing. pp.155.

<sup>171</sup> Fried, M (1967) “Art and Objecthood”. *Artforum* 5.

<sup>172</sup> Lucy Lippard’s seminal essay on the notion of dematerialisation or “dematerialization” of the artwork is found in: Lippard, L (1977) *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*. New York: Praeger.

rather than a guided narrative of interpreting symbols. As Dennis Oppenheim suggests:

*The urge was to go beyond minimalism. It was clear, even to the minimalists, that their idea was reaching ground zero. That's why phenomenology became a way of expanding the domain and a valid way at that. We know that minimalism quickly lifted off into phenomenology via the work of Bruce Nauman and James Turrell and the writings of Robert Morris.*"<sup>173</sup>

It is this phenomenology of experience that enabled Max Neuhaus to maintain and create discourse around his practice as he engaged the public in a dialogue with their surroundings. He has given us, what LaBelle describes as: "the legacy of sound installation as a practice."<sup>174</sup>

This legacy of sound installation deals with the same post-minimal<sup>175</sup> issues as the land artists: the transitory framing of both the visual and sonic, to be explored within this chapter.

Following my journey to and experience of Michael Heizer's *Double Negative*, I suggest that concepts of mid – Twentieth century installation artists broke the frame and opened up the opportunity for sonic and sculptural media to hold a transitory frame. This lasts only as long as the subject's body is positioned in relation to the work, the environment and the landscape in which it is presented – visual and aural. Neuhaus set an example of this transitory frame within his *Times Square* (1977 – 1992 and 2002 – present) piece, located between Broadway and seventh avenue, in Times Square, New York City. Generated from a source below the pavement of the traffic island, it is "what sounds like the after ring of a large bell"<sup>176</sup>, woven into the soundtrack of its surrounding environment. It only

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<sup>173</sup> Dennis Oppenheim in: Heiss, A & McEvilley, T (1992) *Dennis Oppenheim, Selected Works, 1967-90: And the Mind Grew Fingers*. New York: Harry N Abrams. P. 139.

<sup>174</sup> LaBelle B (2006) *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art*. Continuum International Publishing. pp.156.

<sup>175</sup> Influences of the relational aspects of minimalism applied within a wider range of dematerialized genres such as Installation art, Performance, Process art, Site-Specific art, and aspects of Conceptual art.

<sup>176</sup> Max Neuhaus describing the work in a 2002 video document by Rory Logsdail. after installing for the second time. Accessed at: <http://www.max-neuhaus.info/timessquare.htm> Last accessed 13th July 2012.

appears to those who are conscious of its existence, otherwise overlooked as another industrial output of the surrounding buildings. Neuhaus considers it a sound sculpture.



Fig.6

As Heizer enabled the experience of *Double Negative* to appropriate the surrounding landscape within the work, so too does *Times Square*. It is the changing dynamic of the pedestrian and street traffic throughout the day that creates a changing perception of the work. Neuhaus places emphasis on the knowledge that as many people will bypass the work, as will recognise it. This same phenomenon could be considered true of *Double Negative* regardless of the major difference between the two being the number of people passing by both works. The Mormon Mesa has no residential occupation and is not *enroute* to any other location. Times Square may accommodate upwards of 50,000 people within one day.

Through *Radioflash*, I have explored these minimalist and post-minimalist examples as polar extremes of audience numbers and location. This enabled an interesting decision in the siting of the work and the building appropriated for the work. The notion of audience expectation played a key role in where the frame of the work might lie, in relation to the environment. As I explored potential locations, incongruity became a new ingredient. This had emerged through my experience of the incongruity of the Nevada

Nuclear Test Site as very recently adopting the “tourist gaze”<sup>177</sup> into this relic of the Cold War. It consolidated my decision to pursue the notion of abandoned military spaces, as vehicle for a re-reading of sites in a post - Cold War era.

*Potential objects of the tourist gaze must be different in some way or other. They must be out of the ordinary. People must experience particularly distinct pleasures which involve different senses or are on a different scale from those typically encountered in everyday life.*<sup>178</sup>

In developing *Radioflash*, it appeared that illusion and back-story of the Cold War construct was a huge factor in the narrative of my interest in journey and sites. A childhood spent watching activities at Cold War U.S airbases in Suffolk nurtured a need for exploring these fenced enclosures. As Bella Dicks suggests:

*[Her] own research suggests that it is the ‘childhood self’ and the ‘ancestor self’ that finds the greatest satisfaction in living history museums... This sets up easy resonances with the already formed imaginations of the childhood/ancestor self visitor, who also frames the history in terms of personal reminiscences.*<sup>179</sup>

In 1982, experiencing a night time landing of a B52 aircraft, from the edge of a forest, behind the chainlink fence, at the end of the runway has a stronger resonance than science fiction films released around the same time depicting secret military activities: *Star Wars*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *E.T.* The delay of the high-pitched screeching sound, only present when the aircraft had almost entirely passed, because of the forest surrounding, was unlike any experience or thrill up to that point.

The notions of thrill and curiosity, return us to contemplate the threshold experience of the sublime but, as suggested by Ross Brown, in regards to

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<sup>177</sup> Urry, J (1990) *The Tourist Gaze*. London: Sage Publications.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid. P. 12.

<sup>179</sup> Dicks, B (2003) *Culture on Display: The Production of Contemporary Visibility*. Maidenhead: Open University Press. P.129.

sound and illusion, we do not use the words magic or thrill in describing the way theatrical durational sound is employed outside of the music hall or end-of-pier show for fear that the cultural associations of magic might be too low brow.<sup>180</sup> A more detailed description of the *Radioflash* journey will contemplate and challenge this notion where thrill is an important aspect of the live event.

### Radioflash

*Radioflash* was conceived around the notion of the invisible forces of the electromagnetic spectrum (EMS), already prevalent in my previous work, but only ever existent as a manifestation of the media, not as the subject itself. I wished to acknowledge the potential power and force exerted by an electromagnetic pulse (EMP): the energy wave sent across all electrical networks, following a nuclear blast.

Along with sonic warfare, the EMP was considered by the U.S. and European military as a potential supplement to nuclear weapons, due to its widespread impact<sup>181</sup>.

*Water supplies would be cut off and gas and electricity supplies would be disrupted far beyond any target, due to the effects of the Electromagnetic pulse (EMP).<sup>182</sup>*

“Radioflash” was a term used in British military literature between 1951 and 1953, describing the effect of EMP. It was primarily associated with the click typically heard on radio receivers when a nuclear bomb was detonated. Once the wider pulse was acknowledged, EMP replaced “Radioflash”. These undesirable pulses “required that all telecommunication installations

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<sup>180</sup> Brown, R (2010) *Sound: A Reader in Theatre Practice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 90 – 91

<sup>181</sup> Many suggestions and conspiracy theories of the use of EM pulses and infrasonic frequencies have been unfounded or remain mythical inventions. For further suggestions around the fictional use of sonic warfare, see Goodman, S (2010) *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect and the Ecology of Fear*. Cambridge: MIT Press. Pp. 16 – 25.

<sup>182</sup> Clarke, B (2005) *Four Minute Warning: Britain's Cold War*. Stroud: Tempus Publishing Ltd. P.189.

be “hardened” to prevent the command ranks from going deaf, blind and powerless, cut off from contact with the terrain”<sup>183</sup>. This sensory deprivation, suggested by Paul Virilio, as the outcome of such attacks, stands as a further reflection on our unconscious reliance on the EMS as the way in which we experience our environment and phenomenological rationalising of existence within our environment.

Within the buildings acknowledged to be under potential nuclear attack, Faraday Cages were installed<sup>184</sup>. The notion of the Faraday Cage and its invisible presence within the walls of a building forms an analogy of the invisible nature of how we mainly experienced the Cold War, in European countries. It was a war without conflict in the west – although contested by proxies elsewhere in the world – but with continual military activity in the UK throughout this period. The preparation for conflict and anticipation of a nuclear exchange (“the dropping of the bomb”) was a historical constant and yet concealed. For this reason, we believe we have a clear idea of the military activity in the UK during the Cold War period. However, the decommissioning of most Cold War sites between 1992 and 1993 and the declassification of some government documentation has revealed illuminating knowledge and information.

Buildings, objects, sites and activities that are both surprising and often unique in their design and operation offer us slight clues about their purpose. They are the ultimate modernist symbol of power and control. However, even with minimal clues, we are compelled to create the story of their full purpose, based on our splinters of civilian knowledge. Its technology, in particular, is at once familiar through its development into

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<sup>183</sup> Virilio, P (1994) *Bunker Archeology*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press. P. 199.

<sup>184</sup> A Faraday cage is a metallic enclosure that prevents the entry of an electromagnetic field (EM field). An ideal Faraday cage consists of an unbroken, perfectly conducting shell. This ideal cannot be achieved in practice, but can be approached by using fine-mesh metal (often copper) screening. The cage should be directly connected to an earth ground. A heavy-duty Faraday cage can protect against direct lightning strikes. When connected to an earth ground, the cage conducts the high current harmlessly to ground, and keeps the EM pulse from affecting personnel or hardware inside. This includes electronic components, the most vulnerable and therefore the most likely to be a target of any EM pulse used in military attacks on military or civilian sites.

our domestic technological landscape yet seems also distant and antiquated. Paul Virilio likens military architecture to clothing appropriate to the event:

*The fortification is a special construction; one does not live there, one executes particular actions there, at a particular moment, during conflict or in a troubled period. Just as you put on your raincoat in the rain, you go to the fort when peacetime conditions yield to wartime weather conditions.*<sup>185</sup>

The design of the architecture is familiar in its need to withstand destruction, but more austere than could be imagined, dominated by large concrete surfaces with no obvious entrances, possessing shapes that do not resemble those of houses or familiar buildings<sup>186</sup> and which communicate a far greater sense of latent fear than any public information programme ever could. These sites are the fictional adventures of childhood, now exposed within the post – Cold War remains. I channelled this very modernist frame through the postmodern appropriation of the space in which *Radioflash* was created: a bunker.

*One structure above all others typifies the nation's view of the Cold War: the so-called 'nuclear bunker'.*<sup>187</sup>

However, the bunker I selected is a World War II bunker, contrived within its environment and scenography to adopt the identity of a Cold War bunker, through the placing of objects, sound and an invitation paragraph of text. This plays on the notions of myth surrounding our knowledge of the Cold War as we recognise it through popular cultural references.

The specific bunker was selected for its architectural qualities, reading as a hardened shell. It also had the quality of incongruity, already recognised as a significant factor in the framing of the work. This incongruity is due the location of the bunker: directly backing a fitness centre, in the busy New

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<sup>185</sup> Virilio, P (1994) *Bunker Archeology*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press. P. 42.

<sup>186</sup> Significant examples can be seen at Orford Ness, Suffolk or Fylingdales, Yorkshire.

<sup>187</sup> <sup>187</sup> Clarke, B (2005) *Four Minute Warning: Britain's Cold War*. Stroud: Tempus Publishing Ltd. P. 171

Cross neighbourhood, in London. There are no walls externally visible, having been built on top of during the 1960's and 1980's. The centre uses the space as a storage facility. Although reinforced military spaces are to be found in London, many have been appropriated into new building projects or filled in on safety grounds. There are more remaining examples of hardened shell buildings in rural locations, where the land they occupy is at lower premium. Many of these have been utilised for storage purposes, or remain overgrown and inaccessible.



Fig.7

The work follows a journey from the grassy quadrant within Goldsmiths College Campus, into the main space of the fitness centre. Access is through an unassuming *staff only* wooden door, into a thick concrete military bunker. It is an unexpected transition from one world, into another. Each visitor, or subject is able to follow their own journey through the space, in their own time<sup>188</sup>. This journey into the bunker is accompanied by a fluctuating, low, modulating set of sound frequencies, at 15 Hz, 18 Hz, 20 Hz, 25 Hz, 30 Hz, 35 Hz. The first two being below audible level, classed as

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<sup>188</sup> There was no set time limit, however, it was apparent that those who spent longer, became familiarised with the environment and able to deconstruct the experience, whilst those who entered and exited briefly retained a sense of mystery about what they had experienced.

infrasonic<sup>189</sup>, whilst the others are close to the lower end of human audibility. Each body part naturally resonates at different frequencies with the wrist at 50 – 200 Hz, the rib cage at 60 Hz, the eyeball and intra-ocular structure at 30 – 80 Hz and the stomach mass at 4 – 8 Hz<sup>190</sup>. With these resonant frequencies of the stomach being below audible range, it explains the experience sometimes encountered of nausea when no apparent sound is audible.

The frequencies shift and change as the subject moves from one end of the bunker to the other, according to the size of the wave and the physical space in which they have to move. The bunker is separated (originally) into three rooms, each with varying degrees of reduced light and increasingly reverberant sound as the journey progresses from the first, to the third room. The deterioration of focus, both aurally and visually, from one space to the next sets up a disorientation that forms illusions around what is being seen and heard. “I thought the ceiling was higher than it is, because I don’t know where the sound is located”<sup>191</sup> was a comment made by one of the subjects after eventually gaining full acclimatisation to the light levels. “My stomach feels unsettled, even now”<sup>192</sup> was an observation made by another subject, twenty minutes after leaving and moving away from the space.

An accompanying text to *Radioflash* offers the spectator/participant an insight to the work but is specifically not offered until the subject leaves the space:

*Using a combination of an invitation offer of deliberately sketchy information about former Cold War military activity within this “type of” site, with curiosity and self-serving myth, the participant forms an anticipated expectation of what the encounter could be. The contrast with the environment outside the space heightens the sense of discovery and the individual participant’s narrative is formed.*

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<sup>189</sup> Sound frequencies below 20 Hz, with 20 Hz considered the lower threshold of human hearing in adults under the age of 25.

<sup>190</sup> Augoyard, J-F & Torgue, H (2005) *Sonic Experience: A Guide to Everyday Sounds* Montreal: McGill – Queens University Press. P.107.

<sup>191</sup> Subject A

<sup>192</sup> Subject B

*The sound generated in the space uses a combination of frequencies, some of which sit on the threshold of audibility, becoming a haptic sensation. The slightly higher frequencies resonate with the fabric of the space giving the impression of an external sound or one embedded in the walls, as the invisible and silent faraday cage would be, eliminating any unwanted “Radioflash” from an electromagnetic pulse. This sound is smooth and untextured, offering no recognisable association. Localised lighting draws our visual attention to small details of the space, allowing our visual brain to form a picture of the rest of the otherwise dark space. Our olfactory sense is instantly associating the space with the mythologised site, based on nothing more than a desire for it to be ‘authentic’...*<sup>193</sup>

Through *Radioflash*, the experience of the art event explores the sonic sensation beyond the ‘sound object’ or the sound of electrical signal. It is an experience of the very threshold of audio where the signal has become an autocentric, haptic sensation – the direct interface with the body. This can raise the question as to whether the work is a sound installation, as the experience is felt through sound pressure waves as priority over evidence of any composed content or sound object. The body has become the vehicle through which the sensory experience of the work is channelled and therefore the auditory and haptic sensations of the environment animate the body, although the body itself is not the locus of the work. As Catherine Vasseleu suggests:

*The body is a term within the flesh – it participates in so far as it becomes perceivable only through its structuration as perceiving/perceived. The body never perceives itself independently of the language of perception, as a thing itself. It cannot exist independently of a thing perceived but nor is it reducible to that thing*<sup>194</sup>

The body always remains the perceptual vessel through which we read our sensory experiences, although we may puzzle over the capability of our bodies in examples of unexpected and surprise sensory impact or penetration, examples of which would subsequently be tested through

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<sup>193</sup> Accompanying text: *Radioflash*, June 2009, Club Pulse, Goldsmiths College, New Cross, London.

<sup>194</sup> Vasseleu, C. (1998) *Textures of Light: Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty* London: Routledge. pp. 26 – 27.

*Radioflash.* Maurice Merleau – Ponty takes the notion of the experiencing through our instruments of sensation to the point where the very instruments themselves – eyes, ears, skin etc become removed from the perceptual experience. The very interface itself has no fixed position within the biological or perceptual and remains in limbo:

*Since my senses, being several, are not myself, they can only be objects. I say that my eyes see, that my hand touches, that my foot is aching, but these naïve expressions do not put into words true experience. Already they provide me with an interpretation of that experience which detaches it from its original subject.<sup>195</sup>*

So Merleau – Ponty may be questioning the very nature of the interface of our sensory instruments but at what point does the instrument stop and the consciousness of the interface start?

With an aural stimulus the auditory canal, cochlea and auditory nerve are all part of the instrument for hearing, but so are the neurons within the brain that link directly the auditory nerve to the auditory cortex. Is the brain a part of that instrument and where does consciousness and memory exist within the mass of neurons?

Merleau – Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* allowed for a new reading of phenomenology, beyond the rigid bracketing of Husserl's reduction separating out content and representation, without considering the vessel.

In the fifth of his *Logical Investigations*<sup>196</sup>, Edmund Husserl deals with the intentional experience employed in the phenomenological experience but also their contents. It could be considered the frame and its content. It puts a particular emphasis on the act of presentation, separating out the content and representation within that content. All the experiences are positioned as intentional acts although they do not require the individual to be engaged in a conscious act but merely the fact that we are experiencing the sights,

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<sup>195</sup> Merleau-Ponty, M (2003) *Phenomenology of Perception*. London:Routledge. p 212

<sup>196</sup> Husserl, E (1970) *Logical Investigations*. (trans: J N Findlay) New York: Humanities Press.

sounds and touches of everyday encounter. As the outline of a frame in which the experience is being projected, his calculation of complex and simple intentional acts formed the basis for different levels of intentionality. This may include consciously judging the moment and actively experiencing the moment or a rather more passive standpoint of the very being in the moment, a subconscious experiencing of the everyday. The various levels of intentionality reflect the moving thresholds of the frame as the subject is more or less engaged in the intentions of their acts.

The deconstruction of the lived experience into abstract pockets is the distillation that removes the experience from being a purely sensory, empirical experience and becomes the intentional experience of Husserl's fifth and sixth meditations, "investigations devoted to intentionality and categorical intuition."<sup>197</sup>, known as the reduction. It is the reduction, in the pockets of experience that form the basis of the body-subject, where the subject is consciously embedded within their experience but is able to step out and take an intersubjective standpoint but only ever through the content of the reduced pockets. Within this reduction, however, there is no allowance for memory and imagination to fill the gaps between the pockets.

The notion of imagination and memory as a contributing factor cannot exist as simply a past recollection unconsciously assimilated into the current experience though. As a recollection, unconscious or not it will be a reproduced memory rather than current and new experience. As Levinas states,

*If feeling is an obscure fact of psychological life, phenomenological description will take this obscurity as a positive characteristic of feeling, and not conceive of it as clarity simply diminished. If a remembering is always modified by the present wherein it returns, phenomenology will not speak of a falsified remembrance, but will make of this alteration the essential nature of remembering.*<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Ricouer, P (1967) *Husserl: An Analysis of his Phenomenology*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. P 5.

<sup>198</sup> Levinas, E (1998) *Discovering Existence with Husserl*. Northwestern University Press. P.93

Although imagination draws on learnt knowledge, it requires some form of stimulus to activate the assimilation of current, in the moment and the previous upon which the consciousness is drawing. If this is the case, we have a layered imagination of parallels - the primal stimulus and the recalled reproduction. They do not work chronologically but simultaneously and are therefore not any assumed associative process but one that will alter by the slightest amount with the very slightest of variables.

Merleau – Ponty explored the phenomenological experience from the point of view of the cultural and anthropological world, enabling memory, objects and media to oscillate within his phenomenological frame:

*In a flat picture a few patches of light and shade are enough to provide relief, a few branches of a tree in a puzzle suggest a cat, several blurred lines in the clouds a horse. But past experience can appear only afterwards as a cause of the illusion, and the present experience has, in the first place to assume form and meaning in order to recall precisely this memory and not others.*  
199

This opened out a new language that became readily consumed quickly by arts theorists at a point where the dematerialisation of the art object needed philosophical championing. Merleau – Ponty has remained this champion in offering a re-reading of the frame as a sensory moving experience whilst Derrida’s post – structuralist response, via his *Parergon* <sup>200</sup> offers the recontextualising of the frame, through which Merleau-Ponty could be read.

The assimilation of consciousness and memory can enable the manifestation of a narrative that forms a frame for the subject. The relationship between journey, place, space and solicited knowledge of this environment unconsciously merge as part of the experience of the ‘art event’. The artist can fashion the frame according to how they chose to appropriate this subconscious ensemble within the work. The relationship between the

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<sup>199</sup> Merleau-Ponty, M (2003) *Phenomenology of Perception*. London:Routledge. pp.23 – 24.

<sup>200</sup> Derrida, J (1984) *The Truth in Painting*. (trans.) Bennington, G & McLeod, I, Chicago: University of Chicago Press

apparent object of the artwork (be it tangible, ephemeral or phenomenological) and its environment, is key in how the work is framed by both artist and subject or spectator.

### Beyond the Purpose–Built Space, to an Everyday Landscape

In 1968 Max Neuhaus made a decision to finish playing as a professional musician and explore everyday sounds as percussion. Having worked as percussionist with Varese, Russolo and John Cage, he was conscious of his increasing incorporation of percussive everyday sounds into the work of these composers. His interest was not in sanitising them in a performance environment however. He felt the need for his composition to “take on more ‘public’ processes, whereby expanding the aesthetic and philosophical frame in which sounds may enter and exit.”<sup>201</sup> He embarked on a project that would encourage the audience/subject to recognise these sounds in the everyday environment. The project was *Listen*.

The experience started with a group of participants meeting at a specified place, the first being the corner of West 14<sup>th</sup> Street and Avenue D, in Manhattan. Each participant had their hand stamped by Neuhaus with the word ‘listen’. He proceeded to walk them towards the East River, to the Lower East Side, through a significantly industrial area of the city. The journey incorporated low rumbling sounds of the Con Edison power station, the street sounds within Puerto Rican neighbourhood and the fast moving traffic on the freeway. The group finished their journey at Neuhaus’s studio where he performed some percussion pieces.<sup>202</sup>

*Later Listen excursions, often to otherwise inaccessible industrial locations ... were designed “to refocus people’s aural perspective.” Each trip’s aural composite was carefully scripted by the artist, though participants heard only whatever they individually concentrated on. Chance inevitably played a*

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<sup>201</sup> LaBelle, B (2006) *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art* Continuum International Publishing, pp.154

<sup>202</sup> Neuhaus, M (1990) *Elusive Sources and “Like” Spaces*. Turin: Galleria Giorgio Persano.

*role in Neuhaus's art-given that horns blare, sirens scream, tires squeal, and children shriek, along with other uncontrollable and unpredictable explosions.*<sup>203</sup>

The integration of environmental sounds and performed sounds created a work that highlighted the listening experience of the audience, as the work. It moved the sounds of the instruments from the position of isolated musical object, to a wider aural image of the world as a composition of sounds. The “immersion”<sup>204</sup> of the subject, in the urban drone “creat[ed] this structure of a permanent framework over which individual sonic activities are superimposed.”<sup>205</sup> He continued these soundscape journeys as lecture demonstrations always preceded by the word ‘listen’, as a stamp on the hand. The stamp acted as the frame to the journey, lecture and work. He introduced it to wider and wider audiences by distributing postcards and posters also brandishing the word ‘listen’.

By presenting this headline word at the very start of the work, there is an instruction as well as a title. The word as a title helps frame the walk as an artwork by creating a starting point. By issuing an instruction there is an immediate recognition that it is not a passive artwork but an experience that demands the attention of the participant, beyond the aesthetic object presented in the passive environment of the concert hall or theatre. This demand maintains the frame for the duration that the artist is engaging the audience/participant in the event.

At the end of the event the frame is dropped by the act of leaving the studio but it may remain a blurry frame as the participant decides whether to continue recognising the soundscape of their return journey home. Even the threshold of the door to home can be questioned as a frame, although this was tested to a limit of private residence by Vito Acconci in his *Following Piece* (1969, Gelatin Silver Prints, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New

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<sup>203</sup> Lynne Cooke in: Neuhaus, M et al. (2009) *Max Neuhaus: Times Square, Time Piece Beacon*. New York: Yale University Press. p.29

<sup>204</sup> Augoyard, J-F & Torgue, H (2005) *Sonic Experience: A Guide to Everyday Sounds* Montreal: McGill – Queens University Press. P.64

<sup>205</sup> *ibid.* P. 65 The definition of sound immersion given by Augoyard and Torgue.

York). Without the conscious frame, the question arises as to where the event ends. If the participant is prompted to consider their listening experience from the event onwards, they may consider the encounter to be a lifetime event. They may consider the separation of environmental sounds and construct personal symphonies.

This type of listening relies on the surrounding landscape, physical and socially constructed. It is the acoustic ecology<sup>206</sup> pioneered in 1968 by R. Murray Schafer in Vancouver although considered from Neuhaus' point of view of the subject in the moment rather than the research outcome of the after-event, considered initially by the acoustic ecologists. Schafer suggested the sounds of the subjects own body become entwined in a personal symphony, as captured by Brandon LaBelle:

*The daily stroll, as an intermediate practice, imparts an elemental rhythmic flux to the more fixed structures of daily routine. The individual body, in this regard, is not so much a resisting agent, but a movement in continual negotiation within surrounding patterns.*<sup>207</sup>

The detail of the every day allows the subject to extend the work within his or her own given perceptual frame. This deconstruction of hearing demanded a wider phenomenological context for the work and placed the subject in the centre of the work, with the experience of that subject being a reflective one of their own previous experience and knowledge, a reconstruction of their everyday experience, as a way of navigating new experience.

The hierarchical relationship of the listener/viewer shifted from external to the work, in the concert hall or gallery, to being placed within it. The spectator became a participant within the work, in a wider environment that had no boundary between the space of the world and the space of the work.

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<sup>206</sup> The World Soundscape Project also included Barry Truax and Hildegard Westerkamp and established in order to study and search for a harmonious relationship between the environment and human communities.

<sup>207</sup> LaBelle, B (2010) *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group. pp. 90.

Minimalist sculptors established this important role in consideration of medium, object, experience and interpretation of artworks. As Rosalind Krauss suggests:

*These artists reacted against the sculptural illusionism which converts one material into the signifier for another: stone, for example, into flesh – an illusionism which withdraws the sculpture from literal space and places it in a metaphorical one.*<sup>208</sup>

Minimalism meant that the subject no longer necessarily retained the interpretation of the work as an internal thought of either metaphor or symbol. Experience of the work could be externalised to our mind. As no interpretation is required, subjective perception of the work was pure visceral experience. What was experienced internally, however, was the very sensation of experiencing. With epic scale work, the phenomenon of experiencing the presence of a sculpted environment is about our being overwhelmed by the scale of capability of human achievement, a potential sublime experience, but not of nature in its raw form, but of a scale associated with the *other*. As discussed between Mike Kelley and Thomas McEvelley here:

*Thomas McEvelley: For Burke the sublime was anything that is so vast and 'other' that it seems by its very existence to threaten the annihilation of the observing subject. One is witnessing a thing whose inner meaning is one's own annihilation.*

*Mike Kelley: I think Minimalism is sublime in that regard...*

*... There was a shift in the twentieth century in the meaning of materialism, away from realist depiction to an emphasis on matter itself. So in minimalism one is confronted with the base materials that make up daily life, like the base materials of the architecture one lives in presented in an unformed state. And what happens is, one becomes strangely body – conscious in this situation. The focus of the art experience shifts from experiencing an object to experiencing oneself in relation to the object, environmentally*<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Krauss (1981) *Passages in Modern Sculpture*. Cambridge: MIT Press. p.266

<sup>209</sup> Thomas McEvelley and Mike Kelley in conversation in 1992 as a catalogue essay: *From the Sublime to the Uncanny: Mike Kelley in conversation with Thomas McEvelley*, for Sonbeek 93, reprinted and taken here as an extract from Welchman, J C and Kelley, M (2003) *Foul Perfection: Essays and Criticisms*. Cambridge: MIT Press. P.63.

Within *Radioflash*, strives to achieve a sense of the other through this shift, by re-positioning everyday phenomenon. This is enabled through resonant sound trespassing the bodies of the subject or the apparent control of daylight in the domestic space. As Krauss suggests: “Our bodies and our experience of our bodies continue to be the subject of this sculpture”<sup>210</sup> or what Merleau – Ponty would consider:

*The touching and the tangible, its own movements incorporate themselves into the universe they interrogate, are recorded on the same map as it; the two systems are applied upon one another, as two halves of an orange.*<sup>211</sup>

When experienced under normal working lighting conditions, the adapted bunker hosting *Radioflash* does not overwhelm in its scale. It is entirely of a domestic scale with none of the characteristics redolent of the sublime.



Fig. 8

However, the work is scenographically constructed to move from first, to second, to third space with increasingly limited light, becoming more

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<sup>210</sup> Krauss (1981) *Passages in Modern Sculpture*. Cambridge: MIT Press. P. 279

<sup>211</sup> From the unfinished manuscript first published in 1964 and translated into English in 1968. Merleau – Ponty, M (1997) *The Visible and the Invisible*. Evanston: Northwestern University. P. 133.

localised, whilst the sound becomes more diffuse, dense and therefore creating the illusion of a larger space. Visually, room one can be read as an office, with desk, swivel chair, anglepoise lamp, filing cabinet and military documents in files. All the objects appear to date from somewhere between 1970 – 1980. Room two reveals a darker space with illuminated, painted numbers on the wall, under pegs indicating some sort of ordering.



Fig.9

Room three can only be viewed faintly, from dim lighting in the floor troughs, grazing the wall. The illuminated walls are readable only after a period of time adapting to the low light levels.

Moving from one room to the next, the undulating waves of sound appear to have a focus in room one, from within the entrance to room two. Moving into room two, this sound image appears to permeate from all the walls. Finally moving into room three, the sound no longer appears to emanate from the just the walls but also closes in on the body, with no audio dead spot within the room to escape to.

The unexpected de-familiarizing of the space immediately places the subject at a disadvantage, as they have no physical reference to try and navigate

against. The visual clues and auditory sensation and texture of the undulating sound frequencies offer cultural associations. Imaginary places are conjured up, based on the limited text from the invite and their own references to Cold War spaces and sites.

Our knowledge of the Cold War, both during the period and present day is still formed by film, fiction and public information programmes. Although most military buildings are now de-commissioned, they remain relatively hidden from general public access and so retain an enigmatic quality. They form an ideal of a memory without the consequences of war, as James E. Young suggests: “the shape of memory cannot be divorced from the actions taken in its behalf, a memory without the consequences contains the seeds of its own destruction.”<sup>212</sup> That “public memory is constructed, that understanding of events depends on memory’s construction”<sup>213</sup> and therefore is potent enough trigger for the imaginary. *Radioflash* draws on this to inform the work as experience of piecing memories (real and imagined) together, creating anamnesis<sup>214</sup> within the subject. By establishing key signifiers within their immediate experience of the work, the subject can fill in their own narrative of the space, sound and the experience they are witnessing. The whole construct is an illusion in order to convey an evocative sense of ‘experiencing’ the space. The subject is asked to “vivify memory through the memory – work itself – whereby events, their recollections and the role monuments play in our lives remain animate, never completed.”<sup>215</sup> It is through the lens of the cultural tourist, that *Radioflash* is a: “departure, of a limited break with the established routines and practices of everyday life and allowing one’s senses to engage with a set of stimuli that contrast with the everyday”<sup>216</sup>.

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<sup>212</sup> Young, J (1993) *The Texture of Memory*. New Haven: Yale University Press. P. 15.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid P.15.

<sup>214</sup> *An effect of reminiscence in which the past situation or atmosphere is brought back to the listeners consciousness, provoked by a particular signal or sonic context. Anamnesis, a semiotic effect, is the often involuntary revival of memory caused by listening and the evocative power of sounds.* In Augoyard, J-F & Torgue, H (2005) *Sonic Experience: A Guide to Everyday Sounds* Montreal: McGill – Queens University Press. P.21.

<sup>215</sup> Young, J (1993) *The Texture of Memory*. New Haven: Yale University Press. P. 15.

<sup>216</sup> Urry, J (1990) *The Tourist Gaze*. London: Sage Publications. P. 2.

The low (18 – 20 Hz) frequencies of sound used in *Radioflash* are experienced internal to the body. The higher (25 – 35 Hz) frequencies are tuned to the space so resonate with the fabric of the building, giving the impression of an external sound or one embedded in the walls, as the invisible and silent faraday cage would be, eliminating any unwanted “Radioflash” from an electromagnetic pulse (EMP). This sound is smooth and untextured, offering no recognisable association with sounds of military activity, although one witness at the event - an army veteran recalling his time serving in Belfast – experienced his anamnesis, being reminded of the low vibrations of helicopter blades as heard from inside the hardened shell bunker he occupied<sup>217</sup>.

*Localised lighting draws our visual attention to small details of the space, allowing our visual brain to form a picture of the rest of the otherwise dark space. Our olfactory sense recognises the damp concrete, associating the space with the mythologised site, based on nothing more than a desire for it to be ‘authentic.’<sup>218</sup>*

The move from the first, more domestic space, into the third, potentially infinite space forces emphasis on the subjects increased vulnerability through deprivation of focused navigation tools – the reduced light levels and confusing sound image. The audible sound reflections immerse the aural space and deny the subject any recognition of the physical boundary of the heavy concrete walls.

In room one the allocentric sound image is clearly external to the body. In room two it is still perceived allocentrically although the focus of the image is lost and it appears as an acousmatic sound. In room three the inaudible frequencies penetrate the body, creating a resonance in the body cavities that completely consume from the inside. For one subject this “felt like a

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<sup>217</sup> Subject D

<sup>218</sup> I offer an emphasis here in order to highlight the experience I wished the subject to engage with.

stroke”, for others a feeling of nausea.<sup>219</sup> This sensation is purely visceral, with no controlled input from the subject. With control removed it reverts the subject to what Ernest Schachtel describes as:

*Early infancy [where] the autocentric senses (taste, smell, proprioception, viscerosception and touch<sup>220</sup>) play a much more important role than the allocentric ... while in the adult, the reverse is the case. The other fact is that all the senses, including sight and hearing, function in the newborn in the autocentric mode, without objectification, mostly reacting passively to impinging stimuli, and largely with pleasure-unpleasure-boundedness.<sup>221</sup>*

The involuntary nature of this sensation can feel unsettling, with the suggested likeness to behaviour not experienced since infancy. The discomfort of this sensation can potentially manifest as fear.



Fig.10

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<sup>219</sup> Subject C and Subject B

<sup>220</sup> *Touch is not an autocentric sense in the same way smell and taste are. In adult man, it occupies a curious middle position between the autocentric and the allocentric senses and one of its surrounding characteristics is that, depending on its passive or active functioning, it shifts frequently from the autocentric to the allocentric mode and vice-versa.* Footnote from Schachtel, E (1966) *Experiential Foundations of Rorschach's Test*. New York: Analytic Press. P.83.

<sup>221</sup> Schachtel, E (1966) *Experiential Foundations of Rorschach's Test*. New York: Analytic Press. P.83.

This fear is derived from the lack of control ordinarily enabled in adulthood. The visual sense takes time to relieve this fear, as the eyes gradually adjust to the low light levels. This fear is derived from the lack of control ordinarily enabled in adulthood. The visual sense takes time to relieve this fear, as the eyes gradually adjust to the low light levels.

As observed: “I felt like I was walking into a void and had no idea where the sound was coming from or where I was stepping. As my eyes adjusted I could see the walls and it felt like the magic trick had been revealed”<sup>222</sup>. The acoustic and physical sensation had no such privilege however and could only be relieved by complete exit from the space, demonstrating the penetrative and invasive field of sound, not experienced by our visual being:

*In ordinary vision unwanted sights may be often simply closed out by shutting one’s eyes... But not only do our ears have no flaps to close off the sounds ... ultimately to escape unwanted noise we have to either actually remove ourselves from its vicinity or build a protective environment that shuts it out.*<sup>223</sup>

Although Don Ihde goes on to suggest that control of sound is a matter of psychic control, he is describing frequencies of sound within the normal human range of 20Hz – 20000 Hz. *Radioflash* introduces lower frequencies, beyond the audible range, within a “complex corporeal vibration, of some organs”<sup>224</sup>. Therefore the escape can only come from removing oneself from the vicinity of the environment. As previously outlined, the resonance created within the human body and the range of frequencies at which different parts of the body will potentially resonate are highlighted by *Radioflash*.

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<sup>222</sup> Subject C

<sup>223</sup> Ihde, D (2007) *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

<sup>224</sup> Brown, R (2010) *Sound: A Reader in Theatre Practice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. P. 135.

### “The Blurring of Art and Life” – the Importance of Journey as Frame

The extension of our sensory encounter with the work of art is defined in Marshall McLuhan’s media theory<sup>225</sup>, utterly grounded in the corporeal, not technological. His notion that our environment is not natural but constructed is an accurate way of analysing our interpretation of works, whether they rely on sign and symbol, or the experience and encounter or phenomenon of the event.

*Environments are not passive wrappings, but are, rather, processes which are invisible.*<sup>226</sup>

McLuhan’s suggestion seemingly emphasises our conclusions that consciousness, rather than the medium, decides our experience for us, when forming a conclusion that transcends our own framing. This framing may be presented for us in the first instance but its extension will be controlled by us as far as our imagination and memory will allow in respect of that particular moment.

It is this unconscious framing that might recognise the journey from a clean and contemporary fitness centre to the concrete bunker of *Radioflash*, as contributing factors in creating a contrast and a frame. There is no obvious signposting that suggests the point of departure from the everyday, into the work of art as the staff of the fitness centre manage entry to the installation. However, does this create a new identity for them as the ‘gallery assistant’ or do they “all routinely function as nonpersons”<sup>227</sup>, casually undertaking their everyday duties despite the footfall of inappropriately dressed visitors to the Fitness Centre.

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<sup>225</sup> McLuhan, M (1967) *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* San Francisco: Hardwired.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid. p. 66.

<sup>227</sup> Goffman, E (1986) *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Lebanon: University Press of New England. P. 207



Fig.11

In the meantime they maintain the normal work ritual and relationship with their clients, in the fitness centre. This blurring of their roles at the threshold of the work can offer the question around where the frame lies – at the gym entrance or beyond the door to the unknown. The journey to the work could also be considered an extended threshold or entry point. The time taken to consider and contemplate the unknown elements of the work, the anticipation and uncertainty of the aesthetic experience ahead, all inform the self-written narrative leading up to the point of encounter. The physical journeying for our body – negotiating the streets themselves, considering the siren sounds whilst contemplating what sounds of the Cold War will be represented in the piece, walking from hard paving on to soft grass and leaving the smell of fresh rain on grass, to enter an olfactory bombardment of stale perspiration, immediately followed by damp concrete. The notion of this extreme autocentric journey can be interpreted in the geographical and personal, internal sense and the phenomenological sense. The body exists in an interstitial place between its physical journey geographically and the physiological disruption undertaken. The position the subject has taken enables a primacy of experience to emerge, fundamental to Merleau – Ponty's ideas on phenomenology, as he considers that:

*Our bodily experience of movement is not a particular case of knowledge; it provides us with a way to access the world and the object, with a 'praktognosia', which has to be recognised as original and perhaps as primary. My body has its world, or understands its world, without having to make use of my 'symbolic' or 'objectifying' function."*<sup>228</sup>

The subject has encountered and assimilated a range of diverse experiences that build a rich journey, one geographically very short, but physiologically rich. The juxtaposing of ordinarily displaced environments next to each other, on the journey enhances this experience and further reduces the expected threshold of 'reveal', ordinarily experienced within the gallery or performance space.

#### Text and Anticipation – Journey and Thresholds

If there is an anticipated reveal point to the physical journey (as would be experienced in a pilgrimage), it is inevitable that the personal expectation will follow this anticipation. The subject forms their narrative and may speculate on the reveal. A journey to visit a specific art event automatically generates this dual effect of internal and external experiencing, particularly if the visit is a new and planned one. It is the attraction for most audience – the unknown. With the offer of new presentation formats, that “challenge many aspects of what historically has been important to museums – their collections and modes of display and archive”<sup>229</sup>, there is an expectation for ‘thrill’ with format, or McLuhan’s *Medium as the Message*.

*The act of participation defines culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We do not simply want to be passive spectators any more, to marvel at someone else's genius, but to form a part of it and to marvel at our own responses to it.*<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Praktognosia is the practical or instinctive knowledge, the pre-linguistic understanding of objects around us.

Merleau-Ponty, M (2004) Smith, C (trans.) *Phenomenology Of Perception*. London: Routledge. P.162. First published in English in 1964.

<sup>229</sup> Dercon, C (2012) “An Open Manifesto: 15 Weeks of Art in Action” in *The Tanks at Tate Modern*. London: Tate Publishing. P. 2.

<sup>230</sup> Godwin, R (2012) “Tate Modern just gets better”, *Evening Standard*. 18/7/2012.

The unknown is the potential thrill that is expected with any piece of work that retains an element of ambiguity. It is this ambiguity that can often entice and is often used as a marketing device for certain types of new performance, recognising there is a thrill – seeking sector of audience who respond to illusion, teasing and ambiguity.<sup>231</sup> It returns us back to the notion of the Ghost Train, which is why Marisa Carnesky<sup>232</sup> adopted the vehicle in which to create her own surprise presentations. As expressed by Josephine Machon in conversation with David Rosenberg and Lizzie Clachan from *Shunt*:

*All of your work is encouraging in your audience an appetite for curiosity and mystery;*<sup>233</sup>

Within *Radioflash*, this technique is fulfilled through teasing leads in printed marketing material offering suggestions of ingredients within the work.

If the visit involves a physical journey akin to a pilgrimage, the question of where this journey starts becomes a contributing factor in the experience of the work. *Radioflash* is a demonstration of the importance of integrated journey and anticipated experience in what could be considered an immersive environment work.

The notion of the immersive work is problematic as a descriptor of anything outside the digitally enhanced virtual worlds of art, gaming and scientific research, as the immersive offers associations with the digitised landscapes

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<sup>231</sup> This device is mainly used for performance where the sensory or participation is a key aspect of the work. Companies have included: Punchdrunk, Sound and Fury, New York Theatre Workshop, Wrights and Sights, Brith Gof, Quarantine, Shunt amongst many more.

<sup>232</sup> Marisa Carnesky's NESTA funded ghost train observes the role of migrant workers, in the format of the fairground ghost train ride, integrating digital technology creating the illusions common to the ghost train.

<sup>233</sup> Machon, J (2009) "Lizzie Clachan and David Rosenberg of Shunt Theatre Collective: A Door into Another World – the Audience and Hybridity. (*Syn*)aesthetics: Redefining Visceral Performance. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. P.103.

of virtual reality where the notion of immersion has gained common currency:

*For enthusiasts, the perfect interface is one in which the user, wearing a head-mounted display, feels as if she has fallen through Alberti's window and into the world of computer graphics. For them the immediacy of virtual reality comes from the illusion of three-dimensional immersion and from the capacity for interaction. In the case of a traditional painting, photograph or film, the viewer is located beyond the frame, looking in. In the case of such nineteenth – century technologies as the panorama or the stereoscope, the viewer did get some sense of immersion. But ... none of them changed the perspective depiction as the viewer turned his head.*<sup>234</sup>

Applying the notion of the immersive across other media has proved a fruitless pursuit, as all media, including text, could be considered immersive in its ability to transport the subjective to another imaginary place. This has been addressed and argued at length by Frances Dyson in her analysis of New Media<sup>235</sup>.

Dyson does allow one exception in relation to what she calls electromagnetic immersion. It is her description of the work of Catherine Richards: *The Curiosity Cabinet at the End of the Millenium* (1995), which utilises a copper coil (also appropriating the notion of the Faraday Cage) around an isolated chair.

As with *Radioflash*, the concept of being inside an environment isolated from the invisible rays of some powerful and destructive electromagnetic force are enough to create the visual image of an otherwise unrecognised everyday occurrence. Our everyday is filled with the apparently invisible waves of the EM spectrum. Which is why Dyson agrees to Richards preference of the word immersive rather than penetration, as a metaphor for the electricity permeating through the body of the subject, seated in the chair<sup>236</sup>.

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<sup>234</sup> Bolter, J D & Grusin, R (2000) *Remediation: Understanding New Media* Cambridge: MIT Press. P.162.

<sup>235</sup> Dyson, F (2009) *Sounding New Media: Immersion and Embodiment in the Arts and Culture*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 166 – 168.



Fig.12

This choice of the word immersive has less invasive connotations, with a softer and more enveloping association. In dealing with the same properties of the EMS, it seems suitable to use it within the context of *Radioflash*, as an immersive work.

The sense of discovery experienced in *Radioflash*, by the subject, exists because of the threshold between two starkly contrasting worlds and the uncertainty of at what point the work will be revealed. The journey through the first heightens the surprise when entering the second. Returning back into the first world does not have the same affect as the journey is no longer an unknown one. The adjustment of perception in the visual and auditory sensations has moved beyond the initial fascination on our return journey, as the magic trick alluded to, has been revealed.

This blurring of art and life extends beyond what Allan Kaprow was trying to achieve in his *Happenings*. Published in 1965, Kaprow's *Assemblages, Environments and Happenings*<sup>237</sup>, proposed that the Happening is only about the work influencing the subjects experience but not of the subject influencing their experience of the work. It does not acknowledge any

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<sup>237</sup> Kaprow, A (1965) *Assemblages, Environments and Happenings*. New York: Harry Abrams.

anticipation of the work. This sense of anticipation could include any compounded emotional experience brought to the moment of the event and would affect the experience for the subject during the event and retained after the event. Without the anticipation and journey, the retained experience would be weaker as the grounding personal context would be missing. For Kaprow, the participant can offer nothing from prior experience. He proposes a right to influence the behaviour of the subject at the moment of experiencing the work and assumes how the experience influences the life of the subject beyond, but recognises nothing prior to the first encounter with the work. This is an interesting standpoint for Kaprow as his insistence on the merging of art and life is incomplete, not a reciprocal relationship. Nor can his approach be considered a phenomenological one in the existential sense, as it does not accommodate the memory/new experience process. Kaprow's approach has the political intention of changing subjective perceptions of life *after* the event. His is not a reflective analysis, where the experience of the subject prior to the event is introduced into their experience of the work. It remains separated from everyday life in his judgement of the role of the work being one that can charge the subject with a tense excitement of being immersed and his exclusion of memory.

*Radioflash* is an artwork that privileges the experience we bring to the work over the intellectual output we would expect to take from the work. This does not suggest the subject is left devoid of any room for debate over the work but, unlike Kaprow's Happenings, a sense of anticipation or expectation is deliberately introduced to the subject in advance in order to form the basis of a personal narrative for the work. This journey will have become the blurring of art and life that Kaprow sought<sup>238</sup>, although in an apparently less enforced way, as the intended start of the experience in Kaprow's works was clearly the entry point to the space. The role of the subject from that point shifted from spectator to participant, although the degree of subject violation would be questionable. The consideration, by

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<sup>238</sup> Kaprow, A (1965) *Assemblages, Environments and Happenings*. New York: Harry Abrams.

Kaprow, of the subject's previous memory, brought to the work would not take priority over the immediacy of the participant's response to that moment. Kaprow considered the subject's experience as a way of negotiating the unexpected in everyday life. Here, the artist establishes a clear division between the artwork and life in his failure to acknowledge the life of the participant, brought to the work.

As *Radioflash* is primarily determined by time and sound to a greater extent and the physiological sensation of the participant in a less obvious sense, it fulfils Kaprow's requirements for a Happening; But the Happening lacks the element that introduces subjective experience of the artwork as an event crossing the art/life boundary – the journey that becomes the threshold. *Radioflash* can only work as a total experience, moving from one space to the next. The juxtaposition between high – energy fitness centre, to immediate entry into a solid concrete bunker and all their associated characteristics create the disconnection from one world to another.

*Moving over the threshold from one space to another is a contrasting experience for our full sensory perception. Moving through the bunker space deeper, takes us into an increasing abstract world of an unfocused aural and visual space where all the individual components of lighting, sound and perception of space become more and more abstract. On return, moving back through the now seemingly more domestic environment of the threshold room of the bunker, we find ourselves becoming conscious of “the other world” as we approach the door, hearing the music of the Fitness centre from beyond the door. Moving back out into the Fitness Centre, we once again regain the sense of space and natural light missing from the suffocating environment of the bunker. Contemporary Urban Music from the radio in this space becomes a connection we once again have with a world outside the room and daylight comes from a zenith, increasing the knowledge of our sensory experience*

*being above and beyond what is in our immediate environment.*

*We walk toward the door and out into the open air.*<sup>239</sup>

The components of this experience become the work when presented together in this durational linear construct. They are placed against the background of each other. With a limited prior knowledge of what might be expected in crossing the threshold, they work to support one another in creating a heightened sense of contrast in the juxtaposed spaces. The threshold itself is unanticipated up to the point of encounter and retains a certain amount of power as that threshold, in the memory of the subject, after the event. It is purely subjective as to whether the individual has felt any kind of forcing of the different elements they have experienced, or whether they harbour an individual sense that the smell of the Fitness Centre or the sensation of the birdsong, when stepping back into daylight, is a part of their own narrative. As Max Neuhaus explored the threshold of *Listen*, beyond the finale in his studio, *Radioflash* offers the subjectivity of where the journey started and the end point, for the individuals within the audience.

The Threshold and Contrasting Journeys to *Roden Crater*, *Radioflash* and *Double Negative*

The journey to *Radioflash* required a considered effort. It cannot be stumbled upon and therefore had an element of pilgrimage. This was also clear in my journey to *Roden Crater*. This is something Turrell is aware of and he has attempted to control as much of this as possible, as far back in the journey as possible. As questioned in chapter one, viewing the crater from such a distance immediately poses the question of the start of the experience. Is it first spotting it or has it happened already through the appropriation of the surrounding San Francisco Field?

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<sup>239</sup> Placing myself within the position of the subject.

The journey, knowledge and framing, creating the sense of anticipation and expectation of the work, add impact to the experience. The views of the world and the sky will be created for the spectator, with all services to ensure a comfortable and memorable stay. It is moulding the natural landscape in the same way the Centre for Land Use Interpretation is re-framing sites across the U.S., once of either industrial, military or utilitarian use, now derelict but with an interesting contextual frame, or what Lucy Lippard would describe as “mak[ing] accessible a vast amount of information about the way nature is produced and perceived, while subtly moulding the process according to its own light.”<sup>240</sup> The work becomes the total experience of the event, over and above the initial expectation of the visual work that is depicted in text and document. Although the journey will be made to experience the man-made visual phenomenon of the crater, experience of the total journey and event will be the complete work, initially framed by Turrell but completed by the individual spectator.

*Double Negative* requires the role of a sculpture or a marked site in order for it to be “what [is] in the landscape that [is] not the landscape”<sup>241</sup>. Otherwise the surrounding landscape becomes either an everyday encounter or an unimportant location on a map and the topography of that landscape loses the particular qualities we lend it, acting as a lens through which to hear, see and smell the environment. *Radioflash* equally requires the journey of the invitation and pre-amble text in order to initiate the anticipation and context for the work. It relies on a storytelling promise revealing the untold experience of the Cold War stories, to introduce the potential audience to the world in which it is grounded. Without this world, as with *Double Negative*, there would be no contextual frame in which to start forming a personal narrative about the work. The introduction of a narrative to be formed also sets up the potential for a durational aspect to the work – some sort of a journey – prior to even departing for the work.

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<sup>240</sup> Lippard, L (1999) *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art and Place*. New York: The New Press. P.150.

<sup>241</sup> Krauss, R (1979) “Sculpture in the Expanded Field”, *October*, Vol 8, (Spring 1979) P.36

The use of narrative journey is not a unique idea or particular to this work. The durational liveness of performance is considered indicative of the art form. As observed by Michael Kirby: “Indeed, duration is the one dimension which exists in all performance”<sup>242</sup>. It is used explicitly in promenade and site-specific performance. As the subject is required to journey through the space of *Radioflash*, the durational aspect is part of the encounter. Allan Kaprow’s discussions draw upon the durational notions within performance in his perception of time, sound and animated objects. The audience role within the event, or Happening is closer to a promenade or participatory journey with performative quality rather than sculptural object, even though Happenings often used sculptural objects<sup>243</sup>. Kaprow suggested:

*Though the Environments are free with respect to media and appeals to the senses, the chief accents to date have been visual, tactile and manipulative. Time (compared with space), sound (compared with tangible objects) and the physical presence of people (compared with the physical surroundings), tend to be subordinate elements. Suppose however, one wanted to amplify the potentialities of these subordinates. The objective would be a unified field of components in which all were theoretically equivalent and sometimes exactly equal. [...] Time would be variously weighted, compressed, or drawn out, sounds would emerge forthrightly, and things would have to be set into greater motion. The event which has done this increasingly is called a ‘Happening’.*<sup>244</sup>

However, there is often a more explicit start to the journey and a clear point of entry to the work. The invisible aspect of the journey experienced in *Radioflash* may be as inadvertently influential on the art event or performance, in the purpose built space of the gallery or theatre. The subject’s consciousness of the journey, prior to the event, remains outside of the critical engagement with the work, forming the basis only of a conscious

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<sup>242</sup> Mariellen & Sandford, eds. (1995) “The New Theatre” in *Happenings and Other Acts*. London: Routledge. Pp.

<sup>243</sup> Claes Oldenburg’s 1961 – The Store – being a good example that presented the object in a staged environment, replicating a ‘realistic’ space. Contemporary examples by artists - Mike Nelson and Stan Douglas present this same quality of obvious staging, combined with illusion.

<sup>244</sup> Kaprow, A (1965) *Assemblages, Environments and Happenings*. New York: Harry Abrams. Pp.

experience of the reveal. The subject is not yet consciously ‘activated’ within the work until the reveal; they have not yet become the willing participant although reflection on this journey after the event may change their decision about the blurring point of art and life. In retrospect, the time line of events throughout the day may, on reflection, form a far more nebulous threshold for the start of the event than they had established at the start.

### The Objecthood of Experience

As a case study, *Radioflash* suggests that the relationship between the appropriated environment and the subject, is not a product of the medium but a sensory experience in what McLuhan might suggest is an environment made by us in our perception of our experience. Here the medium forms “extensions of some human faculty – psychic or physical”<sup>245</sup>, whether that faculty is visual, aural or the kinaesthetic (haptic). This somatic sensation, Husserl would have described as being not just a three-dimensional body but also within the centre of everything else, arranged around the body - his *Lifeworld*<sup>246</sup>. With this sensation being within the work, it is lived and transcends representation in our perception. Immersed in a tangible environment, we are not required to suspend our disbelief, accepting instead the reality of our environment. Positioning our body in the same space as the objects that form the work, we seem to become part of that work and the threshold of art and life has become blurred. As we are real, the other elements of the work are understood to also be real, not representational. We are not viewing the work objectively, at a distance, nor experiencing it passively but reading the work through all our sensorial receptors of the moment, combined with the memories of past triggers that we are able to associate with the current, as an anamnetic<sup>247</sup> experience. We are seeing

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<sup>245</sup> McLuhan, M (1967) *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* San Francisco: Hardwired. P. 26.

<sup>246</sup> A progression from the “reduction” developed later in his life. This will be continued in chapter 3.

<sup>247</sup> Augoyard, J-F & Torgue, H (2005) *Sonic Experience: A Guide to Everyday Sounds* Montreal: McGill – Queens University Press. P.21.

ourselves within the environment, experiencing it: “The body is always seen and seeing”<sup>248</sup>. This reading, however, is not made without recognition of *Radioflash* as art work. Therefore it is not an abstract stumbling or trespassing into a space. It has intentionality. As Steven Crowell asks of the minimalist art work:

*A multicoloured fluorescent light piece by Dan Flavin draws upon the viewer’s bodily engagement, the ability to change position and remark transformations in one’s experience... however moving within the ambient light of a Flavin piece more closely resembles an experiment in the psychology of the vision... what then distinguishes such pieces from an actual psychology experiments – perhaps visually identical – conducted in the lab?*<sup>249</sup>

He goes on to answer through a Husserlian deconstruction of the lived experience, removing the experience from being a purely sensory, empirical experience to one that is intentional, or in other words – the reduction:

*I notice a box of kitchen matches on my desk, open it, and remove a match. If asked what I see, I will say “a matchbox”; that is what is perceptually given, the intentional object of my act of perception. What interests Husserl in such an everyday experience are the essential elements that give it structure, elements that constitute the way the matchbox is given ... the perceptual object is given as something (as a matchbox); it has meaning. This meaning is not entirely a function of what is strictly “seen”, however ... to grasp something as a matchbox is to take it in relation to other things ... knowing what to do with them.*<sup>250</sup>

It is this meaning, or reduction and the recognition of the context or relationship to its background or horizon that enabled Merleau – Ponty to apply his theories within cultural theory and create a re-thinking of phenomenology for the creative fields, most importantly the three – dimensional space. This language was adopted readily by the shift made

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<sup>248</sup> Erwin Panofsky quoted from Merleau – Ponty’s *Eye and Mind* in Vall, R van de (1956) *At the Edges of Vision: a Phenomenological Aesthetics of Contemporary Spectatorship*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd. P. 27.

<sup>249</sup> Steven Crowell in Parry, J.D (2011) *Art and Phenomenology*. Abingdon: Routledge. P. 38.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.* P.39.

from two – dimensional to the new aesthetic of the three – dimensional space by the minimalists.

The gallery work of the minimalists brought attention to the experience of self within space, the subject’s phenomenological encounter with object. It remained within a clearly framed context of the gallery or concert hall but enabled experience of a wider sensation of self that did not have to remain connected with a particular work. Rather, it was an art that found itself *as art* in sensation that manifested itself, ‘theatrically’ in the subject’s experience of the everyday object and its presence in the world. Michael Fried describes the ‘theatricality’<sup>251</sup> in Robert Morris’s work thus:

*Beyond a certain size the object can overwhelm and the gigantic scale can become the loaded term. Morris wants to achieve presence through objecthood, which requires a certain largeness of scale, rather than through size alone [...] the things that are the literalist work of art must somehow confront the beholder – they must, one might almost say, be placed not just in his space but in his way. None of this, Morris maintains ‘indicates a lack of interest in the object itself. But the concerns now are for more control of ... the entire situation [...]. It is, I think, worth remarking that ‘the entire situation’ means exactly that: all of it – including, it seems, the beholder’s body.’<sup>252</sup>*

Fried argued that the positioning of the work, placed it within the same time and space of the spectator, rather than their being transported, through the frame, to another place, for him the work was more comparable with theatre than sculpture. Morris’s larger scale “anthropomorphic”<sup>253</sup> slabs, blocks, beams and L-shapes extend the sense of body in space as the subject is drawn to the tension created between the object and wall, or floor, or ceiling or between two or more of those planes of the room it occupies. To experience the object above us, forcing us to gaze up above our own eye level and bringing our own stature into question was a development in our thinking of the space and the boundary of the work.

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<sup>251</sup> The theatricality described by Michael Fried in his 1967 Artforum article - “Art and Objecthood”

<sup>252</sup> Fried, M (1967) *Art and Objecthood*, Artforum 5. pp. 15-16

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

As Fried put it: “everything counts – not as part of the object, but as part of the situation in which its objecthood is established and on which that objecthood at least partly depends”<sup>254</sup>. This everything includes the object, the room, the gallery, the building and ultimately the landscape in which the building was located, “the pure idealist space of dominant modernism was radically displaced by the materiality of natural landscape or the impure and ordinary space of the everyday. And the space of art was no longer perceived as a blank slate, a tabula rasa, but a real place.”<sup>255</sup> The combination of the real environment of the natural landscape and the subjective experiences brought to that encounter took Minimalist art out of the gallery and into a wider landscape that still required the subject to question the relationship between it as the human figure, in relation to the object. The difference now was the scale of the human figure. With land art, the subject was no longer engaged with the familiar ergonomic proportions of Dan Flavin’s domestic fluorescent tubes or Carl Andre’s firebricks. These ready-made components within even the larger installations would remind us of their function as a tool within our domestic lives. The visual horizon was extending beyond the purpose-built space.

*Double Negative* is clearly an intervention in nature, unlike the appropriated site housing *Radioflash*. The two, hundred foot long and fifty foot deep cuts into the top of the mesa are the obvious hand of the artist, unlike the surrounding undulating crests along which this is carved. “The work cannot be viewed from a distance on land, only from the sky, as there is no road on the East side of the mesa. This side of the mesa undulates in and out, obscuring any view that might be gained from further along the top. The absolute flatness of the mesa top also obscures any approaching view that might be glanced in the rise and fall on the approach.

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Kwon, M (2002) *One Place After Another: site – specific art and locational identity*. Cambridge: MIT Press. pp. 11.



Fig.13

Approaching what might be the location, it is only seen as its edge is reached, with a sharp drop in front. It is the combination of the surprise arrival with no lead up and the scale of the work that forces the spectator to ‘enter’ it in order to witness it”<sup>256</sup>. It is actually the removal of the material that creates the work, through its visual shape and manipulated acoustic properties. The negative space of the cuts is totally immersive and suddenly, clearly a work of manipulated environment.

Entry to the work is self-consciousness of not just the ourselves in relation to the man-made cuts in the ground, but our isolated position, in a hostile and almost un-navigable landscape. This participation in or ‘inhabiting’ of the work immediately places us in the non-hierarchical position of spectator, where there is nothing else in the field of hearing and vision, but the work. Our experience is totally immersive due to the auditory field that stretches beyond our immediate visual field, into a seemingly infinite plane and back within the body. The absolute stillness of the air and the landscape leaves nothing but the background sound of air. In reaching for something locational in both the visual and auditory horizons, there is nothing within the landscape that can locate a sound to an object beyond the static surrounding. The air, as a uniform and consistent sound is as uniform as the

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<sup>256</sup> Journal entry. Entry to the work is as much of a blurred encounter as with *Radioflash* however, as there are no signposts and indicators. In the same way the fitness centre staff straddled the threshold of their more familiar roles, the work adopts no other visual additions to the surrounding materials.

internal sounds of the body and become blended into one. Rosalind Krauss remarks:

*The image we have of our own relation to our bodies is that we are centred inside them; we have knowledge of ourselves that places us, so to speak, at our own absolute core;*<sup>257</sup>

More than the artist's cuts in the landscape occupy the aural and visual fields. The earthwork occupies the centre of the focus but the plateau top, the cliff edge, the steep slope down and the valley beyond, takes up the peripheral. The absolute stillness is not broken by any intrusion from a familiar soundscape. The sense of stillness has no perspective defined. It is almost a ganzfeld auditory field with an equal stillness in both the immediate space and the distant space.

*As the spectator, I was conscious of the symmetry in the work that compelled me to acknowledge the reflection of my own position in the opposite cut. The orientation of the gaze in lining up the two cuts in order to form a geometric shape in the natural landscape defines this as "the artwork" and the misaligning of the two, causing a reintroduction of the cuts, back into the surrounding landscape, that renders it no longer "the artwork"? The equal reflection of sound, when standing immediately between the cuts, becomes the moment of the artwork, breaking the uniformity of sound, only to become once again unbalanced as I stepped forward and offset the reflections on either side?*

*Once I left, the work returned to the landscape. It has no human presence against which it may be judged; it has no signposting, no landmarks indicating its presence; only a perilous road by which to approach and leave it*<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> Krauss (1981) *Passages in Modern Sculpture*. Cambridge: MIT Press. P.280.

<sup>258</sup> Intersubjective position

As with *Radioflash*, this anonymity destroys the possibility of any convenient experiencing of the work, by chance encounter, but does it also remove the framing? It is contextualised as sculpture, requiring effort to experience. The preparation for the journey, anticipation of the event and the pilgrimage required, identifies the work as such in the subjects mind? Similar to Neuhaus' *Listen*, it is the approach and encounter with the site of the work and the full experience of the sculpting of the landscape that validates the work, remaining the work for only as long as we occupy its space. As Krauss notes:

*Within the situation of postmodernism, practice is not defined in relation to a given medium – sculpture – but rather in relation to the logical operations on a set of cultural terms, for which any medium ... might be used.*<sup>259</sup>

By reading work through this postmodern lens, the frame becomes almost impossible to stabilise and all traditional roles of the art form are dissolved. Fried's notion of the theatrical experience of minimalist sculpture stands as an important doctrine for this reason, but not in maintaining his own personal criticism of the effect, but one that enabled an expansion of the spectator as performer, to enter the currency of art forms.

#### The Unmatrixed Theatrical Construct: Illusion and Myth

The acousmatic sound of *Radioflash* has been constructed in a way that allows it to sweep in and out of our immediate environment, depending on the subject's position within the space. It denies the position of selective hearing, ordinarily experienced. We are unable to locate specific sounds associated with their source, whilst backgrounded by the extended sound world. As Ihde describes:

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<sup>259</sup> Krauss, R (1979) "Sculpture in the Expanded Field", *October*, Vol 8, (Spring 1979) P.42.

*I can select a focal phenomenon such that other phenomena become background or fringe phenomena without their disappearing.*<sup>260</sup>

The sound is entirely acousmatic and can only come from an imagined or fictional source. We are therefore not searching for the source, we are conscious of it pressing on to us from every angle, with no direct point of focus. The field of sound is constructed of smooth modulating waves with no recognisable texture to identify and associate with. The auditory field immerses beyond the limited visual field<sup>261</sup>, especially as the initial visual field is impaired by unadjusted light perception. With the soundscape of *Radioflash*, the subject is allowed to reject the learnt perception of the Enlightenment where artworks are interpreted with an intellectual analysis of the concept/aesthetic, or what Jonathan Sterne refers to as the “Ensoniment”<sup>262</sup>. Sterne describes listening and hearing in the period:

*During the Enlightenment and afterward, the sense of hearing became an object of contemplation ... Sound itself became an object and a domain of thought and practice ... It was measured, objectified, isolated and simulated.*<sup>263</sup>

Instead, *Radioflash* appeals to McLuhan’s suggested return to the “pre-alphabet people [who] integrate time and space as one and live in an acoustic, horizon-less, boundless olfactory space, rather than a visual space”.<sup>264</sup>

*With most frequencies below audible level, we are not even conscious of their presence but the sensation converts to a haptic one where visual disorientation or slight nausea might be*

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<sup>260</sup> Ihde, D (2007) *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound*, Albany: SUNY Press. p.74.

<sup>261</sup> Don Ihde introduces the auditory field “as a shape does not appear so restricted to a forward orientation” of the visual field where we are also required to move our head and body in order to accommodate an extension of the visual field. *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound*, SUNY Press (2007)

<sup>262</sup> Sterne, J (2003) *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*. Durham: Duke University Press. P. 2.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid. Pp. 2-3 .

<sup>264</sup> McLuhan, M (1967) *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* San Francisco: Hardwired. P.57.

*experienced. Other frequencies are large but still audible enough that they appear to come from the walls of the space; the image is directed in order to appear beyond the walls.*<sup>265</sup>

With the focus of the sound distorted, there is a question whether it is a sound internal to the space or an external one.

*The teasing of an audience with sonic suggestions or auditory ambiguities can be theatrically exciting, and therefore change physiological and psychological registers of reception.*<sup>266</sup>

As it expands and contracts, the subject requires additional information to help explain the location – the visual elements become indicators to help construct the narrative. The elements of directional lighting positioned on numbers painted on the wall, furniture and documents contain too much contrived theatricality to ever be perceived as a natural phenomenon.



Fig.14

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<sup>265</sup> Intersubjective position, reflecting on Radioflash.

<sup>266</sup> Brown, R (2010) *Sound: A Reader in Theatre Practice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. P. 137.

The combination of all elements together, however, does introduce a question around what has been introduced into the space and what exists as natural phenomenon. From this starting point of enquiry, myth can be created surrounding the true age of the bunker, its purpose and the believability of its construction materials – visible and invisible. As Barthes suggested:

*Myth can be defined neither by its object nor by its material, for any material can arbitrarily be endowed with meaning.*<sup>267</sup>

It is the juxtaposition of these two simultaneous sensations of familiarity and estrangement that Rosalind Krauss and subsequently Claire Bishop refer to as decentring the subject in this environment<sup>268</sup>. The tension between the familiar and unfamiliar lends itself to the creation of a new reality within the installation. The unfamiliar space has the sensation of being a fabricated environment, framed as an artwork, no matter how solid and real the site may feel. The subject accepts the objectiveness of what is presented as a part of the real environment. They have to question whether the wall they might lean against is not potentially a considered part of the aesthetic of the space as well as a considered element that controls their movement within the space. The experience of questioning every detail overpowers any detached viewpoint of the work as their senses become more alert and heightened. They may find themselves recognizing their own sensorial experience, consciousness of their stimulæ, through being within the environment and the soundscape, as a haptic presence in the space. Husserl draws a distinction between these two halves of what he considers the act: matter and quality.

In his theory of intentionality, in the fifth logical investigation, Husserl introduces the act quality as a way of demarcating the part of the intentional

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<sup>267</sup> Barthes, R (1972) *Mythologies*. London: P.118.

<sup>268</sup> Decentring was presented initially through poststructuralist discourse, removing our gaze from the masculine renaissance one central to perspective, to a position outside of that hierarchy. This was championed most notably by Krauss and subsequently adopted by Bishop.  
Bishop, C (2005) *Installation Art: A Critical History*. London: Tate Publishing

act that carries the content – a question or perception. The act matter is essentially the context in which the act is experienced. Within the *Radioflash* experience, the decentering effect can be explored through this separation of the act with the full body presence and awareness in the space, to the sense-triggered, imagined memories, without the bodily experience as a present part of that. On arrival in the bunker, the smell, minimal focused lighting and claustrophobic sound resonating through the space is an immediate and unexpected switch of sensory stimuli. The body is immediately confronted and penetrated by sound and smell, with no distance between them and the source. This literal penetration is the mode of autocentric perception and a direct switch from the mainly allocentric experienced prior to entering the space. There is no opportunity to recognise these sensory inputs as external to the body, before being confronted by them. This is unsettling and emotionally destabilising, when there is no understanding where that sensation is being formed. This forms both bodily experience and the anamnetic experience, the act matter and act quality.

These two halves are still fragments that, in their duality have no linear construction and we therefore only ever receive a part of the overall view. What we are able to do through our intention to understand is to interpret what we are unable to see or hear. This in turn gives us a complete picture of what we are experiencing based on the ability for memory and imagination to fill in the gaps and form a complete experience. This sensation of:

*Urbewußtsein, is not meant to denote a particular intentional experience. Rather, the term designates the pervasive dimension of pre-reflective and non-objectifying self-consciousness that is part and parcel of any occurring experience.*<sup>269</sup>

It is a visceral experience of the everyday, that the subject is unable to become detached from, even by retreating from the space, as they are

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<sup>269</sup> Dan Zahavi, (2006) "Does (Husserlian) Phenomenology have a Future?" *On the Future of Husserlian Phenomenology* - Internet project organized by the Husserl Archives at the New School for Social Research, Denmark. URL:

<http://www.newschool.edu/nssr/husserl/future/part%20two/zahavi.html>. Accessed 26/10/2008.

*Urbewußtsein* is translated as original or primal consciousness.

already aware of what lies beyond the door and cognisant of its existence. They are therefore integrating their journey into this experience and find themselves surprised at being confronted by the unexpected. It places the subject in Krauss' decentred position. If the threshold had been between that of the outside and the gallery or studio they would be less likely to be surprised as they clearly recognise this frame or threshold.

Her analysis is generally limited to the object but the notion of decentring may encompass the three-dimensional space as a whole, where the apparently obvious viewing point for the work is removed and the subject becomes unclear about their relationship with it.<sup>270</sup> Krauss does not allow for being inside the work, however, which forces the gaze to become active since the subject must move around in order to accommodate the full extent of the work. Thus, they become conscious of their auditory and kinaesthetic sensations, which exceed the experience of sculpture in the gallery that Krauss refers to. Her notion of decentring is wholly appropriate but needs to extend its inclusiveness to audio/visual installation.

The decentred position forces the subject to introduce their own judgements on individual experience and inform personal conclusions over the work. This allowance of judgement is steered by the realness of the environment they are immersed in, something I present as a strong reason for our confidence with our informed decisions. The experience of the perceived real, rather than representational draws on our sensations of rationalising within our everyday and therefore we feel empowered to respond as we would in this instance – a natural response. So by exploring the position of the subject within this immersive and enveloping environment, I present the experience of the journey as one they trust and believe because they are placed in a newly decentred position and not one they believe to understand the convention of.

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<sup>270</sup> Krauss, R (1981) *Passages in Modern Sculpture*. Cambridge: MIT Press. P. 279

The uncertainty within the mind of the subject will render them susceptible to any reading offered, of the site's true use. The subject's alertness to their surrounding environment draws attention to their seeing, hearing and touching. The subject's experience and interpretation of the narrative and phenomenological encounter becomes the artwork. There is no point at which the subject is outside of the work; experience is observed only within the work, it is never encountered as an external spectator. The subject's experience here involves the reality of a physiological, phenomenological experience as corporeal, reflex functioning, as well as apparent reality in the site having had a living past.

This reality can be presented within the solid fabric of the site but the subjective imagination will draw conclusions based on whatever memory and associations allow, forming an individual version of their own reality. This presents the extent to which theatricality can exist within the installation whilst also presenting us with the tangible sense of our own perceiving. The familiar/unfamiliarity of this environment opens up the vulnerability of the subjects mind as to what is real and what is fabricated and enables the use of memory, imagination and anticipation of the journey and experience, as the work. The subject's experience will be formed around their own knowledge on an intellectual level and how they choose to read the stimuli. On a visceral level, the subject may experience a change in visual, auditory, and tactile perception affected by the hidden technology used in the installation but can draw no relationship between sensory perceptions and the intellectual contemplation of this experience. The combination of these will be a newly manufactured synthesis of immediate experience and interrogation of the boundary between artwork and reality. The subject's gaze is split and they find themselves in the decentred position. This manipulated unease manifests as an emotional response.

With this emotional response being identified as the product of multi stimuli, it would therefore be interesting to establish whether a potency within a more limited introduction of stimuli can produce a similar response and whether the stimuli can be channelled into an experience considering

the auditory with greater weight than the visual. Removing the applied visual hand of the artist, leaving the auditory experience and the journey only, where the site and the use of sound as an animator of the site, would become the starting point for my next case study. This work would become *Hush House*.

### Chapter 3 – Hush House: The Phenomenological Experience



Fig.15

*The luminal tunnel of Eero Saarinen's TWA Terminal at JFK International Airport was always the perfect symbolic experience of the future. With its plunging vanishing point and soaring roofline, Saarinen's theatrical passage embodied, if not created, Utopian ideals of transcendence and transportation in travel. spectra (for Terminal 5, JFK) is Ryoji Ikeda's stunning site-specific installation commissioned for the tunnel as part of Terminal 5, an exhibition curated by Rachel K. Ward. While spectra appeals to ideals similar to Saarinen's, it employs entirely distinct strategies that generate singular phenomena and renew our optimism for the future. Describing spectra, Ryoji Ikeda says "This installation offers visitors a special phenomenon, which is nearly invisible due to its intense brightness and inaudible due to its ultra-frequencies. Visitors can barely recognise the dimensions of the space, as if they were blind in a whiteout state. As they pass through the corridor, subtle oscillation patterns occur around their ears, caused by their own movements interfering with the sounds." The sound is subtle and minimal, yet the experience of the sound in the installation is active and dynamic. Only through the public's physical engagement in the sound space can the real character of the work be perceived.<sup>271</sup>*

<sup>271</sup> Taken from Ryoji Ikeda's press release. Describing text for *Spectra (Terminal 5 JFK)*, presented in the luggage claim entrance tunnel of the Terminal 5 building at New York's

The press release for Ryoji Ikeda's *spectra (for Terminal 5, JFK)*, highlights the significant points of engagement within the work: the architectural form of the space, the sonic and visual intervention and the phenomenological experience of the encounter with the space. Similarly to *Radioflash*, Ikeda's emphasis on the subject's physical engagement with the space is key to the 'activation' of the work; it is to be experienced from inside the work, not gazed upon from a distance. This was one of the significant outcomes from *Radioflash* and one I intended to pursue in the next stage of this research; The 'animation' of the space, using acousmatic sound and the activation of the work, through the subject's somatic and visceral experience. This experience is one that transcends the medium, placing emphasis back on the space being animated: the luminal tunnel or bunker.

Using the same mythical interpretations of fiction introduced into *Radioflash*, Ikeda had similarly acknowledged the potency of the romance and nostalgia for a site, even if that nostalgia is not based on an original first-hand experience but sits in the "biography/culture intersection occupied by heritage suggest[ing] a particular category of the tourist gaze – one which seeks the meaning of encountering or fantasizing the self as *other*"<sup>272</sup> The press release highlights the value of the airport terminal within contemporary interest in the archaeology of Modernist architecture. Rachel K Ward, curator of *Terminal 5* stated:

*Without being sentimental or nostalgic, I want to respond to the sense of possibility that seems almost inaccessible to us at this present moment. Air travel, modern architecture and contemporary art share a certain sense of failed promise but also represent the potential of human will... we are trying to allow the best of the 20th century to provide a platform for the best of today. Air flight is the invention of the 20th century and*

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JFK airport, 1<sup>st</sup> October 2004 – 21<sup>st</sup> January 2005.

[http://www.ryojiiked.com/project/spectra/#spectra\\_II](http://www.ryojiiked.com/project/spectra/#spectra_II)

<sup>272</sup> Dicks, B (2003) *Culture on Display: The Production of Contemporary Visibility*. Maidenhead: Open University Press. P.127.

*the airport, particularly Saarinen's, is the masterpiece castle of our historical moment.*<sup>273</sup>

The installation created by Ikeda is a literal reworking of Saarinen's tunnel to bright, utopian future. The phenomenon of that experience is given a hyper real makeover. The experience of the animated space transports the subject/spectator into an imagining of the original vision for the terminal tunnel. It is a glossy vision distorted by the disorientating soundscape within the installation. It doesn't lead the subject to exit the building and enter the aircraft, but physically disorients them, leaving them decentred, contemplating an analogy of a rather more sinister vision of the future.



Fig.16

The acousmatic and untextured auditory experience has 'immersed'<sup>274</sup> the subject. It presents intrigue, followed by fear (through the disorientation effect). This shift from one state to another is experienced as a conversion from physiological into emotional sensation. This emotion is wrapped up in

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<sup>273</sup> Rachel K Ward in interview with John Casey on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2004 [online] *Terminal 5* website [http://www.terminalfive.com/terminal5\\_interview.html](http://www.terminalfive.com/terminal5_interview.html). Accessed 20/4/2012.

<sup>274</sup> As defined by Frances Dyson, discussing Catherine Richards' *The Curiosity Cabinet at the End of the Universe* in: Dyson, F (2009) *Sounding New media: Immersion and Embodiment in the Arts and Culture*. Los Angeles: University of California Press. Pp. 166 – 168.

a combination of the disorientating sonic experience and the “sign referring to it that marks it out as distinctive”<sup>275</sup>.

In the example of *spectra*, the building represents a “Utopian ideals of transcendence and transportation in travel”<sup>276</sup>. Through the re-framing of the airport terminal it offers this promise of an experience apparently lost, but as art tourism, devoid of the promise of departure, as a traveller. The nostalgia introduced by the curator, cannot reference “homesickness – a form of melancholia caused by prolonged absence from one’s own country or home”<sup>277</sup>, but actually what Lippard refers to as the “dreamlike process of memory”<sup>278</sup>. The use of such a building as terminal 5, as a departure point for all the works in the exhibition, is summarised by Lippard’s suggestion that: “History, created and recreated, is the motherlode of tourism ... Historical tourism thrives on anachronism which jolts perceptive participants into consciousness and synchronism, which perpetuates their enjoyment of historical myth.”<sup>279</sup>. This is where the emotional response is grounded. The deconstructed airport terminal offers a short-lived anachronistic experience of glamorous air travel, through fragments of memories and indicators.

The deconstructed environment offering the reduced fragments of information can be examined through Husserl’s reduction. The process of reduction employed the phenomenological experiences of the constructed memory, already discussed in previous chapters. However, as already outlined, the reduction failed in the inability to link the body with the consciousness of feeling and emotion. It was Husserl’s later rethinking and

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<sup>275</sup> Urry, J (1990) *The Tourist Gaze*. London: Sage Publications. P. 13.

<sup>276</sup> Taken from Ryoji Ikeda’s press release. Describing text for *Spectra (Terminal 5 JFK)*, presented in the luggage claim entrance tunnel of the Terminal 5 building at New York’s JFK airport, 1<sup>st</sup> October 2004 – 21<sup>st</sup> January 2005.

[http://www.ryojiikeda.com/project/spectra/#spectra\\_II](http://www.ryojiikeda.com/project/spectra/#spectra_II)

<sup>277</sup> As described by Lucy Lippard as being the true definition from her own dictionary. In: Lippard, L (1999) *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art and Place*. New York: The New Press. P.153

<sup>278</sup> *ibid.* P.153.

<sup>279</sup> *ibid.* P. 154.

his Life-World or *Lebenswelt*<sup>280</sup> that placed the experience within the world through which *Radioflash* could have been explored. However emotion remained absent within phenomenological discourse for the remainder of most of the Twentieth century until the emergence of Gesellschaft für Neue Phänomenologie (GNP)<sup>281</sup> in 1992.

Throughout this chapter I will be continuing to explore the notion of the phenomenological experience *as* a work of art, using a new work: *Hush House* as the central example. The basis for this stage of research is to explore the concept of the experience as the work of art, beyond the Husserlian frame of constructed memory, picking up his Life-world into another context of the emotional phenomenological experience, as illustrated by *spectra*. A new wave of phenomenology, the GNP, has opened this discourse.

The Gesellschaft für Neue Phänomenologie (GNP) was established in 1992 to seek an “affective involvement”<sup>282</sup> in the definition of new phenomenology:

*New phenomenology differs from other philosophical approaches in that it is orientated around experience and applicability.*<sup>283</sup>

This timely link between the *Neue Phänomenologie* and the growing interest in the experiential artwork may apply a more appropriate phenomenological frame, through which to question how the phenomenological may link to the contemporary sublime experience, pursued within this research.

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<sup>280</sup> Husserl’s progression from 1925 – 1928 in his *Ideas I*, away from transcendental idealism to a layering of experience against the background of the world. Interacting with nature and making pre-theoretical, cultural associations. This was eventually picked up and adopted by Merleau-Ponty.

<sup>281</sup> Society for New Phenomenology

<sup>282</sup> Werner Müller-Pelzer in: Witte, A & Harden, T (2011): *Intercultural Competence. Concepts, Challenges, Evaluations*. Oxford: Peter Lang. Pp. 57.

<sup>283</sup> Gesellschaft für Neue Phänomenologie (2012) *GNP Online* [online]. Accessed 15/10/2011. <http://www.gnp-online.de/index.php?id=15&L=1>

## Hush House

*Hush House* is a site-specific sound installation with equal principal ingredients of sound, journey and architecture.

The site is a decommissioned Cold War American airbase in rural Suffolk: the former RAF Bentwaters, on which stands a hush house, used for testing jet aircraft engines. The architecture of the building was designed for a particular purpose and yet this purpose is outside of the layman's common knowledge and therefore has an ambiguity to it. It is this quality that, unlike the bunker of *Radioflash*, already recognisable through fictional representation, establishes an uncertainty as to what might be encountered inside the building.



Fig.17

The journey to the building requires driving across the entire length of the military base, enabling a rich visual tapestry of abandoned Cold War ephemera to be absorbed on the approach to the hush house building. This is after having made a drive through the entirely agricultural surrounding countryside. Arrival at the building is met with very little indication of 'the rules' of how to engage with the work, or what the work might be. Minimal signposting guides rather than controls the subject and entry into the

building is taken in ones own time. The combination of these elements establishes an environment in which the subject has already become a participant. As Felix Barrett suggests of the comparable experience in the work of Punchdrunk:

*[It is] allowing the body to become empowered because the audience have to make physical decisions and choices, and in doing that they make some sort of pact with the piece. They're physically involved with the piece and therefore it becomes visceral.*<sup>284</sup>

This knowingly active relationship between the audience and work is the basis for *Hush House*, as an experiment in creating a phenomenological experience as the art work.

The sound within the space consists of five low frequency, large wavelength, modulating sine tones: 10, 20, 23, 31 and 32 Hz. They were generated in order to fit the shape of the internal chamber of the building<sup>285</sup>, creating a sense of the sound being projected by the fabric of the building itself and no central focus to the source, therefore remaining acousmatic. These frequencies are drawn from the scale of frequencies once generated by the jet engines tested in the building during active service. These particular frequencies would be considered the undesirable ones, sitting at the lower threshold of human hearing but causing physical impact on the body. One frequency: 10 Hz is below audible level.

The reference to the building's resonant frequencies is important as the sickness caused in industrial and military sites was undetected until French scientist - Dr. Vladimir Gavreau, detected ongoing building sickness amongst his researchers whilst developing military arms from his laboratories in 1957.

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<sup>284</sup> Felix Barret describing his own work with *Punchdrunk* in: Machon, J (2009) "Felix Barrett and Maxine Doyle of Punchdrunk: In the Pra-sens of Body and Space – The (Syn)aesthetics of Site-Sympathetic Work", *(Syn)aesthetics: Redefining Visceral Performance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. P.89.

<sup>285</sup> The size of waves measure 33.3m, 17.5m, 14.9m, 11.1m and 10.7m respectively. The internal building dimensions are 20m x 25m x 10m at the highest point of the vaulted roof, dropping to 7m high at the edges. The tunnel is 6.6m in diameter.

*It was thought that the condition was caused by pathogens, a “building sickness”... The source was traced back to an improperly installed motor-driven ventilator ... It was found that the loosely poised low speed motor, poised in its cavernous duct of several stories, was developing ‘nauseating vibrations’.*<sup>286</sup>

The sickness known as kinetosis is common amongst operators of machinery, the use of which is now strictly legislated<sup>287</sup>.

The sensation experienced through the low frequency sound waves is an important factor within the overall experience of the space. It is the device that ‘animates’ the space through this suggested tactile sense of what may have been experienced during full working order of the hangar.

*Hush House* and *spectra (for Terminal 5, JFK)* are not works implicated in a hierarchical model of viewer and work, where the viewer observes the work as an external object. They are works that require their visitor to become participant. There is no separation between the environment in which the work is sited or how the body is physically affected by the work. The subject participates in the work as the immersive environment<sup>288</sup> defined, once again, by Dyson.

The *Hush House* exhibition text reads:

*Hush House is a combination of the unfamiliar spectacle of this Cold War building and the presence of low frequency sound in the space. They form an experience of unnerving ambiguity about the space, enabling the spectator, as participant, to form conclusions about the site, and a visceral engagement with it. The sensation experienced is the work.*

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<sup>286</sup> Vassilatos, G (2006) “The Sonic Weapon of Vladimir Gavreau”, *Borderlands.com* [online]. Accessed 2/10/2006. <http://www.borderlands.com/archives/arch/gavreaus.htm>.

<sup>287</sup> Augoyard, J-F & Torgue, H (2005) *Sonic Experience: A Guide to Everyday Sounds* Montreal: McGill – Queens University Press. P.107.

<sup>288</sup> The notion of the immersive, as defined by Dyson, is once again appropriate to *Hush House*, through its appropriation of the same ‘energy’ as the media and will therefore be used in this context throughout this chapter.

*Hush House is a work that serves to question how we experience site-specific artworks that are ambiguous in their framing. The encounter may be very different from one experienced in a gallery or performance space, as we are not given clear parameters and boundaries around what we are experiencing – there is no obvious “art object”. This is a work that relies on a combination of our aural, visual and tactile senses – a visceral sensation that initially prioritises the emotional response over the intellectual. Hush House presents this back to us by enabling us to be conscious of this experiencing whilst also questioning how much of it is due to artist intervention and how much is determined by our individual experiences and associations we make.*<sup>289</sup>

Within the context of this research, the notion of the immersive has been applied across several examples and defined according to its suitability and appropriateness. It has also been appropriated by Denis Smalley in his reference to immersive space as “The filling of spectral and perspectival space in circumspace so that the listener feels immersed in the image”<sup>290</sup>. Dyson’s choice of electromagnetic energy being immersive rather than penetrative is appropriate to *Hush House*, as it was in *Radioflash*, given the piece employs the same electromagnetic energy, manifesting in sound waves, as the medium. The work is the conversion of the energy into a tangible entity, a recognition of the phenomenological experience.

It is, however, framed within a more specific narrative context of the site, in order to pull the phenomenological acknowledgement back from a purely abstract sensory experience as created by Michael Asher for *Spaces* (1969-70) where the room was manipulated: “Emptying the room of visual differentiation, from sightlines to acoustic zones, from visual distance to aural contraction, Asher altered a viewer’s expectations, turning the experience of art viewing into an acoustical absence”<sup>291</sup>. The context of site and its potency as a symbol of twentieth century power will be explored further throughout this chapter.

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<sup>289</sup> Exhibition signage for: Sandys, K (2010) “Hush House” *Faster than Sound/Aldeburgh Music*, Bentwaters Parks, Woodbridge, Suffolk. [Installation] 19<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> March 2010.

<sup>290</sup> Smalley, D (2007) “Space-form and the Acousmatic Image”. *Organised Sound*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Vol 12, Issue 1. P.55.

<sup>291</sup> LaBelle, B (2006) *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art Continuum* International Publishing. P.88.

From *Radioflash* and the Journey, to *Hush House* and the Site

*Radioflash* placed the subject inside an experience that required the subject to trust the text offered in advance of the work. Given that the premise of the work was about invisibility of the protective Faraday Cage, this trust was extended to the experience. The cage (eventually revealed as a fictional one) was represented by the sound generated in the bunker. The sound described the architecture of the space as a three-staged event, from one room to the next.

As outlined in relation to *spectra* (for *Terminal 5, JFK*), *Hush House* takes this one step further by removing any sense of the existence of a present sound generating object around which the work is based. The object in *Hush House* is the absent efflux of the jet engine. This places the subject in an encounter with the apparent sonic memory of the site. The lack of obvious point of focus, unboundaried journey to the site and anticipation built throughout the journey heightens the sense of expectation of the object, never revealed. The subject is left with a sense of empty, lost, past presence of the space as they navigate their way through it. The feeling is one in the past, one that has gone, one that feels like the trace or an absence of something that, although being experienced in the now, is describing something in the past.

In *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* Jacques Lacan describes the loss of the Mother, being replaced with an image. The image is the thing. It is not real but fills the void of the real. It cannot be presented but is a replacement and therefore characterises the impossibility of replacement with something always reminding us of its impossibility of replacement. It is a signifier in the void<sup>292</sup>. There is no signifier in *Hush House*, nothing that can replace the absence, due to there being no immediate reference to draw from. What replaces the lost signifier is a sensation. The sensation is physiological, but,

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<sup>292</sup> Lacan, J (1992) *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* Basingstoke:Routledge. P. 125

as a physical movement of air pressure and therefore not visible, it is not readily recognised as a physical manifestation of the loss. The physical sensation is interpreted as an emotional one. This emotional vulnerability is the place in which the constructed memory, or nostalgia might reside. If nostalgia follows Lippard's definition, however, it seems to suggest a sense of historical tourism is the focus of *Hush House*. There is no intention to animate an historical building for the sake of highlighting the building's full working purpose, as a history lesson, but through a rather more enigmatic reference to its past use. The animation is a sense of presence rather than a re-enactment of its past.

### The Experience of *Hush House*

As with *Hush House*, Rjoji Ikeda's *spectra (for Terminal 5, JFK)* uses sound as a way of describing the architectural space whilst creating a sense of disorientation. Neither pieces employ a clear sound image or source – both are acousmatic, using either very high frequencies in the case of *spectra (for Terminal 5, JFK)*, or very low frequencies in *Hush House*. Denis Smalley describes this as spectral space:

*Spectral space is concerned with space and spaciousness in the vertical dimension – up, down, height, depth, along with the infill and clearing.*<sup>293</sup>

Edmund Carpenter would have regarded it auditory space:

*Auditory Space has no point of favoured focus. It's a sphere without fixed boundaries, space made by the thing itself, not space containing the thing. It is not pictorial space, boxed in, but dynamic, always in flux, creating its own dimensions moment by moment. It has no fixed boundaries; it is indifferent to background. The eye focuses, pinpoints, abstracts, locating each object in physical space, against a background; the ear however, favours sound from any direction.*<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> Smalley, D (2007) "Space-form and the Acousmatic Image". *Organised Sound*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Vol 12, Issue 1. P.45.

<sup>294</sup> Carpenter, E & Heyman, K (1970) *They Became What They Beheld*. New York: Outerbridge & Dienstfrey. P. 67

This mode of listening is more akin to our regular mode of listening, the immersion defined by Augoyard and Torgue<sup>295</sup> as a background drone of the everyday where we are not drawn to a particular sound object or specific source. This does not apply to the entire listening experience of *Hush House* however. The walk from exterior to interior and back to exterior does heighten the profound differences in the apparent solitude of the Suffolk countryside.

The drive across the former military airbase offers what has already been described as the visual indicators toward the *type* of building *Hush House* is sited in. Arriving at the hush house, from its exterior, it appears as much like the other hardened hangars on the airbase.



Fig.18

There is little indication as to where the cars or buses are to be parked, other than a sign indicating the entrance side. As there are only two obvious entrances to the building, it is clear that the exterior staircase, to the top of the efflux tunnel must be the entrance. A sign on the stairs indicates a hint of the potential risk of nausea or dizziness. This sign is carefully positioned in relation to the ascent of the stairs, an act of elevation to a higher place. With a foreboding warning, the question could be what the decent might hold. On reaching the top of the staircase, a clear view of the airfield can be seen in one direction and the farmland in the other. The view to the horizon in any direction reveals nothing more than the two, with very few residential

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<sup>295</sup> See previous reference and definition from P 64 of Augoyard & Torgues.

dwellings. This view is offered as a reminder of the concealment of Cold War activity in the most rural parts of the UK. Many of the hangars at RAF Bentwaters were disguised as barns using rather naïve scenography taken from an American rural aesthetic and placing it in the British landscape. The hard standing launch pads or “operational readiness platforms”<sup>296</sup> are concealed within the woodland peripheral areas of the airbase. RAF Bentwaters housed reserve nuclear warheads in the “igloos”<sup>297</sup> and was therefore one of the most heavily concealed airbases.

The decent down the staircase, into the efflux tunnel is a deliberate construct of *Hush House*. There is an uncertainty about what the tunnel is, what lies in it and what might be greeted at the other end. This tension is a specific factor in the work.

Edmund Burke suggests, in contemplating the difference between looking up and looking down as “a powerful cause of the sublime”<sup>298</sup>, that “we are more struck by looking down from a precipice, than at looking up at an object of equal height.”<sup>299</sup> This suggestion is coupled with his references to Milton and the reiteration of depth and “darkness to be a cause of the sublime.”<sup>300</sup> Kant supports this in his suggestion that:

*A great height is just as sublime as a great depth, except that the latter is accompanied with the sensation of shuddering, the former with one of wonder. Hence the latter feeling can be the terrifying sublime, and the former the noble.*<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Cocroft, W & Thomas, R (2004) *Cold War: Building for Nuclear Confrontation 1946 – 1989*. Swindon: English Heritage. P 27.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid. P 60.

<sup>298</sup> Burke, E (1757) *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. P. 66.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid. P.66.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid. P.132.

<sup>301</sup> Kant, I (1960) Goldthwaite, J T (trans.) *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*. Los Angeles: University of California Press. Pp. 48 – 49.



Fig.19

The descent to the bottom of the staircase leads the eye down the tunnel, to the main chamber of the hangar. At this point the subject is still standing in open daylight with the concrete of the blast wall behind them. This position in the hangar is the point at which the efflux would have been directed. The realisation that no engine or blast is about to be inflicted offers a moment of respite. This main chamber ahead is dark but architectural features in either wall can be identified as large louvers used to enable air to be drawn into the building, directed through the engine and down the tunnel. With no engine in position, the building feels calm. This is enhanced by the exterior sounds of only insects, birds and the occasional light aircraft travelling overhead. There are distant sounds of agricultural vehicles but no other intrusion into the rural soundscape<sup>302</sup>.

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<sup>302</sup> Soundscape is most significantly defined by R. Murray Schafer as having “*Keynote sounds, signals and soundmarks... The keynote sounds of the landscape are those created by its geography and climate: water, wind, forests, plains, birds, insects and animals... Signals are foreground sounds and are listened to consciously... Soundmark is derived from landmark and refers to the community sound which is unique or possesses qualities which make it specially regarded or noticed by the people of that community.* In Schafer, M (1977) *The Tuning of the World* New York: Alfred A Knopf. P. 10.

When entering the tunnel, a sense of quietness, apart from footsteps on the perforated metal cladding, descends. There is a point at the two-thirds mark of the tunnel where exterior noises become lost and a sense of absolute silence is reached. At this point, the waves of the sound filling the main body of the building are too large to enter the tunnel and the outdoor sounds are absorbed by the acoustic insulation material, sandwiched in the perforated metal walls. The tunnel walls absorb sounds from the subject's own body and the sensation is one of absolute stillness.

This quietly unnerving point of the journey into the building is as disturbing as the bombardment of senses from Ikeda's piece, for the same reason: in both instances, this is no longer a normal state of hearing. The *Hush House* audience become aware of a shift from one type of sound to another, from a sensation of open, distant reach of hearing, to a very close and enclosed sensation. In Pierre Schaeffer's acousmatic reduction, the subject has moved from *Ecouter* or the sounds surrounding us that contextualise the event at the time, the sounds that "are an index to a network of associations and experiences; we are concerned with causality."<sup>303</sup>, to *Entendre* and a listening for the quality of sound itself, as confronted by it.

*Hearing, here, according to its etymology, means showing an intention to listen, choosing from what we perceive what particularly interests us, in order to make a "description" of it.*<sup>304</sup>

This change in 'listening experience' was observed as a number of subjects moved back and forth in the tunnel in order to establish the point at which *Ecouter* became *Entendre*. Their movement in and out of the threshold of the tunnel and main space almost appeared predictably choreographed by the subjects, after a while.

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<sup>303</sup> Kane, B (2007) "L'Objet Sonore Maintenant: Pierre Schaeffer, sound objects and the phenomenological reduction." *Organised Sound*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Vol 12, Issue 1. P.18.

<sup>304</sup> Chion, M (1983) *Guide Des Objets Sonores*. Paris: Editions Buchet/Chastel. P 20.

There is a very obvious deadening of sounds. The sound is not loud but feels close and prominent – within touching distant. It is through tuning the frequencies of sound, in relationship to the building that has created this sensation. Applying Barry Blesser and Linda - Ruth Salter's idea of the aural architect<sup>305</sup>, to the space, I have selected specific attributes of the space, described them with the sound and framed them in order to heighten the emotional and sensory experience at that moment of moving over the threshold.

The subject moves beyond the threshold of the tunnel and stillness to be greeted by an opening of the space and experience of sound. A creeping, low modulation of sound pulses wraps their way around the head of the subject and steadily through the body cavities too.



Fig.20

These frequencies are mainly on the threshold of audibility (between 20 – 32Hz), with the one at 10 Hz, below audible level or infrasonic, similar to those also experienced in *Radioflash*.

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<sup>305</sup> Blesser, B & Salter, L – R (2007) *Spaces Speak, Are You Listening: Experiencing Aural Architecture* Cambridge: MIT Press. P.5

The sound is generated from a simple tone generator using the six sine waves, on a modulating continual loop. The modulation enables an ebb and flow of the sound in an apparent random fashion as the waves occasionally clash with one another creating either a cancelling of their own wave or a standing wave. As these waves are as big as the space, it is possible to step in and out of areas where the sound appears to disappear. This is short-lived as the next wave in the modulating cycle replaces the momentary apparent silence.

It was important that the source of the sound, coming from the speakers, remained hidden. The image was a stereo one, with only two sub – woofers generating the sound. These are not standard PA speakers<sup>306</sup> but designed by *Meyer Sound* for their ability to drive lower than audible frequencies in specialist installations. It was possible to conceal both cabinets in two unused recesses of the building that remained entirely dark but allowed a 150 degree angle of play in order to utilise the most unfocused reflections within the space. This ability to create an entirely acousmatic image was an important factor in the achieving the “ubiquity effect”<sup>307</sup> within the space.

The infrasonic sound frequency resonates through the space enhance the sense of trepidation as the body is physically disrupted rather than being drawn to a focused aural point. The creeping sensation is an imaginary one, prompted by the physical and psychological experience, which cannot be rationalised through an intellectual enquiry of the piece. As Schaeffer suggests:

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<sup>306</sup> Therefore no model number or catalogue reference.

<sup>307</sup> *An effect linked to the spatio-temporal conditions that expresses the difficulty or impossibility of locating a sound source... Diffused, unstable, omnidirectional sound presents an intrinsic tendency towards ubiquity – in fact it is impossible to delimit or materialize the “location” of a sound... Certain sounds are in fact more present than others: any “sound background” – an urban drone, the purring of a machine in a reverberant room, or the bodily hum of an organism – can be described as a ubiquitous sound in the very literal sense that it comes from everywhere and nowhere at the same time.* In: Augoyard, J-F & Torgue, H (2005) *Sonic Experience: A Guide to Everyday Sounds* Montreal: McGill – Queens University Press. Pp. 130 – 131.

*Often surprised, often uncertain, we discover that much of what we thought we were hearing, was in reality only seen, and explained, by the context.*<sup>308</sup>

It is a purely visceral and reflex action. It is that recognition of complete awareness of ones hearing, the *Entendre*, which makes the work consciously phenomenological.

### Decentring Within *Hush House*

This experience has been the basis of phenomenological enquiry with or without a name, since the emergence of phenomenology. Husserl brought the notion of the “lived body” to attention, to be challenged in recent years by Hermann Schmitz and his *Neue Phänomenologie* of emotion and “affective involvement”. The lived body of the subject engages with their perceptual field, or what Husserl calls technically the Life-world (*Lebenswelt*). As Edward Casey suggests: “to neglect the life-world is to neglect the role of the “lived body”<sup>309</sup> which is conceived by Husserl as essential to the experience of the life-world”. He concludes that the body within the perceptual field: “engages with the sensuous aspect of things in such a way as to dovetail with them in an ongoing participation.”<sup>310</sup>

Within Husserl’s model of the *Life-world*, there would be no separation between memory of experience and perception of the experience in the current moment. Within Schmitz’ model, the ‘felt body’ is equally connected between memory and what is being perceived but is married with an emotional and conceptual connection. It is this ongoing perception of past, present, memory and emotion that I have appropriated within *Hush House* as the moving frame and a blurring of what is perceived as the artwork and what is the real world.

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<sup>308</sup> Pierre Schaeffer in: Kane , B (2007) “*L’Objet Sonore Maintenant: Pierre Schaeffer, sound objects and the phenomenological reduction.*”. *Organised Sound*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Vol 12, Issue 1. Pp.17 – 18.

<sup>309</sup> Casey, E (1998) *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*. Los Angeles: University of California Press. p. 217.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.* P. 217

What is fundamental to the experiences of *Hush House*, for the subject, is the moving view of the subject from observer to participant and, ultimately, to the “decentred”<sup>311</sup> position that leaves the subject at odds with the single position from which to understand the work. The decentred position in this instance is one where the subject is not offered the reward of object or clearly identifiable end point. The intellectual capacity by which to rationalise the concept is removed. As suggested in the previous chapter, Rosalind Krauss’ analysis is limited to the object but the notion of decentring may encompass the four-dimensional space, since as Krauss clarifies, it is:

*Less easy to recognise the human body in those works and therefore less easy to project ourselves into the space of that sculpture with all our settled prejudices left intact.*<sup>312</sup>

The durational nature of *Hush House* expands and contracts at a different scale for each subject. Being inside the work forces the gaze to become active since the subject must move around in order to accommodate the full extent of the work. The subject thus may become conscious of their auditory and kinaesthetic sensations, not necessarily activated during the experience of sculpture in the gallery.

*Hush House* is not sculpture, not even sound sculpture; it is an installation that envelops or, already acknowledged through Smalley and Dyson<sup>313</sup>, ‘immerses’ the subject. The subject is no longer a spectator, but becomes a participant as the gaze is denied any obviously artistic object of contemplation and the work demands the use of all senses in order to accommodate it. As Claire Bishop remarks on the notion of decentring subjective experience, the subject also becomes *activated* within the work.<sup>314</sup> This notion of an active engagement is vital to all installation

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<sup>311</sup> Used in relation to Krauss’s definition.

<sup>312</sup> Krauss, R (1981) *Passages in Modern Sculpture*. Cambridge: MIT Press. pp. 279

<sup>313</sup> See previous references.

<sup>314</sup> Bishop’s notion of the activated viewer is the spectator enveloped by the work, not a distanced, physically passive spectator. Bishop suggests this is inherent within all installation art.

work<sup>315</sup>, be it the “art grounded in the human, the subjective and the world around it” of Paul Thek<sup>316</sup>, Christina Kubisch and Graf Haufen or the absence of time and space, “liberated from all objects”<sup>317</sup> in James Turrell’s gallery installations. But our sense of the location of the installation will affect how enveloping<sup>318</sup> that experience truly is. If we define the notion of the “enveloping experience” according to Augoyard and Torgue, it adopts qualities that could be inspired by Kant’s own Critique’s. Augoyard and Torgue define “Envelopment” as:

*The feeling of being surrounded by the body of sound that has a capacity to create an autonomous whole, that predominates over other circumstantial features of the moment. The envelopment effect is sometimes applied to negative situations, but most often it provokes reactions comparable to bewitchment – staggering, delightful.*<sup>319</sup>

This domination of the sonic experience over other sensory inputs cannot be purely exclusive though as the whole event is conditioned by the subject’s experiences before entering the work. This includes the journey to the work, or a longer period that encompasses past experiences that have informed and shaped our own perception of the world. An experience does not rely on the momentary witnessing alone. As Immanuel Kant suggested:

*Our knowledge begins with experience. For how should our faculty of knowledge be awakened into actions did not objects affecting our senses partly of themselves produce representations, partly arouse the activity of our understanding to compare these representations, and, by combining or separating them, work up the raw material of the sensible impressions into that knowledge of objects which is entitled experience?”*<sup>320</sup>

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Bishop, C (2006) *Installation Art*. London: Tate Publishing. P. 102 - 127

<sup>315</sup> Not to be mistaken with the active intellect we adopt in the presence of all artworks. This engagement is a phenomenological active engagement.

<sup>316</sup> Delehanty, S (1977) *Paul Thek, Processions*. Philadelphia:Falcon Press.

<sup>317</sup> Birnbaum, D (1995) *Eyes*. Magasin 3. Stockholm.

<sup>318</sup> Augoyard, J-F & Torgue, H (2005) *Sonic Experience: A Guide to Everyday Sounds* Montreal: McGill – Queens University Press. P.47.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid. P.47.

<sup>320</sup> Kant, I (1985) *Immanuel Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*. (trans) Kemp Smith, N. London: Macmillan. Pp. 41

In his first Critique, Kant presents us with the fundamental basis of knowledge aside from our sensory experience. We now accept that this must also be true of our sensory perceptual experience, the agent through which we form the reasoning around how we build knowledge upon knowledge. Indeed Husserl was critical of Kant “as he did not grasp the need for a foundation in something other than the pure mind”<sup>321</sup> and drew no connection to corporeal functioning, or the lived body. It is within the nature of the site-specific installation that is “said to render one conscious of one’s existing within this ambience. The body of site specificity [is] a physicalized body, aware of its surroundings, a body of heightened critical acuity.”<sup>322</sup>

The initial moments of witnessing the artwork (be it visual art, performance, music, text) will be a unique and unrepeatable moment of encounter and as subject in that exchange we will respond according to our instinctive visceral perception at that moment. We move from the position of spectator of the world, to a subject of experience. The association we make between our past sensible intuition as Kant described, and the new experience of the moment are combined to form a compound knowledge from which “we are not in a position to distinguish [new knowledge] from raw material”<sup>323</sup>, the raw material being our *a priori*<sup>324</sup> knowledge of the world.

The raw material or *a priori* knowledge is important to our reasoning of the concept we are confronted with but we do unconsciously apply our sensible knowledge in this equation. If we failed to retain the sensorial memories

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<sup>321</sup> Casey, E (1998) *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*. Los Angeles: University of California Press. p. 217.

<sup>322</sup> James Meyer in: Suderberg, E (2000) *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. P.26.

<sup>323</sup> Kant, I (1985) *Immanuel Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*. (trans) Kemp Smith, N. London: Macmillan. pp. 42

<sup>324</sup> Kant proposes an *a priori* knowledge is not necessarily a ‘pure’ knowledge if there is a requirement of experience to test the judgement in question. He reserves the right to reduce its ‘purity’ at later points in his critique, when importing a judgement based on experience, for the benefit of clarifying a proposition but in this example *a priori* is proposed as judgement independent of actual experience, just knowledge of the universal rule.

from all past experiences, we would be unable to make the decisions that protect our survival, all of which are governed by our sensory knowledge and prioritised by our unconscious over the conscious reasoning of intellect. In identifying the subject's consciousness of the sensible knowledge of seeing, hearing, touching as a sensorial 'scanning' of the encounter with the artwork, they are treating the experience as phenomenon. This is not a smooth and fluid thing, they are always collecting these data in pockets of information and rely on an *a priori* knowledge to fill in the gaps and form a continually changing narrative in order to make sense of this continuous, changing experience. The rationalising of this experiencing is converted into the perceived fluid and continuous chain of events. It is the capacity of every individual to assimilate their own prior experiences with their momentary experience that forms the fluid interpretation of the event. This gap filling derives from the individual imagination and memory and may be encountered in varying degrees of consciousness.

This is the basis of Husserl's *Life-world* and still maintained a resonance within the phenomenological reading of Minimalist work. A more existential approach, it moved Husserl on from his empirical reduction, from transcendental knowledge assuming that what we conceive is true as we describe it - the *a priori* - prior to the confrontation of experience, to a world defined as "the consciousness which gives, which sees, which effects presence, and it supports and founds the consciousness which signifies, which judges, and which speaks."<sup>325</sup> As with Kant, he concluded that we entered the world not from our consciousness but from the world itself, the existence of the object in the world came first and consciousness of this followed rather than a will of consciousness informing the world.

The gap filling within this later progression is presented not as a chronology of experience with one experience following after another but as

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<sup>325</sup> Ricouer, P (1967) *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*. Ballard, E, Embree, L (trans) Evanston: Northwestern University Press. pp. 204

simultaneity, what Husserl referred to as “passive genesis”<sup>326</sup>. So it is that, as Bernet, Kern and Marbach comment:

*Spatial perceptual objects are never fully given in intuition with respect to all their sides and characteristics, and yet, in the simple performance of a perception of a thing a unified thing is seen, and not merely, say, its front side.*<sup>327</sup>

By bringing associated memory to the new experience, an entire different experience is formed through synthesis of the parts.

In Husserl’s lecture course *Einleitung in die Logik und Erkenntnistheorie* of 1906 he begins with the observation of our awareness of our perceiving. The sensations of the perceptual experience itself are not objects that can be rationalized with the reflective perceptual experience. This sensation referred to as the *Urbewusstsein*<sup>328</sup> is formed of all the memories ever existing before. They are part of the unconscious being and therefore inherently unintentional. They can only be revisited upon the associated introduction of memory so create the synthesized new perception, even if the experience is fleeting.

### The Cold War Aesthetic Fulfilled by Memory

*Hush House* utilizes this association of memory, perceived memory and perceptual experience, or passive genesis, in order to create the narrative against which the experience is heightened<sup>329</sup>. The drive across the airfield at RAF Bentwaters offers opportunities for this as the journey takes in views of hardened shell bunkers, decommissioned Harrier jet aircraft, watch towers and the navigational markings on the tarmac.

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<sup>326</sup> *The structuring of objects in layers sedimented upon one another.* In: Moran, D (2000) *Introduction to Phenomenology* London: Routledge. P.167.

<sup>327</sup> Bernet, R; Kern, I; Marbach, E (1999) *An Introduction to Husserlian Phenomenology.* Evanston: Northwestern University Press. pp. 6

<sup>328</sup> Translates as ‘primal consciousness’ or ‘original consciousness’

<sup>329</sup> With context forming the basis for the narrative and myth, as described by Barthes in *Mythologies* in ‘The Form and the Concept’. Pp.126-128.

None of this might be familiar within an everyday environment but stand as symbols for the military activity imagined for the site. They form a fractured image of former activity, with the gaps filled by an imagined narrative. This encourages a desire to fabricate an active world from these relics.



Fig.21

It is that desire that enabled film to form such vivid imagery depicting military activity during the Cold War that therefore perpetuated the imagined architectural landscapes of the Cold War.

In an interview with Christopher Frayling, in 2003, Ken Adam, Production Designer of several James Bond films<sup>330</sup>, described how he was able to enhance the sense of reality within the design of significant locations, or as Frayling offers: “not offending the audiences’ sense of reality, but pushing it further and further.”<sup>331</sup> Adam described how he was unable to access the vaults of Fort Knox in order to reproduce accurate replicas of the bullion rooms for ‘Goldfinger’ (1964). He had no access to the vault and had created an environment of pure imagination, with gold piled high – completely unrealistic in terms of weight-loading but stylized for effect. He

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<sup>330</sup> Those produced as the Cubby Broccoli franchise.

<sup>331</sup> Frayling, C (2005) *Ken Adam: The Art of Production Design*. London: Faber and Faber. P.137

had visited the vaults at the Bank of England and found them “most uninteresting”<sup>332</sup>. His version of the bullion vault offered an idealised image of how he imagined the store *should* look. As he continued: “Fort Knox is interesting because it is like the War Room: nobody has been there so we can only imagine what it looks like.”<sup>333</sup> This satisfied a curiosity and, more importantly, fulfilled a desire to know what was behind all the secrets and covert military activity of the Cold War.

The perpetuation of the covert activity of the Cold War was maintained through novels and movies, with very little reality ever presented. Even the exposure of British Double Agents: Donald McLean, Kim Philby, Guy Burgess and Anthony Blunt retained an elegant and charismatic media image, through cultural and academic connections and associations.

It is a desire for the filmic version of the Cold War, that might offer the lure for exploring the deserted military installations we are now able to access, be they the vast deserts of Nevada’s Nuclear Test Site in the U.S, or the open lowlands of Suffolk, in the UK. These military sites currently still have the forbidden nature and air of danger that feeds our curiosity. As outlined in the introduction, this interest has emerged in the work of other contemporary artists and seen through retrospectives of Cold War. *Cold War Modern: Design 1945-1970* at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2008 claimed:

*Art and design were not peripheral symptoms of politics during the Cold War: they played a central role in representing and sometimes challenging the dominant political and social ideas of the age.*<sup>334</sup>

In developing *Hush House*, a busy, industrial or urban landscape experienced in *Radioflash*, would make this encounter a mildly interesting one but it is the juxtaposition of the hard architecture of these sites, in the

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<sup>332</sup> *ibid.* P. 139.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.* P139.

<sup>334</sup> Victoria & Albert Museum (2008) *Cold War Modern: Design 1945-1970*. [online] 25<sup>th</sup> September – 11<sup>th</sup> January 2009. <http://www.vam.ac.uk/microsites/cold-war-modern/>

bleak but agriculturally well developed landscape of Suffolk that makes the encounter a rather more unfamiliar and surprise one. This part of the UK is, nevertheless, filled with these de-commissioned installations, although most of them remain well hidden within the landscape and in some cases have been once again re-appropriated by the agricultural community as storage hangers for onions or potatoes – a twist on the picturesque image often associated with Suffolk through the work of John Constable and Benjamin Britten. The rural idyll, however, remains largely intact, around the sites, due to most of its trade routes being via its coastline, reducing the inland impact of major road networks.

In this respect it retains a great deal of similarity with the deserts of Nevada, having land access to a limited number of towns allowing much of the countryside to remain largely untouched by visitors. It is the visitor therefore that finds the juxtaposed military sites, in the landscape, a more alien encounter.

This background of landscape, against which the work and therefore the experience is foregrounded, is maintained in Husserl's conclusion with his *life-world* and subsequently supported by Merleau – Ponty as he forms the connection of things in space by what they have in common, their shared characteristics. As James Meyer concludes: “ An underlying topos of Merleau – Ponty's phenomenology, of the happening and performance, Presence became an aesthetic and ethical *cri de couer* among the generation of artists and critics who emerged in the 1960's, suggesting an experience of actualness and authenticity.”<sup>335</sup> Space, is thus “not the setting (real or logical) in which things are arranged, but the means whereby the position of things become possible.”<sup>336</sup>

Merleau – Ponty's complete acceptance of what constitutes a corporeal encounter and space, as the phenomenological experience or “true

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<sup>335</sup> James Meyer in: Suderberg, E (2000) *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. P.26.

<sup>336</sup> Merleau – Ponty, M (2002) *Phenomenology of Perception*. pp. 284

perception”<sup>337</sup> has been further explored by a new wave of phenomenological discourse, in the last twenty years: *Neue Phänomenologie*.

It is the writings of Hermann Schmitz, between 1964 and 1980: the *System of Philosophy* that ignited a new philosophical thinking about what the felt experience is. Schmitz believes that the felt body is not just the Husserlian body of linking experiences, separated from the mind. He embraces the *leib* (the felt body) as one with emotions, feelings, subjectivity and recognition of the embodied experience. Since 1992, the ‘Society for New Phenomenology (Gesellschaft für Neue Phänomenologie)’ has discussed, explored and published notions around emotions as spatial atmospheres. In the first English translation of Schmitz publications – *Emotions Outside the Box – The New Phenomenology of Feeling and Corporeality*<sup>338</sup>, Rudolf Owen Mullen introduces Schmitz’ consideration of the body and space:

*It is worth pointing to Schmitz’ theory of space here in particular, because it is one of the most characteristic elements of his overall approach. Space, according to Schmitz, is not originally encountered as the measurable, locational space assumed in physics and geography, but rather as a pre-dimensional surfaceless realm manifest to each of us in undistorted corporeal experience, for example in hearing voluminous sounds or sensing atmospheres. Examples of surfaceless space include the massive, room-filling sound of a giant church bell, but also the shrill and sharp cry of a bird of prey. The weather, too, presents surfaceless spaces that are felt immediately in our bodily responsiveness to the atmosphere surrounding us. Crucially, the felt body itself is a surfaceless space, or more precisely an assemblage of many such spaces: corporeal “islands” such as the stomach region or the soles of feet are felt as diffuse but still separately identifiable spatial realms. Not surprisingly, Schmitz argues for the primacy of felt pre-dimensional, surfaceless space, undertaking to demonstrate that the measurable, three-dimensional physical space is a derived, theoretically stabilised construction imposed upon original spatial experience on which it is conceptually*

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<sup>337</sup> *ibid.* P. 343.

<sup>338</sup> Schmitz, H, Müllan, R O and Slaby, J (2011) “Emotions Outside the Box – The New Phenomenology of Feeling and Corporeality”, *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, Vol 10, no. 2. pp. 241 – 259

*dependent.*<sup>339</sup>

Francis Crick explains:

*In perception, what the brain learns is usually about the outside world or about other parts of the body. This is why what we see appears to be located outside us, although the neurons that do the seeing are inside the head... The 'world' is outside their body yet, in another sense, it is entirely within their head.*<sup>340</sup>

The physiological experience of the 'predimensional surfaceless realm' is one felt internally but we consider it to be an external experience and embrace it as our individual and unique experience that we can only understand.

In the example of *Hush House*, the subject is experiencing this predimensional surfaceless realm as a real and a psychoacoustic effect known as phenomnesis<sup>341</sup>, or imagined sound. Ross Brown describes it:

*In the cases of synaesthesia or schizophrenia, or when we hallucinate through tiredness, we hear things 'out there' which normally we would only think 'in here'. These sounds appear every bit as real as perceived sounds. In a way, they are as real: all sound is merely thought, and any sound which one appears to hear 'out there' is in only a psychoacoustic projection. CAT scans show that most of the same areas of the brain 'light up' when one hears a sound in the imagination or memory as one hear sound sensorially.*<sup>342</sup>

This thinking is shared by Brian Kane's analysis of Schaeffer's reduced listening and the *sound object*:

*Once Schaeffer commits to reduced listening, there can be no essential difference between imagined hearing and actual*

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<sup>339</sup> Schmitz, H, Müllan, R O and Slaby, J (2011) "Emotions Outside the Box – The New Phenomenology of Feeling and Corporeality", *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, Vol 10, no. 2. pp. 241 – 259, p245

<sup>340</sup> Crick, F (1995) *The Astonishing Hypothesis*. London, Touchstone. Pp. 104.

<sup>341</sup> Augoyard, J-F & Torgue, H (2005) *Sonic Experience: A Guide to Everyday Sounds* Montreal: McGill – Queens University Press. Pp.85 – 86.

<sup>342</sup> Brown, R (2010) *Sound: A Reader in Theatre Practice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. P. 75.

*hearing. The 'mode of givenness' may change but the 'central core' remains the same (Husserl 1928: 89 – 90); in other words, this core, this irreducible remainder that underlies aspectual difference, is simply this sound object (the one unifying this set of imagined or real adumbrations) grasped as a specific essence.*<sup>343</sup>

It seems impossible that an internal perception of sensation could be a shared experience even though the stimulus is a single and shared source. This phenomnesis could then be questioned as being a part of the work and a consideration for the artist in the making of and presenting the work. Every subject will experience a different event as what they apprehend in their perception is the idea inspired by the stimulus or work. If phenomnesis is the experience, this may replace 'immersive' as a descriptor for such works of this kind.

Can each of those individual ideas be considered a conscious decision of the artist and therefore belong to the artist as part of the intellectual property of that work, or is it a given that the phenomnesis within the work is what makes the work of art itself? The subject will remain conscious of a certain understanding of the experience, at that point but may not be willing to offer up a complete sense of their experience, as that experience may be, to a degree, unconscious. The loss of ability to form a coherent analysis of what the encounter *was* reminds us of the unrepresentable in the sublime. It is, however, not just within the realm of "astonishment"<sup>344</sup> outlined by Burke. The combination of site – journey – sound, in the *gestalt* tradition means there is no object foregrounded against a background, to contemplate. "The issue is not a figure-ground relationship."<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> Kane, B (2007) "L'Objet Sonore Maintenant: Pierre Schaeffer, sound objects and the phenomenological reduction." *Organised Sound*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Vol 12, Issue 1. Pp. 19 – 20. Citing Husserl in: Husserl, E (1928) *Ideas*. (Trans 1962) W.R Boyce Gibson. New York: Collier Macmillan. Pp. 89 – 90.

<sup>344</sup> Burke, E (1757) *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. P. 53.

<sup>345</sup> Silverman, H (2002) *Lyotard: Philosophy, Politics and the Sublime*. New York: Routledge. P. 227.

Hugh Silverman takes issue with the matter of the figure – ground relationship in Barnett Newman’s ‘zip’ paintings. He describes them as *postmodern sites*, representing neither figure or ground. It is this tension that is the *postmodern site*.

*The postmodern sites are events of difference between the panels and the zips. The postmodern sublime is the very question as to whether the difference is happening at all... The appearance of the unrepresentable is also an effect of the postmodern condition... While Lyotard has called this “presentation of the unrepresentable in presentation itself” the postmodern, it also has another name: the sublime. And because the sublime does not characterize an object but rather an event, and there are such events in many places, the sites of the sublime are also multiple.*<sup>346</sup>

If this mode of the *unrepresentable in presentation* can be applied to *Hush House* the phenomnesis is a contributor within the experience. If *Hush House* has the potential of the *postmodern site*, it could accommodate new readings of the phenomenological frame as the sublime experience.

As the Minimalists were able to embrace Merleau – Ponty as the philosophical contemporary of their phenomenological encounters, Schmitz argues for a new phenomenological understanding that resonates with *Hush House* and the contemporary examples of work, already described, presenting themselves as event and encounter, appropriating the sensory and the psychoacoustic. Ikeda’s *spectra* embraces the notion of the surfacelessness and presents it back to the spectator/participant as *their* experience within the framework of the site. This also incorporates the political act of engaging the participant in their relationship with the site and the sensation felt within that site. Again, this is the subject of Bishop’s “activated spectatorship”<sup>347</sup> within *Hush House*. It is this mode of spectatorship, engaging the body as emotional being, as well as the felt body, that enables the opportunity for the subjectivity of response within the sublime encounter and therefore one step closer to where the potential for

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<sup>346</sup> Ibid. Pp. 227 – 228.

<sup>347</sup> Bishop, C (2006) *Installation Art*. London: Tate Publishing. P. 102.

the sublime framing might exist in the contemporary art work. It once again returns the discussion to the position of the frame.

### The Nebulous Frame: The Potential Sublime

Within *Hush House*, duration, as well as spatial encounter is borrowed from performance. The audience inhabit the same space as the objects and time is required to move within the environment as it is laid out for us. The time – based property of the work is crucial in experiencing it, as a series of ‘reveals’ are offered. As with a performance of linear narrative, this can be chronologically ordered. It may work in a linear narrative or as an abstract narrative that the spectator may assemble and form their own narrative within. It may be the journey through this narrative that establishes a final picture of the whole work, or the memory of past incident or experience that is introduced to the narrative in order to form a new one.

The associations we draw on here do not apply merely within the context of the tangible object. We also apply it within the social and cultural situations against which we judge our aesthetic and moral assumptions. This synthesis of judgment allows us the framing or background within or against which experiences are presented.

As Hegel suggested, our acquired knowledge would challenge the notion that we can be separated from our social and cultural environment in which we have been born and raised<sup>348</sup>. This interconnectedness means we are able to make associations and draw conclusions for our decision-making. Without this attachment between knowledge and experience, we would not survive in the world.

At a moment of forming intellectual conclusions rather than primitive survival decisions, however, do we draw on a different set of memories to fulfil the immediate task? The relationship between these memories and the

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<sup>348</sup> Harris, H.S (1995) *Hegel: Phenomenology and System*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co.

context in which they might *now* be presented is crucial to the conclusions we might draw from present experience. The associations made between the memory of a previous context and the present may have differing emotional associations. It is the context that can shape the association for us and therefore the decision enabled by the frame.

The intellectual decision could be considered to override the natural, raw judgement when presented with a clear, contextual framing of the experience. If we remove the frame, do we still make an intellectual judgement or act on the instinct of retained visceral memory?

If confronted by a work not conveniently framed by the gallery, museum or theatre threshold, such as *Double Negative*, *Listen* or *Hush House*, with no gallery wall or auditorium, what conclusions do we draw about the encounter and which part of our brain are we drawing from in order to consolidate the thoughts on our experience? *Double Negative*, *Listen*, *Roden Crater*, *spectra* and *Hush House* all require an acknowledgement of their extended environment as a part of the work – the threshold of the work is a fluid one. The environment slips from being a neutral one to the subject of the work as much as we choose to apply the threshold of the frame to the work. The journey made through this material/immaterial environment varies in importance according to our desire to acknowledge it as either work or life.

We will be informed by our own existing knowledge of the signifiers in the work and the environment ie. Nevada Desert, New York power plant or Cold War military site. With associated memories and emotions, these are brought to the experience, forming a larger conception of the landscape, to then be reconstructed into the work, as soon as it is framed as artwork.

*There is no essential difference between a Jean-Baptiste Simeon Chardin painting hung in a museum and a Frank Stella painting hung in a museum. Similarly, there is no essential difference between the music of Mozart in a concert hall and the music of Karlheinz Stockhausen in a concert hall. Museum and concert*

*hall embed the works equally in late Western history... Call the museums, concert halls, theatres, journals and so forth frames of mind.*<sup>349</sup>

The gallery or performance space as context explains our experience, regardless of our own previous experience of those signifiers and environments. If we remove the frame, our experience remains but is it the same experience as one that is distinctly framed? Do we rationalise our experience in a different way, splitting the art/life synthesis that Kaprow sought to repair?

It is the actuality of the context that challenges the notion of whether it can be considered an artwork? The artist will employ memory in presenting a series of associated signs or symbols. It may be the intention of the artist to present the framed signs in such a way that empathy reliant on a shared memory of the work is the driving force behind the intended, manipulated emotional response of the viewer. When responding to art instinctively, its judgement will always remain subjective. If the artist were able to control this subjectivity and present a series of actualities, as work that does not require the aesthetic to define its role as art, is it still to be considered an art work or a phenomenon of fact and possibly nature (in the widest context of an un-manipulated phenomenon, for the sake of art)?

Theorists and artists alike embraced Merleau - Ponty *because* he was able to offer the cultural framework missing from Husserl's readings on experience, through perception. Schmitz has once again removed the frame by taking the phenomenological experience beyond perception. However this vulnerable relationship he promotes, between the emotional brain and sensory perception, may be the position for the frame of encounter and therefore the 'ineffable moment' associated with the sublime.

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<sup>349</sup> Kaprow, A (1996) *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* London: University of California Press. Pp. 202 – 203.

### Return to the Framed Encounter in the Landscape

On leaving the main space of *Hush House* and returning to the outdoor world, many subjects were more conscious of the sounds of birds, motor vehicles and even whispers of air through distant grass and trees. However, still accompanying this was the sensation of the sound just experienced inside. Although this acoustic after – image or phonomnesis of sound still resonates, it needn't be any less real in mind of the subject, than the pheasant sound abruptly drawing attention to their present moment. Therefore phonomnesis and anamnesis are the links between the corporeal manifestation of the phenomenological and the memory of the sensation required to recall that visceral anamnetic fingerprint to the individual.

Subjects are left with a personal, perceptual experience that recognises the extent of the work according to their own acknowledgement of memory, journey and self-imposed framing. The experience will remain always unique and the gaze will be a continually moving one, in anticipation of the work, during the experience of the work and as they reflect on the experience of the work and the combination of the prior, during and post event. In this reflective capacity, thought turns to the total experience of the complete event, rather than focus on the moment of encounter. This total event, one that will continue as long as the memory of the event remains will generate a self – framing imposed at different stages of the moving gaze.

When given *its* framing, *Double Negative* appropriates the landscape in which it is sited as a considerable part of the event, after the event and in the memory of the event. As such, the spectator will question the physical making of the work in a wider context of landscape and indulge him or herself in the opportunity to imagine the work beyond their own visual, aural or kinaesthetic experience at that moment. McLuhan remarks: “Media, by altering the environment, evokes in us their unique rations of sense

perception. The extension of any one sense alters the way we think and act – the way we perceive the world.’<sup>350</sup>

So is this imagination of the viewer an experience to be owned by the artist or one that is impossible to predict in its variation, as much as the variation of every single changing factor of that moment in time and viewer of the work? Does this then pose the consideration of the work as experiment rather than “creative expression”? The unframed *Double Negative* would not present itself in a clear context of artwork, but a channel of moved earth within a remote desert region of Nevada State. The encounter of this work by chance, with no prior knowledge of the work, the artist or its existence, would leave the viewer questioning the possibility of such a feat of earth shifting in such a precise manner or as just quarrying. The spectator may render it an abandoned site of human excavation and give it no further consideration. The spectator’s consciousness would form concepts based on potential social activity rather than consider that wider contexts of place and space. Who owns the consciousness of the viewer in their encounter of an immersive environmental artwork – the artist or the subject? These conclusions about status of the subject’s consciousness of it as a non-artwork rely on the association of existing knowledge with what the spectator is witnessing. If so, does the conscious thought of the spectator only matter to the artist when the adequate framing is given? If it is not in the context of the actual encounter, but through document or remediation, such as photographic, phonographic or videographic representation, what happens to the reading of the work?

Even with the self-imposed frame, the artist’s mark making will result in some remains or record to be interpreted, as the work. *Double Negative* leaves a man-made disturbance of nature to interpret if it is to be judged in isolation from the journey. This may be experienced through a photograph.

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<sup>350</sup> McLuhan, M (1967), *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* San Francisco: Hardwired. P.148.

This judgement of the picturesque image, rather than experience, is the problem Derrida finds with Husserl's notion of pre-linguistic consciousness. It cannot exist without the interpretation. However Derrida does allow for Husserl's perception relying upon what is not present. The gaps, with memory being crucial in the experience, define the difference between encounter with the work or a picturesque representation that we might find in the photographic document. This reliance upon the perception of the viewer's encounter automatically draws on memory and expectation in order to allow for the possibility of perception of the present.

In chapter five of *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida recognises this reliance on past and future and how this determines the position of the subject, or the self, by what is as much absent as present in memory or anticipation of the encounter<sup>351</sup>. What translates through to the remediation of the work, in its representational form, is an entirely new framing, with no ambiguity of the work within the landscape, but a whole new set of questions for the subject. The main being what is being projected through the remediation and how the opportunity for the subject to position the moving frame is entirely removed. It is exactly this position that *Hush House* adopted the year after I initially presented it. This will form the conclusion to this study as potential emergent discourse around the remediation of sound installations.

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<sup>351</sup> Derrida, J (1973) *Speech and Phenomena* (trans.) Allison, D. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. p.64

#### **Chapter 4 - The Ineffable Moment: The Problematic Museology of the Site-Specific**

In 1993, Swiss artist, Christian Philipp Muller, was invited to represent Austria in a transnational pavilion at the Venice Biennale. His work - *Illegal Border Crossing Between Austria and Czechoslovakia*, took him on a journey from Austria into eight European borders into former Eastern Block countries, all of which were crossed without any passport or prevention by border guards.

He was consciously disguised as a tourist. The work was an action, not object although each crossing was documented photographically and a postcard sent to his dealer issuing the proclamation: “I crossed the border and I’m still alive”<sup>352</sup>. This journey from one country to another questioned his artistic freedom in an illegal act of travel from one country to another without any interrogation by authority figures.



Fig.22

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<sup>352</sup> Muller, C P (2006) “A Conversation Between James Meyer and Christian Philipp Muller, May 2006”. *Christianphilipp muller.net* [online] [http://www.christianphilippmuller.net/e/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=56&Itemid=54](http://www.christianphilippmuller.net/e/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=56&Itemid=54) Accessed 23/9/2010

As political statement, motivating the artistic act, Muller used the notion of site - specificity and journey as an enigmatic framing of artwork that places the gaze within the act of the work and presents the agenda of the site.

In effect, the work was represented in the Biennale by a series of images, in the pavilion at the Giardini, although the work of art itself was an act of journeying across invisible boundaries, undertaken by the artist.<sup>353</sup> This presents the question, therefore, of what constitutes the work and whether the set of objects, presented in the Giardini, are a true representation of the work or another piece of work altogether. The photographic document is not the actual experience of the work in situ, but a representation of the act. The photographic object is a representation of the journey and the site. What the viewer does not experience is a first-hand sense of the act; there is no connection with the act itself. As Tracey Warr suggests:

*The photograph as icon is compromised and contradictory because it is both indexical (like the Turin Shroud) and documentary, so that it purports to show us something real and actual which in turn compromises its status as a manifestation of an unknowable to be believed. However, the very incompleteness and paucity of photographic documentation enhances its iconic status – encouraging the development of legend by giving us enough but nothing too definite.*<sup>354</sup>

As an example demonstrating how the journey and the significance of that journey was the work, what is particularly interesting is the notion of the invisible within this journey. The land has not become altered in any way, in order to present the work. The artist has camouflaged himself (by becoming tourist) in order to undertake the act outside of his role as artist and the document of images do not depict significant and monumental landmarks clearly identifying the locations, they are snapshots with the artist as the central figure. The photograph does not depict the site in a picturesque way

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<sup>353</sup> This is considered the “mobile site” by James Meyer, one that is a *functional* site, as opposed to the *literal* site of *Double Negative* in: Suderberg, E (2000) *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Pp.23-37.

<sup>354</sup> Tracey Warr in: Tate Catalogue (2003) “Image as Icon: Recognising the Enigma” in *Art, Lies and Videotape* [exhibition catalogue]. London: Tate Publishing. P.36.

for us, as we only need to recognise it as a boundary, not a location with an identity beyond our needing to recognise the artist's act, as the work. The artist is photographed in a striding pose – a large gesture of moving from one foot to another, therefore stepping across an area of ground that we must assume to be the invisible boundary. It is not a grand statement. The artist's humble and consciously invisible undertaking of these politically monumental passings makes this act of journey weighty with the presence of its location and political statement. What it does offer us is the allure of storytelling and potential for myth in journey form – the memory of the artist that cannot be depicted in visual document remains discrete to the artist only.

The experience and associations are particular to the artist. They will always apply to his experience and never be communicated through any representational form. It is this impossibility that encourages us as viewer of the work to desire the journey for ourselves. To be able to undertake this journey ourselves, our personal experiences and knowledge would inform the phenomenon of our own journey, although it might mimic the same geographical journey as that of the artist. The deliberate and considered journey weighs it in expectation. It has already been 'mapped'<sup>355</sup> and therefore there is an expectation and an outcome for any potential 'follower'. This outcome might not be an end point but it is certain that there is something to experience from the journey.

It is not Muller's intention that we follow him on a pilgrimage of border crossings. Neither does he present us with an art object to contemplate in its complete form in full context. The images (or *icons*) and concept presented in the exhibition space demonstrates the distant position that we occupy as a viewer of the work. We are not viewing photographic images for their composition as complete images, but are viewing them as a document of the journey, a representation of the location in which they were shot. The images were originally intended for distribution to the media so never

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<sup>355</sup> Where knowledge of the experience has been previously experienced and documented in some format in order for it to be followed – visual, aural or tactile.

created as a photographic artwork. We will fill in the gaps and form our own narrative of this experience. We are enabled participants and this narrative will be unique to each viewer of the images. The narrative will be filled with our own expectations, informed by the clues we are offered in the images. It offers a story of journey we wish to know and understand ourselves but are not invited the opportunity to witness.

The representation of the work through the concept presented in the Giardini offered a valid discussion around the museology of the action work, when not experienced first hand. If the work becomes exposed to a wider, secondary audience, *via* a mediated form, the work can start to become recognised *as* this format and no longer the original encounter.

This is familiar territory for many Twentieth Century acts of Performance Art, as presented in Tate Liverpool's 2003 exhibition – *Art, Lies and Videotape: Exposing Performance*. The exhibition explored the role of the document in performance art through photographs and film documentation. Joseph Beuys' 1974 *Coyote: I Like America and America Likes Me* is one of the most infamous. The authenticity of the act, the claim of living with a wild dog for one week, the published stories surrounding the true wild nature of the coyote and the staging of the photographs have created a mythical event that relies on how an audience may interpret the secondary evidence of the event. It is the secondary objects – the photographs and film, as icons, which have now become the work, as this is how it is experienced in today's museum or gallery publications.

This is not to suggest all documents of Performance Art are just problematic representation; many photographic images or early experimental video works were the vehicle through which Performance Artists could challenge presentation or framing of their work – Dan Graham, Bruce Nauman, Stuart Brisley and early experiments by Marina Abramovich and Mona Hatoum being notable. The use of the edit could create a new and manipulated narrative of the work.

The famous Caroline Tisdall photograph captures Beuys' coyote tearing at the felt, arching its back, whilst Beuys points his cane towards the animal and cowers under the cloth, creates a sense of mortal danger for the artist. When the moment is viewed as part of the longer film document, it is clearly a snapshot of play between the animal and the artist with very little sense of danger to the artist. This carefully staged representation of the act offers a very narrow frame of the original work but creates a very rich, evocative narrative as a photographic image alone, without need for remains or icons from the original act.

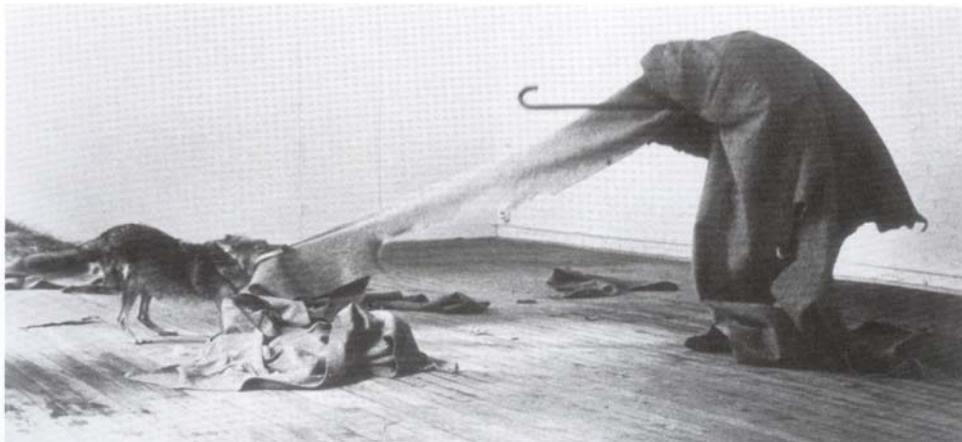


Fig.23

The notion of the icon can only be applied to an object that has been physically salvaged from the original act. If a musical score presents a document of the potential performance, is there any difference between a used or unused score – an icon or multiple copy? As the Fluxus artists endeavoured to reference, does the original act even matter if the work is offered as a set of instructions, or a score<sup>356</sup>?

Does the document adopt a new status as an alternative work to the incarnation from which it sprang, as suggested by Peggy Phelan:

*I consider the ontological claim of live performance art as a means of resisting the reproductive ideology of representation. Defined by its ephemeral nature, performance art cannot be*

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<sup>356</sup> Fluxus questions about sound were framed almost entirely in terms of its acoustic, physiological and kinaesthetic properties. Douglas Kahn in: Armstrong, E & Rothfuss, J (eds) (1993) "The Latest: Fluxus and Music": *In the Spirit of Fluxus*. Minneapolis: Walker Art Centre. P.104.

*documented (when it is it turns into that document - photograph, a stage design, a video tape – and ceases to be performance art).*<sup>357</sup>

However, does the used object hold some sort of provenance to reinstate it as an extrusion of the original? Warr describes the icon as:

*A distillation of an unknowable, incomprehensible mystery to a visible, tangible manifestation. It is both a reduction of that mystery and capable, through belief, of fully expanding into an encounter with that mystery. The icon makes the intangible and invisible accessible in a portable form and therefore creates a market for the priceless and the immaterial.*<sup>358</sup>

What we see in this unique object raises Walter Benjamin's notion of *aura* from his seminal essay: *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*<sup>359</sup>?

When presented with an object as representation of immersive or performance work, we may be satisfied with the item that evidences the history of the existence of the work but the very experience of the work, as a first-hand phenomenological exchange between artist's concept and audience experience is missing. The ineffable moment in the presence of the work would therefore be potentially impossible to capture in the museum presentation. This does not imply that there is a lack of the phenomenological in witnessing the icons. If anything it offers a new experience that almost defines the notion of Merleau – Ponty's thinking, in the respect that the objects are real and take our imaginations back to the anamnetic experience, discussed in the previous chapter, whereby we create the fictionalised world based around the "mobile site"<sup>360</sup> in the combination of relics or 'icons' from the real world and a fictional map of how we tie those objects into a memorised or imagined experience. The imagined

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<sup>357</sup> Phelan, P (1993) *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. London: Routledge. P.31.

<sup>358</sup> Tracey Warr in: Tate Catalogue (2003) "Image as Icon: Recognising the Enigma" in *Art, Lies and Videotape* [exhibition catalogue]. London: Tate Publishing. P.35.

<sup>359</sup> Benjamin, Walter (1968) 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, ed. and tr. Hannah Arendt. London: Fontana.

<sup>360</sup> James Meyer's definition of the *functional* site as a new reading on document of the site specific in: Suderberg, E (2000) *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Pp.23 – 37.

experience need not even ever have existed as an initial event, if the relics offer enough for our actively interested ego's to form a complete enough imagined experience.

Christian Philip Muller had no intention of his act of journey ever being experienced as an initial live event. The work always intended to be formed of 'relics' creating the narrative of the experience. It distances the subject from the event itself but distills the essence of what the imagined experience might be through the careful selection of objects. The subject, as audience are forced to lose what Husserl refers to as *die natuerliche Einstellung* or "natural attitude"<sup>361</sup>, instead replacing it for a reflective and rational attitude that forces the subject to participate in order to form their imagined experience.

This presentation format was witnessed in Marcel Broodthaers notion of the museum or gallery as the canvas of the work<sup>362</sup> in which the audience become the participant spectator, rather than passive observer. It is formed out of the very act of collecting and showing, with an audience of self-made archaeologists, piecing together the imagined journeys.

As a deconstruction of the museum format, Broodthaers highlighted the itemisation of the museum display. When an acquisition is incorporated into an exhibition, it no longer retains the identity of a work alone. It has become a curatorial choice and is therefore mirrored against its neighbouring acquisitions. The curatorial choices used to create the display have not been limited to the pure object on display and have extended to the notion of the museum without walls, or "Le Musee Imaginaire", as first posed by French writer Andre Malraux in 1947<sup>363</sup>, on the theory that photographic

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<sup>361</sup> The everyday state of navigating through the world without interpretation of every act and interface with the world.

<sup>362</sup> Broodthaers' *Museum of Modern Art, Eagles Department* (1968-1972) became the seminal work of conceptualising the institution and introducing linguistics as a protagonist in the work - referred to as institutional critique.

<sup>363</sup> Malraux, A, Gilbert, S (trans), Price, F (trans) (1967) *Museum Without Walls* London: Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd

representation in publishing would extend the canon, beyond the objects on display, opening a wider experience of treasured works

*“... thanks to reproduction, being opened up ... this new domain ... is for the first time the common heritage of all mankind.”*<sup>364</sup>

What Malraux highlighted was the way a photograph of the object strips it bare of not only its context, but also any tactile and tangible connection the viewer might have with the object. He presented the notion of the photographic reproduction as a Modernist machine suitable for cataloguing the work for a wider dissemination, regardless of the reduced context of the work. The photograph democratised the works by presenting them all against a neutral world, with size and status reduced to the uniformity of the size of the photographic paper.

Malraux’s cultural democracy for accessibility removed the notion of experiencing the work in the flesh. Although it may take a certain form of pilgrimage to witness a piece of work held in a collection on the other side of the world, it is this quasi - magical *aura*<sup>365</sup> surrounding the work, that transforms the viewing into an experience and event. Benjamin embraced the role of the photographic reproduction as a democratisation of the work of art but argued for the importance of the presence of the original.

Works that rely on the phenomenological experience as a part of, or as the work, such as listening or viewing the very presence of the site of the work are challenged by the museology of experience. The very physiology of a sound work relies on the environment.

*Sound can occupy and be heard differently in different rooms and from different places within a room, and it also may ‘drift’ from one spot to another. A space ‘filled’ with an almost palpable sound develops around one’s body, thereby*

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<sup>364</sup> Malraux, A, Gilbert, S (trans), Price, F (trans) (1954) *The Voices of Silence* London: Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd. P.46

<sup>365</sup> Benjamin, Walter (1968) *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, in *Illuminations*, ed. and tr. Hannah Arendt. London: Fontana.

*heightening a sense of corporeality, especially when the body is vibrated by amplified sound.*<sup>366</sup>

If the artist desires the work to be exposed to a wider audience, or the work is considered for curatorial representation, that is where the challenge lies: how is the work presented without misrepresentation?

*Hush House* has been subjected to this ongoing position of remediation, through several stages of exhibition presentation, in order to establish how an audience interprets the work through a series of transposed display formats. These interpretations test the limits of remediated experience at an extreme distance and challenge the assemblage of sound, images and video as a coherent enough document of the work. What has emerged through the process of this research is just how problematic the notion of display and the offering of documentation becomes when the work crosses genres, from the visual arts, to the performing arts. As Peggy Phelan states:

*Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representation: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance... to enter the economy of reproduction.*<sup>367</sup>

Performance in a secondary format is not treated in the same way as performance art in a secondary format<sup>368</sup>. In its exhibition format, *Hush House* can be viewed and classified as a form of remediation, capturing an existing work in a newly edited format, as well as being able to present in more than one location at a time. It is the reproducibility of this format that embeds it within the genre of screen and lens-based media, no longer the live event. It is offering the original medium through an interface, rather than exposing the audience to the original immersive environment. It is the notion of the interface, building a barrier between the audience and the

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<sup>366</sup> Douglas Khan in: Armstrong, E & Rothfuss, J (eds) (1993) "The Latest: Fluxus and Music": *In the Spirit of Fluxus*. Minneapolis: Walker Art Centre. P. 106.

<sup>367</sup> Phelan, P (1993) *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. London: Routledge. P.146.

<sup>368</sup> E.g: Tate Liverpool (2003) *Art, Lies and Videotape: Exposing Performance* exhibition, demonstrated.

visceral experience that has come to define the problematic nature of remediation. As Jay Bolter observes:

*Directors ... take great pains to achieve the sense of “liveness” that characterizes rock music. The desire for immediacy leads digital media to borrow avidly from each other as well as from their analogue predecessors.*<sup>369</sup>

Touching the remediated work is to touch the interface through which it is presented – screen, headphones or navigation tool. The original medium is substituted by an interface.

Replacing the original *Hush House* installation with video, photographic images and an audible soundtrack is a new experience of the work and deliberately avoids trying to capture the whole experience. It offers an edited view of the space without the 360degree visual horizon. The alternative soundtrack to the fat, fleshy resonance of the spatial sensation is thinner and listened to through headphones, creating what Jonathan Sterne describes as: “not only the separation of hearing but also the other end of the medium... The booth serves as a framing device.”<sup>370</sup> By doing so is in the problematic position of only ever being a description of the original.

However, according to Sean Dorrance Kelly and his analysis of Bill Viola’s *Passion* series, the power of the edited video and soundtrack presented through remediation may have transcended the initial experience of *Hush House*. Kelly describes the experience of *Passion* as an entirely separate heightened emotional experience, separate from the viewing experience<sup>371</sup>. This places the distanced viewing of the act into another more recent discourse around the emotional potential within phenomenology as already discussed through Schmitz. This is extended to new, visual media by, as a heightened distillation of actual emotion rather than representation.

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<sup>369</sup> Bolter, J & Grusin, R (2000) *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge: MIT Press. P.9.

<sup>370</sup> Sterne, J (2003 ) *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*. Durham: Duke University Press. Pp.158 - 159.

<sup>371</sup> Sean Dorrance Kelly in: Parry, J (ed) (2011) “Representing the real”, *Art and Phenomenology*. London: Routledge. p. 102

It is the first – hand encounter with *Hush House* – the original work and the subsequent remediation and re-presentation of that work, as document that I will analyse in this chapter. The audience experience, the different modes of presentation (or descriptions), and the notion of whether the document acts as a valid replacement in terms of it fulfilling Friedrich Kittler’s argument for screen-based image projecting<sup>372</sup> as enough of a phenomenological recognition, to be finally compiled, examined and compared. I will consider the position of a live experience, or performance, as the art object and how that changes by representation captured through other media and how it is interpreted in different contexts. The specific example of *Hush House* raises the debate around corporeal subjectivity and how the second – hand mediated output of this work serves to highlight the immateriality/materiality of the contemporary, immersive, sonic artwork and where these works lie within the discourse of contemporary and new phenomenological discourse. Within this overall discussion, I can conclude with the consideration of whether or not the sublime experience or the ineffable moment deteriorates through increasing levels of remediation.

#### Establishing the Potential for *Hush House*

*Hush House* has manifested in different formats, for the benefit of this research, although, fundamentally the piece is truly only one, at the former *RAF Bentwaters*, for *Aldeburgh Music’s Faster than Sound* programme, in March 2010, with satellite variations of the documents or descriptions of the whole work at the 2011 Quadrennial of British Theatre Design in Cardiff: *Transformation and Revelation* from March – April 2011<sup>373</sup>, the international *Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space*, in June 2011<sup>374</sup> and *Transformation and Revelation: From Gormley to Gaga*

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<sup>372</sup> Kittler, F (2010) *Optical Media*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

<sup>373</sup> The quadrennial exhibition of British performance design, run by the Society of British Theatre Designers is challenged to explore new presentation formats for every incarnation of the exhibition that represent scenography as true as possible.

<sup>374</sup> An international festival of performance design, installation an architecture consisting of three main events: an architectural exhibition, an exposition of performance design and a

exhibition at the *Victoria and Albert Museum* from March – September 2012, as part of the London Cultural Olympiad. What is important within this analysis, and common to all the exhibitions is its perceived position as part of the performing arts landscape, rather than the visual arts, as an installation would be considered. This has raised questions around the blurring of the barrier between sound design and sonic arts and where sonic art sits in the interstitial of performance, music and the visual arts<sup>375</sup>. It also raises questions about the notion of the spectator's role within an immersive installation, as performer, when the space becomes a playground for interaction and self-choreographed activity<sup>376</sup>. Through the process of this research, I have observed the difference in how it has been received in its different formats, by different audiences and what their conclusions are about what the actual work is, whether it can be pigeonholed into one of the easy commodified categories of the twenty - first century cultural landscape: Sound Art, performance, new media or installation art as potential examples. What has emerged is how the failure to pigeonhole the work places it in a category of other. If a failing to describe the experience (as recorded through subject feedback) or understand the visceral sensations experienced, it potentially serves as a demonstration of some of the principles of the other, in the sublime.

A challenge to this conclusion however comes in the form of an international award for Performance Design, given to the work. This judgement of quality, deemed worthy enough to receive an international accolade, given by the judges without experiencing the actual event itself, is the most contentious issue for myself, as the author of the work. As a work that was created to test the potential for the ineffable, the criteria were embedded within the experience of the work being impossible to recapture.

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live performance programme. The exposition format follows the example of the Venice Biennale with each contributing country producing its own pavilion, representing their nation with either a selection of designers or sometimes just one designer who captures the climate of design in that nation, at that time.

<sup>375</sup> As explored by Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (2004), Alan Licht (2007), Brandon LaBelle (2006), Douglas Khan (1999), Seth Kim Cohen (2009) for example.

<sup>376</sup> See photographic images of play and self-choreographed activity of audience in *Hush House*

It is the descriptive rendering of the work in a secondary format, that has been rewarded and therefore it is potentially the remediated document, the mobile site that is the prize winner, in a competition where *all* the exhibits are mobile sites and descriptors of their original (both exhibitions were entirely of performance design and therefore automatically presented everything in a secondary format). The only alternative to this argument is the respect for the judges to be able to make a strong enough leap of imagination based purely on the descriptive elements placed in front of them. In the context of the exhibition, this is the very essence of the performing arts in their broadest sense. As Peggy Phelan writes:

*As those artists who have dedicated themselves to performance continually disappear and leave “not a rack behind” it becomes increasingly imperative to find a way to remember the undocumentable, unreproducible art they have made.*<sup>377</sup>

The decision made by each designer, of what to present in the exhibition, resulted in a mix of documentation and icons, altering the relationship to and the distance from each performance and the spectator.

There was a great variation in just how full a picture of the original work, was presented for each production. The problematic nature of how *Hush House* could be documented and shown elsewhere became the basis for the curators<sup>378</sup> theme, adopting the work with an affinity and forgiveness through embracing the problem as the challenge of the exhibition. This was equally obvious in the documents of all the other site-specific productions.

In my questions to visitors at both the original work and the exhibitions in Cardiff and Prague, the response from different professional backgrounds remained fairly uniform in their sense of having lost the presence of the building, the scale of the space and the scale of sound that animated the space. Subject E – a practitioner, academic and researcher within lighting and performance, pointed out this issue clearly:

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<sup>377</sup> Phelan, P (1993) *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. London: Routledge. P.31.

<sup>378</sup> Peter Farley: British theatre designer and academic.

*I think this begs the question of the nature of an 'exhibition' in the Prague/Cardiff sense. An art gallery/exhibition generally presents the art works 'themselves' (which is of course a rather slippery idea, but you'll take the point in an every-day sense) rather than second-order representations of the work. Prague/Cardiff, Linbury prize exhibition, etc., all suffer and struggle with this, as we know, as people try to find ways of presenting work that in the end just isn't there. What are we left with? A slightly desperate hope that viewers will be able to construct in their imagination, based on the paltry materials we have to offer, something that may have some relation with the original. Nevertheless, the original is genuinely lost.<sup>379</sup>*

How is the work being judged? If the concept is strong enough, the hope of the artist or designer is that the imagination is stimulated enough to fill in the gaps of the missing experience, with an individual narrative. Therefore the potential for the alternative version to have a similar weight to the original might be possible. In the context of the viewer only experiencing the exhibition format however, as the judges were, their need to become the thoughtful viewer<sup>380</sup> would encounter phenomenological and phonometric revelations to a degree if the elements of the display offer enough information of a realistic enough representation.

Sean Dorrance Kelly's considers this a truly phenomenological experience in Bill Viola's use of film in his *Passions* series:

*To produce the video<sup>381</sup>, which is part of Viola's Passion series, he filmed five men and women on high speed film at approximately 16 times faster than normal. During the filming the actors go through a series of extreme emotional changes over a period of about a minute. By digitally converting the film to video and then projecting it at normal speed, the finished work is approximately 16 minutes of emotional intensity. For this sort of reverse time-lapse technique has the effect of supersaturating the images with ordinarily imperceptible*

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<sup>379</sup> Subject E

<sup>380</sup> The thoughtful viewer is explained in Noel Carroll's essay about the film *Memento* and how we make sense of the narrative through the characters construction of the narrative. It is a phenomenological structure.

Kania, A (2009) *Memento*. Abingdon: Routledge. PP. 127 - 146

<sup>381</sup> "Quintet of the Astonished"

*affective content, the micro changes in facial expression that normally occur so quickly we don't even notice them... each of these frames is imbued with an affective content that we would not have known about had we seen the events at normal speed... the affective content of the images not only reads perfectly well, it seems to extend well beyond the nearly instantaneous temporal frame. As Viola says, the experience of the still image [...] as exuding a rich plenitude of emotion led him to conclude that "emotions are out of time."<sup>382</sup>*

What Kelly presents is his own suggestion that an artwork is tied to its perceptual power, not just within new media but throughout the history of painting, where the image may represent on one level but also presents the reality of the depicted subjects and objects for the audience to contemplate as an object that exists in reality as much as the object may do if they are holding it. This duality of the represented and the real follow a history of philosophy back to Plato's cave but the principle remains the same in that the audience will project their own intention of reality onto the object in front of them and therefore that version of reality has the power to create as much of the lived world for us within the active imagination. It is this power that we find in phonomnesia and paramount within reading novels or immersive new media and the main contender for arguing against the Cartesian phenomenology but maintaining the imaginative experience of the lived world supported by the New Phenomenology.

However, in *Hush House* the fundamental physiological sensation of the sound media against the space and the human body can never be replaced without a complete restaging. It deliberately defies recording and replaying with any off-the-shelf equipment and therefore all that is associated with that experience is lost to any other remediation. The physical experience that offers potential for the sublime is also lost in any translation. What is salvaged is transposed into a replacement through the visual imagery, in order to tell the story.

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<sup>382</sup> Sean Dorrance Kelly in: Parry, J (ed) (2011) "Representing the real", *Art and Phenomenology*. London: Routledge. p. 102

### Recalling and Evaluating *Hush House*

As an installation, *Hush House* combines, site, journey and sound together, but it is also durational, appropriating scenographic devices formed around a narrative of the site – typical characteristics of performance work. This immediately introduces the problems with performance document: how that document will be received and what experiential aspects of the work can be extracted from the document or descriptive tools.

Performance relies on the audience communicating some form of exchange of engagement. It is inherent within the “Liveness”<sup>383</sup> of the event in the here and now, what Philip Auslander considers the “the energy that supposedly exists between performers and spectators in a live event.”<sup>384</sup> Auslander argues that the live mode only dates back to the 1930’s when recording techniques were introduced and therefore created the distinction of liveness with the notion of the live performance as one entirely as a product of mediatization<sup>385</sup>. It could be considered that the notion of liveness has therefore become more prominent in discourse as we have developed the tools of remediation.

As live durational work unfolds, the series of revelations that form the linear narrative are received directly by the audience and responded to immediately. It is a lingering and enduring arc of an experience with a start and an end. The participant may choose to repeat the arc but the repeated experience will not have the same qualities as the first, as elements that form the surprise or delight in the undiscovered, have already been revealed. Every successional repeat of the experience, however, will present a different encounter. Subsequent reveals may introduce more detail to the

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<sup>383</sup> Philip Auslander highlighted the use of “liveness” in contrast to mediatized performance in: Auslander, P (1999) *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. London: Routledge. although Peggy Phelan had most notably created a discourse around the notion of the live performance as “representation without reproduction” in: Phelan, P (1993) *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. London: Routledge and Steven Connor’s ideas on postmodern performance in: Connor, S (1989) *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

<sup>384</sup> Auslander, P (1999) *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. London: Routledge. P.2.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid. Pp.52 - 53

experience but this serves to enrich the discovery of the environment and add an element of testing and playing with the environment to manipulate the experience further.

The initial encounter with the work cannot be consciously manipulated, as there is no consciousness yet of what is to be manipulated and therefore the participant is completely in the hands of the artist, with all the potential for how many levels of potential ineffable moments the artist wishes to introduce. There will never be an identical rendition of that moment with the work, when experienced through any recorded media. Framed from a single, author's viewpoint, this is lost, no matter how careful the edit, purely through the lack of the (Smalley and Dyson's) immersive, physiological qualities introduced as part of the work. That lack of immersiveness, experienced in Cardiff and Prague, compared to the original event, is captured here by Subject F, a Senior Research Fellow within Environmental Science:

*I realise the constraints imposed on the exhibit but in a perfect world I would have liked to see one enormous image that dwarfed the viewer, and captured the emptiness of the space... I think the pics [sic] gave a bit of the context but what could not be captured was the sheer scale and 'wow' factor of the original experience... I think the sound was an incredibly difficult thing to represent - the original was more about feeling than hearing<sup>386</sup>*

Articulating the personalised experience of the live encounter, whilst still in the lingering presence and memory of the event, is valuable evaluation material for any performance maker as it taps into the involuntary metaphysical language that we are inclined to use whilst still maintaining immediate memory of the event. I devised a process of gaining this feedback for *Hush House* in the least invasive way possible. After experimenting with *Radioflash*, the most successful approach was to create a relaxed environment in which personal discussion and dialogue enabled an open discussion. This space was a separate *Portakabin* from the main

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<sup>386</sup> Subject F

building, with heating, bathroom facilities and tea, coffee and cake. These familiar gestures of comfort were inviting enough in a barren location, to enable that relaxed and open dialogue to be had and recorded. With no set questioning, the discussions were honest und unforced.

I would treat this feedback as the judge of a narrative and experience having been communicated clearly, or not. Jacques Ranciere refers to this audience as an “Emancipated Community”<sup>387</sup>, linking together the information that has been made evident in the work, with that which is not, in order to form a new, individual narrative for each audient. The outcome of the experience cannot necessarily be anticipated, because every audience dynamic will create a new context against which each will form their own interpretation of the encounter. Within the construct of *Hush House*, as a piece of work that is both installation and performance<sup>388</sup>, reflection on ones own experience, as a participant, is as much a part of the work as the encounter with the work itself. “It requires spectators who play the role of active interpreters, who develop their own translation in order to appropriate the story and make it their own story. An emancipated community is a community of narrators and translators”.<sup>389</sup> This returns us to Lucy Lippard’s notion of the dematerialised art object<sup>390</sup> and the experience of the Minimalist’s gallery space as a total immersive environment; although the caveat to Ranciere’s own notions of the emancipated community helps contextualise *Hush House* as an experiment and a tool for interrogating the phenomenological experience (albeit a rather cynical one), as he concludes that “To dismiss the fantasies of the word made flesh and the spectator rendered active, to know that words are merely words and spectacles merely spectacles, can help us arrive at a better understanding of how words and

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<sup>387</sup> Ranciere, J (2009) *The Emancipated Spectator*. London:Verso

<sup>388</sup> With the immersed human presence required in order to activate the work and allow the audience, as performer, their own narrative.

<sup>389</sup> Ranciere, J (2009) *The Emancipated Spectator*. London:Verso p. 22.

<sup>390</sup> See: Lippard, L (1973) *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*. New York: Praeger.

images, stories and performances, can change something of the world we live in”.<sup>391</sup>

The words, images and stories, relayed by the audiences for the *Hush House* event in 2010, were documented in written and verbal forms<sup>392</sup>. It is particularly through hearing and reading the words and personal stories<sup>393</sup> that uniformity emerged in the way the audience felt they had experienced the work. It was important to ensure this feedback was clearly applied within the context and frame of the work to make it beneficial. As Erving Goffman clarifies:

*The organization of whatever is meaningfully said will have to satisfy the rules of a language, competence in which a particular will have to bring with him to his moments of talking and listening... This competence is closely linked with another, one that specifically bears on the actual social situation in which it is exercised, for there will be required use of “indexical expressions”, for example, those of time, place and person, which are responsive to the setting.*<sup>394</sup>

Goffman talks of a social situation where the social status acts as the frame. With the mixed spectatorship for *Hush House*, the frame is a wider one as it is not clearly outlined. Therefore the vocabulary and discussions might have been wider in diversity. They did, however, remain within a similar vocabulary, across the demographic. Adjectives such as “eerie”, “lingering”, “presence” and “the experience” appear frequently in the feedback.

Although these very visceral expressions are easily articulated in the immediate moment of leaving the event, they have been used as part of the descriptive language, when asked to recall the feeling left by the event through an email questionnaire<sup>395</sup>, many months later, in un-pressured, constructed feedback. Similar responses maintain the notions of presence and experience that *Hush House* was created to embody. These adjectives

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<sup>391</sup> Ranciere, J (2009) *The Emancipated Spectator*. London:Verso p.23.

<sup>392</sup> Visitor book entry.

<sup>393</sup> Some reflecting personal anamnestic experiences from the work.

<sup>394</sup> Goffman, E (1986) *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Lebanon: University Press of New England. P.500.

<sup>395</sup> See appendices.

describe a sense of the relationship between the participant and the space rather than their own specific feelings. It appears that the sound has not overwhelmed the space but enhanced its architecture and therefore their own sense of presence in the space. These suggestions come in reference, primarily to the three elements that manifest as the work – the architecture of the site, the journey to the site and the sensation of the sound. What was clearly identified within the comments around the sound was always its attributes as a sensation rather than a tangible object of sound. Certainly, the considered feedback from the later questionnaires suggests the sound is an embedded factor within the experience, but not an overwhelming element on its own; the work does not appear to have been considered a discreet Sonic Artwork.

*The sound acted both to create a presence that altered my relationship with the space (compared to an imagined encounter with the space without sound) but also created a reason to make the journey at all. I can't imagine bringing my family on a 4 hour round trip if simply offered the opportunity to take a look inside the Hush House, but we did make the trip to experience an art installation... Thus the sound element was both central (the linch-pin for all other aspects of the experience) and also tangential (not directly my abiding memory of the overall experience).*<sup>396</sup>

To that extent, the work has succeeded in terms of my ambition for it: *Hush House* is an animation of the environment, enhancing the former purpose and properties of the building and the acoustic properties of the space. The actual work is the sensation left with the participant and the imagination used to animate and form their own narratives for their experience. The cycles of sound animated the space and gave the sense that “the building was speaking”<sup>397</sup>. This movement of sound and the journey to, through and from the space defined the durational concept of the work, the subjective experience of which is impossible to offer successfully in any secondary format.

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<sup>396</sup> Subject E

<sup>397</sup> Visitor book entry

It is the durational aspect that would always push the work into a more performative context by embracing the time-based quality of the art form, along with introducing the audience into an environment that they are able to interact with, form their own dialogue with and therefore generate their own narrative within and around the work. As already analysed in the previous chapter, the recognition of ones own phenomenological communication with the world is quite gratuitously evident through being immersed in *Hush House*. The experiences of the audience feeling they might have “[grown] an ear in [their] stomach[s]”<sup>398</sup> or felt “the bodily experience of the place”<sup>399</sup> are very instinctive responses to the work that does not require intellectual interrogation. Therefore Goffman’s framing of the descriptive language is within an enabled context of subjectivity.

The experience is an inherent component of the contract entered into by the audience, one that does not allow them to observe the work from a distance, or with a passive gaze. This total immersion is only possible through the first hand experience of the work. This is what would prove to be the challenge in establishing the potential format for the subsequent presentations of *Hush House*, unless subsequent presentations are intentionally re-mediated using the language of a storyteller, through the relics of sound, image and object, to form a semi-complete presentation, with enough space for the subject to introduce their own “genetic constitution”<sup>400</sup>.

### Institutionalised Remediation and Display

*Transformation and Revelation* was the title and theme for the 2011 Quadrennial of British Theatre Design in Cardiff. The national exhibition is open across all Performance Design disciplines and therefore represents a

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<sup>398</sup> Visitor book entry

<sup>399</sup> Visitor book entry

<sup>400</sup> Considered by Husserl as the manner in which objects appear within the temporal flow of our experience and the point from 1930 onwards where he offered a tiny insight into possibly contemplating the spirit as a consideration within the phenomenological experience

cross section of performance design or scenography, in the UK, in the four years leading up to the exhibition.

It invites designers working with set, costume, light and sound, to present their work. As a body of work it does represent the widest possible spectrum of scenography, from the spectacles of West End productions (examples included Billy Elliot), International Opera Festivals (Bayreuth) and large-scale music concerts (Lady Gaga) through to the more conventional regional theatre space and, in the recent eight years, a rise in the use of non-purpose built and found spaces.



Fig.24

It is the increase of found space and site-specific work that inspired the title of the exhibition. With a more prolific appropriation of disused and derelict spaces becoming the new performance venues, in the last thirty years, Mike Pearson and Richard Gough were early British champions of the appropriated space.

*In the 1970's Cardiff laboratory Theatre created a number of special events under the direction of Richard Gough... They are events for special times and places ... disused churches, deserted beaches, abandoned country houses ... They may*

*celebrate particular dates ... draw attention to a specific building ... the life of a famous person' and take the form of a feast, a procession, a guided tour, a mystery outing in which 'each part of the journey is celebrated by music and action - the arrival at the theatre, the embarking, the trip, the disembarking'.<sup>401</sup>*

Out of the 200 exhibitors in *Transformation and Revelation*, a small representational selection was made for presentation at the *Victoria and Albert Museum* in the Summer exhibition (March – September 2012), preceded by a smaller selection subsequently made to represent Britain in the *International Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space* (June 2011).



Fig.25

*Hush House* was one of the projects included in both selections. However the decision to include the work in both exhibitions was based purely on the documentary material, for use as the exhibit. Neither curator for each of these exhibitions experienced the original manifestation of *Hush House*.

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<sup>401</sup> Pearson, M (1980) *Glimpses of the Map: Cardiff Laboratory Theatre 1974 – 1980*. Cardiff: Cardiff Laboratory Theatre in Pearson, M (2010) *Site-Specific Performance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. P.2.



Fig.26

Kate Bailey and Greer Crawley, editors of the *Victoria and Albert Museum* exhibition catalogue, asked the question: “*Is it important to document performance? What offers the most effective method of recording something so ephemeral?*” for the accompanying catalogue. My response was as follows:

*There is a rather paradoxical quality to performance documentation and its purpose.*

*Live performance is created in a different way to recorded media because it engages with an audience in a different way. This makes documentation of live work very difficult, as it will never be the same experience as first hand encounter. This is very true of Hush House in particular. It is a work that is not just about the experience of the immersive environment and experience of the journey to that site, but also uses sound frequencies below human audible level, only experienced through the sensation they create in the body. It is this sensation that creates the sense of presence of the building. These frequencies of sound could never be captured by a recording device and would need to be played back in an exact replica of the original space, in order to come anywhere close to a true representation of the original work. It is this visceral engagement that is lost in the documentation of a performance and yet without the document, there is only the memory of the work.*

*Hush House is presented as a document of the work but is edited and presented in a deliberately contrived way in order that it is accepted as an alternative piece of work, not a representation of*

*the original. However this is a notion continually up for debate and has been wrestled with in the circles of performance and performance art more so, for decades.*<sup>402</sup>

As with all performance work, unless experiencing the original, there is a challenge in how the design for the piece can be presented as an exhibit in a gallery, in order to truly represent the immersive nature of the live environment. The Prague Quadrennial attempts to address this problem:

*Prague Quadrennial will continue with the struggle of exhibiting performance, to capture the ungraspable, to make eternal something that is a constant construction site, always temporary and never completely finished. A process, undefined and unfinished. Something that, as Simon McBurney says, “only exists in the mind of the audience”.*<sup>403</sup>

This observation is the nature of live performance, as addressed by Peggy Phelan<sup>404</sup> but Filippo Tommaso Marinetti had a more focused understanding of the sensory impact scenography and the *mise-en-scene* can have:

*Marinetti celebrated the Variety Theatre for its reliance on “swift actuality” (Marinetti 1971:116) and for its generation of what he termed the “Futurist marvellous” (117). The marvellous is characterized by sensory invasion, the subversion of intellect by “body madness” (120). Marinetti proclaimed “the new significations of light, sound, noise and language, with their mysterious and inexplicable extensions into the least explored part of our sensibility” (117).*<sup>405</sup>

The production set designer will always produce a scale model or series of models, in which the detail enables all collaborators to accurately place themselves in the performance space, with a true sense of scale. The human instinct to be naturally seduced by a perfectly scaled down, but proportionally correct version of the full size space, has always been an

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<sup>402</sup> Sandys in: Bailey, K & Crawley, G (2012) *Gormley to Gaga, Transformation and Revelation: Design for Performance*. London: V&A Publishing. P.29.

<sup>403</sup> Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space(2011) *The Disappearing Stage*. [online] <http://www.pq.cz/en/international-competitive-exhibition.html>. Accessed 20/11/2011.

<sup>404</sup> Phelan, P (1993) *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. London: Routledge.

<sup>405</sup> Stanton B Garner Jr in: Banes, S & Lepecki, A eds. (2007) *The senses in performance*. London: Routledge. P.115.

effective method of communicating an accurate representation of the three dimensional space, to those that have not viewed it first-hand.

For a Costume Designer, the finished product is full – scale, whereby the object itself can be exhibited on a mannequin and treated with light to re-create a captured moment of the piece<sup>406</sup>. Drawings, models and sketches are accepted as an ever-evolving series of stages in the development of a production and a tangible document after the event.

Lighting Design and Sound Design are altogether not only harder to recreate or represent, both being the product of electromagnetic energy and therefore intangible media, but the nature of the process in using these media reduces the visual process (for the purpose of presentation or exhibition) to a series of charts, plans and diagrams of apparent abstract code. The very media is apparent only when applied within the same environment as the spectator. In trying to document this experience, for a Lighting Designer, good quality photographs that truly capture the temperature of light at any one moment, are very few and precious, with the balance of frequency and wavelength of light always an unstable force for any camera to grapple with. They hold only a static moment of the piece, never showing the fourth dimension of movement, one of the fundamentals of working with light for performance. Time and movement of lighting can be presented through video and becomes most effective when the relationship between the audience and the performance space has a sense of distance rather than the edit of a filmic close-up. Moving image shown on a transmitted light screen is more effective than a reflective viewing surface as it emits the same frequencies of light transmitted in the initial work and therefore can give a better

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<sup>406</sup> This would be considered a true “icon” of performance, within the context of the icon having some lived quality. The sweat, worn edges, traces of make-up and rips of a costume on display are alluring for the spectator, at close proximity. The traces of the performer along with the sense of size and scale of the performer, create a very tangible image of the complete performer, for the beholder. The queues to view Kylie Minogue’s famous gold hot pants, at the *Victoria and Albert Museum’s* exhibition of her costumes in 2007 are testament to this fascination with ghost of the embodied object and re-establishes Benjamin’s notion of the ‘aura’ as a descriptor of the uniqueness of a single object, with no replica.

likeness of the phenomenon of the lit experience than a printed or reflected photographic image.

With sound, representation becomes more problematic in that Sound Design is fundamentally about manipulating the movement of air and reflective surfaces within the given space, to recreate certain sounds. An example of when this fails to achieve is given by Barry Blesser:

*I once heard a concert while seated in the last row of Kresge Auditorium at MIT. That seat was located against a back wall that had been extensively treated with a massive amount of sound-absorbing material. Because there was no sound reflecting from that surface, perceptually, the wall was the virtual equivalent of an open space. Throughout the concert I had a feeling of being pulled into the void behind me, as if I would fall out of the auditorium when leaning backwards... From an aural navigational perspective, the acoustics of the rear wall should have provided a clear sense of my proximity to the back of the auditorium.<sup>407</sup>*

Blesser's focus becomes distracted from the music played at the concert, by his spatial relationship with the venue in which he is listening to it. Sound design is always dependent on the auditory field of the spectator and their relationship to the reflective surfaces around them. Each position within the space will dictate a different response for each participant. Therefore, Sound Design is inherently always site-specific. As suggested by Ross Brown: "a sonic environment is, to an extent, produced by the subjectivity of its inhabitants".<sup>408</sup> Playing a recording of the original sonic environment back through an exhibition speaker cabinet reduces the whole sonic image to a very flat plane. The dynamic of the full spectrum of sounds in the original performance, can often be clipped by the failure from a smaller speaker, designed for a smaller space, unable to transmit the full frequency range originally generated. Most people would recognise this in the lack of low-end frequencies, experienced at a large music concert, lost through

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<sup>407</sup> Blesser, B & Salther, L (2007) *Spaces Speak, Are You Listening: Experiencing Aural Architecture* Cambridge: MIT Press. P. 146.

<sup>408</sup> Brown, R (2010) *Sound: A Reader in Theatre Practice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. P.128.

translation in a subsequent TV broadcast. The physical nature of large movements of air, within a space, created by low frequencies is only ever going to be experienced within the space of the original performance. With *Hush House*, this is emphasised with half the frequencies of sound used in the work, being on the threshold of human perception of hearing. As the frequencies have become a tactile experience, no off-the-shelf recording technology will truthfully read or collect this data. Phonomnesia is the most accurate record of the experience after the event:

*The sound sits inside your head for a while after leaving the tunnel.*<sup>409</sup>

The challenge, for *Transformation and Revelation* and the *Prague Quadrennial 2011* was how to present something that no longer existed in a stable recorded audio format.

The recorded sound document is easily mistakenly contextualised if experienced as a stand-alone recording outside of the other artefacts and documents of the performance. With *Hush House* the recorded moments are so few and slight, there would appear to be very little sound in the space. The reality of the installation was a very dense sound environment, on the point of suffocation. As observed by one subject:

*There's a great contrast between the heaviness inside and the lighter sounds outside.*<sup>410</sup>

It was the low frequencies (10, 20 and 23Hz), un-captured by recording equipment that filled the space and bodily cavities. The punctuations of overhead light aircraft, pheasant calls or buzz of a bee became amplified in the sound recording as the solitary few audible sounds. In actuality, these sonorous objects were lost in the mass of air movement experienced in reality and remained very much part of the background as they contend with the psychoacoustic properties of the deeper, muscular wavelengths, more

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<sup>409</sup> Subject J immediate feedback after experiencing *Hush House*.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid.

prominent in the bodily cavities. Steve Goodman elaborates on this in his own observations in the use of digital equipment over analogue:

*Postquantum experimentation with sound and computation has drawn attention to an atomistic digital ontology, whose analysis cannot be subsumed to a topology based on analog waves. This methodological problem, central to the ontology of vibrational force, also lies at the heart of contemporary debates regarding digital sound aesthetics and the textural innovations of granular synthesis. Texture marks the membrane between vibration and skin.<sup>411</sup>*

The sparse digital recording of *Hush House* is a misrepresentation of the event and does not match the comments collated from the audience or the physicality of the individual participants in the video footage as they move in a stilted choreography to locate themselves in different acoustic positions within the building.<sup>412</sup> The sound recording accompanying the video document has been edited and amplified, with many of the sparsely collected sounds layered in order to enrich the experience for the secondary spectator. The entire soundtrack has been rebuilt from the existing recordings but matched with the visuals of the edited video document to enhance the document film. It is this act of manipulation and editing that takes the document from being a series of captured moments of the event, to a fully constructed film - to be experienced as another work. With a reconstructed soundtrack enhancing the evocative images of the original work, it is this experience that had to be judged by the secondary audience, complete with fully reconstructed Sound Design.

At a *Prague Quadrennial 2011* panel discussion, hosted by Steven Brown<sup>413</sup>, the difference between the craft of a sound designer and sound artist was debated at some length. In conclusion, it was the general consensus that there was very little difference between the two, from the point of view of the practitioner and sound community. It was considered a

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<sup>411</sup> Goodman, S (2010) *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect and the Ecology of Fear*. Cambridge: MIT Press. P. 117.

<sup>412</sup> See video document

<sup>413</sup> Prague Quadrennial 2011 [online] <http://www.pq.cz/en/steve-brown.html>. Accessed 28/8/2011

more naïve notion on the part of the external spectator, which maintained the separation between the two.

*Hush House* was categorised in the catalogue as a work of Sonic Art and yet it was awarded the *Prague Quadrennial Special International Jury Award for Excellence in Sound Design*.



Fig.27

It seems unlikely that the judging panel based their decision on the soundtrack alone and therefore it can only be concluded that the concept of the work, with sound as a central scenographic device, combined with enough visual imagery was a substantial enough descriptive document to evoke a strong enough aural and visual image, in amongst the overwhelming sea of other exhibits.

*The award to Sandys (pictured with Czech director and Juror, Viliam Docolomansky is significant. International recognition for her work which uses resonance and vibrations rather than traditional composition, suggests that the UK theatre sound scene should similarly seek to redefine itself more expansively. It would seem that scenographers must master a related but different field in the presentation of their work. Lotke noted that when scenography is transposed to a new context, the*

*dramaturgy must also evolve for the exhibit to work on its own terms.*<sup>414</sup>

As noted in this report from Dodi Nash, there is a willingness amongst the sonic or audio community to dispel any separation in the use of sound related definitions of roles and activities, across genres of art. If anything, the interdisciplinary potential of the medium is embraced. If this is the conclusion of a panel discussion of sound practitioners within the Performing Arts, it would be interesting to examine what conclusions can be drawn from a panel of sound practitioners within the visual arts context. As acknowledged by the Artistic Director of the Quadrennial (and one of the judging panel) – Sonia Lotke – the medium can be allowed to drive the work and dramaturgical decisions are allowed to be governed by the individual participants, not by a given text or movement. This is clearly recognition for sound as more than just passive scenography.

#### Remediation or New Work?

*The debate continued how to represent sound design. Some said it shouldn't be attempted, others couldn't wait to experiment. Sandys' own exhibit consisted of little more than photographs, prose and a recording: our brains did the rest. Presenting work in new ways in a museum context does throw up problems of museology.*<sup>415</sup>

What is evident in the discourse around how performance and scenography are displayed, beyond the original work itself, is definitely reliant on what is displayed and what is construed from the evidence on display or how much of the concept can be portrayed. Despite the lack of aura, remediation may be the only way to experience the concept of the work for a mass audience. As with Muller's *Illegal Border Crossing*, *Hush House* had to become a collection of items that would create a bigger picture than just the sound itself.

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<sup>414</sup> Dodi Nash PQ 2011 – *Treading the Path of Risk (abridged for Blue Pages)* Wordpress. July 6 2011. <http://dodynash.wordpress.com/2011/07/06/pq-2011-treading-the-path-of-risk-abridged-for-blue-pages/> Accessed 28/8/2011

<sup>415</sup> Dodi Nash PQ 2011 – *Treading the Path of Risk (abridged for Blue Pages)* Wordpress. July 6 2011. <http://dodynash.wordpress.com/2011/07/06/pq-2011-treading-the-path-of-risk-abridged-for-blue-pages/> Accessed 28/8/2011

With *Illegal Border Crossing*, the objects as document, presented by Muller in the gallery space, were not the artwork; the artwork exists within the imagination of the viewer, although never a participant in the experience. The document or ‘relic’ will maintain its longevity as an artwork through it being a framed object in the gallery: the marketable object. It is contemplated at a distance. The combination of the cropped image, the selected tree and the staged viewing platform for these objects, reduces the act of journey to a visual fragment, for the audience. This visual fragment, as the only interpretation of the event, could be considered a series of icons of the work. Tracey Warr suggests:

*The icon ... is both a reduction of that mystery and capable, through belief, of fully expanding into an encounter with that mystery. The icon makes the intangible and invisible accessible in a portable form.*<sup>416</sup>

With any performance, documented and recaptured in another format at a later date, although the artefacts may be remediated as icons, as time distances the viewer from the act, Warr separates the objects (or icons) from the act, by presenting them as “marketable”. What Warr claims, endorses the object of documented act as another outcome from the act, not a document and certainly not a version of the act. This could apply to the documented act of *Hush House*. The artefacts created for display purpose have become another outcome, to the extent that when curated as an entire package, including the flight cases, the works become a new display: relics within a larger installation with a new narrative. Peter Farley - curator of the *Prague Quadrennial 2011 UK* display suggests:

*We wanted to include designs for the increasingly wide range of theatre genres found in the UK – from drama, dance, opera and spectacle to site-specific, found-space, experiential and immersive performance; to explore the use of new technology in live performance; to include designs by artists from other disciplines such as architecture and fine art; to reveal the*

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<sup>416</sup> Warr, T (2003) “Image as Icon: Recognising the Enigma” in *Art, Lies and Videotape* (catalogue). London: Tate Publishing, P.35

*designer as an essential collaborator and contributor in the creation of a work of theatre; to show that design is not simply about clothes and scenery but is primarily concerned with the careful layering and interpretation of inspired aural and visual ideas.*<sup>417</sup>

His use of the artefacts from Contemporary British Theatre Design formed the basis for his design of the exhibition stand. Each of the twelve works was isolated within a skeletal gold-framed box, containing an assemblage of documents and artefacts or icons from the production.

The display technology (lighting, sound, video) used within the exhibit was stripped back to component parts (electronics and wires) exposed in order to create a sense of the work being maintained or incubated. Each design was labelled, the aesthetic of which was drawn from forensic labelling, drawing attention to the displayed objects as evidence.

*...to give the spectator a glimpse of who this shadowy theatre artist actually is and how he or she thinks, we realised it would be essential to exhibit, not only final designs and artefacts but also, where possible, preparatory drawings and other work that demonstrate his or her journey through ideas and working processes – to reveal the transformation of concepts into reality. One of our many references was the notion of synapses and the electrical impulses in the brain that connect these ideas. This engendered a mental picture of the exhibition space as a living organism kept alive by electrical transfusion through wires and cables whilst also being an organism in the process of being dissected, analysed and examined – a sort of alchemical laboratory of objects and ideas exposed and displayed.*<sup>418</sup>

Imposing such a strong display format, all the works were denied strength of their own identity, amongst the collection. However, on closer inspection of each, a reading of the work was clear for the viewer. The rules of engagement were offered at the outset of entering the exposition and there was no expectation for anything beyond the fragments of each design. In this respect, the curation and design of the British Exposition was an elegant

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<sup>417</sup> Peter Farley in: Cipcova, L, Svoboda, A & Parizkova, D eds. (2011) *Prague Quadrennial 2011 Catalogue*. Prague: Arts and Theatre Institute. P.246.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.* P.247.

solution to the problem of displaying the performance document, experienced internationally. The deconstructed event is deliberately maintained as a set of artefacts or icons within which the imagination of the viewer reconstructs their own event. The notion of synapses can be embraced as a mode of operating through the exhibit as the self – made detective. Given this instruction, the viewer may undertake their own adventure. This reconstruction will not be weighted with the same immersiveness as the original, but that becomes irrelevant when a replacement *modus operandi* offers an alternative experience that remains unique to that context with all the opportunity for developing the mythical quality espoused by the Performance Art community and captured very precisely within Muller’s Biennale exhibit.

*Illegal Border Crossing* had no primary audience to witness the act in the first instance. It is not a participatory work that has subsequently been re-contextualised. As a fragmented document, it is only possible to construct the journeys in the imagination, forming a unique map of the event, for each viewer. There is no context missing, only what is evident, constructed for the viewer in the exhibit. It might be possible to question relics and document of Performance work, when framed against a similar backdrop of a festival of work. How much of a performance would need to be constructed in order to generate a tangible enough set of relics and documents to present as exhibit? How much could remain fictional, as long as the description of the event offers enough clues to construct the potentially hypothetical event in the mind of the viewer/spectator. Does the viewer/spectator become participant in the construction of a mythical narrative, the inventor of their own imagined event?

Within *Hush House*, where an even more fragile layer of unrecordable media is offered as one of the elements lacking in the evidence on display, the leap of faith undertaken by the viewer/spectator relies entirely on the subjectivity of the individual and the capacity for their own created narrative. `to that extent the potential of the sublime experience is only ever

a desired one, never the embodied, corporeal experience suggested by Tracey Warr within the evidence of the icon.

## Conclusions

The process of *Hush House* being exhibited in Cardiff, Prague and London has drawn a useful conclusion to the PhD. It has clarified for me the perception of artwork through different modes of spectatorship. This is demonstrated through the journey *Hush House* has made in its incarnation as site-specific installation and subsequent remediation in exhibition and museum displays.

The continued remediation and subsequent award for *Hush House* has happened beyond the original scope intended for this research project. A single stage of remediation was only ever intended for the purpose of drawing conclusions over one of the main research questions within this study: *How perception of the work is altered by remediation, considering the original work is constructed to present the environment and phenomenological experience as the work.* With this having been explored through a lengthier process and collection of qualitative material, my research has benefited with an enriched outcome of findings, as disseminated through chapter four.

Earlier stages of the research process presented the other two major research questions: Initially a study of *how the shifting frame within site-specific installation could change perception of the work and where the use of specific media, in relation to the site and journey, could present the potential for qualities of the sublime.* My intention was to explore existing presentation formats of site-specific installation, expanding on the use of intermedia and sonic readings of the site through developing new works in response. This discourse was the vehicle through which to interrogate potential for the sublime experience within these works.

The outcome was never intended as a redefining of the sublime but to use the work as an alternative reading of sublime discourse from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, recognising the problematic nature of the discourse around subjectivity of the encounter with an artwork. I created

new works in order to test the discourse to establish where they might sit within it or whether shifting the frame and exploring the touch of the artist, would aid in revealing ways of reading the sublime through the works. This was extended to those in particular that employ the sonic experience.

Starting in the landscape of the desert, the journey has taken me through open landscape of the mid-west United States, through de-commissioned nuclear testing grounds, into creating new works in de-commissioned military spaces in the UK, concluding with remediation of these newly created site-specific installations in the gallery and museum space.

As explored through the journey of this PhD, the position of this research, within current discourse of the sublime, offers an alternative reading for the site-specific installation as a phenomenologically recognised experience, as event. It is neither just a Kantian intervention within the natural landscape, or an entirely abstract notion of Lyotard's other as pure emotion. This places it in a position straddling both, whilst not conforming to one or the other. It has adopted qualities recognised within existing discourse that I have been able to explore and challenge in order to establish alternative readings. Where I hope to contribute and expand on current discourse is in the reading of the particular sites, as spaces for reading the sublime through the notions of the overflow outlined by Derrida as the prodigious. I proposed the experience of hearing and the expanded notion of sound, space and its impact on the body has a place as the prodigious. The experience of the work as prodigious, only qualifies, however, if the *colossal* frames the fear, as explored through the notion of the shifting frame.

I have explored the notion of the pilgrimage journey as an attribute of the site-specific installation. This journey through the text and around the works embarked as a touristic pilgrimage, through a similar gaze of the eighteenth century Grand Tour, from the desert to the military bunker.

Throughout this research, my chosen examples challenge the human understanding of what apparently exists as part of the landscape and what is

contrived and fabricated. It is the point where the experience confounds comprehension of logical explanation and therefore beyond the explainable, with potential for the ‘other’. The major argument from this then forms – can we call it the ‘other’, or the sublime experience if it is constructed?

The journey adopted a more phenomenological angle as the journey moved from the gaze of the exterior to the internal gaze of experience in order focus on the phenomenological experience of sound as a catalyst for further discourse around a potential for the contemporary sublime. I problematized the nature of the sublime as an issue of subjectivity. This was contextualised further within more recent discourse around the New Phenomenology or *Neue Phanomenologie*, grounded within emotion and subjectivity, opening up the position of the frame as a perceptual device within this context, steering phenomenology and the sublime to be distilled and interrogated through *Hush House*.

Alongside the acknowledged revival of interest in the sublime, I have been able to observe recognition of interest in the use of sound as an acknowledged medium. This recognition was witnessed personally through receiving the award for sound design at the *Prague Quadrennial 2011* (the first time sound has been considered and rewarded on the scenographic platform, in it’s 45 year history), as well as the accolade of the *Turner Prize* being awarded to a sound artist – Susan Phillipz - in 2010<sup>419</sup>. This recognition was commonly shared by the British media, as voiced by Channel 4 News culture editor Matthew Cain:

*The win was a shot in the arm for sound art ... This movement has been under way for a while now and the roots of it can be traced as far back as the start of the twentieth century, with the activities of the Dadists and the Futurists ... The high-profile win for Susan Philipsz might just build this up to the tipping point needed for sound art to really take off.*<sup>420</sup>

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<sup>419</sup> Annual British art prize given to an “innovative” nominated artist under the age of 50. Sponsorship of the monetary prize was given by Channel 4 in 2010.

<sup>420</sup> Cain, M (2010) “Turner Prize: Susan Philipz wins prestigious art award”. *Channel 4 News* [online] 6/12/2010. Accessed 31/7/2012. URL: <http://www.channel4.com/news/turner-prize-susan-philipsz-wins-prestigious-art-award>

As described by Charlotte Higgins in *The Guardian*:

*Philipsz, 45, is the first person in the history of the award to have created nothing you can see or touch.*<sup>421</sup>

Higgins' observation highlighted the purpose of the *Turner Prize* as a barometer of "new developments in contemporary art".<sup>422</sup>

The journey *Hush House* has made from its original incarnation, to the subsequent stages of presentation has worked as a vehicle to read the journey of my thesis through. It describes the process of exploration and revelation, which informs the shift in media that I have used throughout, from open landscape to an introduction of acousmatic sound, "that concentrates on space and spatial experience as aesthetically central."<sup>423</sup>

The shift in media has therefore had a direct impact on my own practice and the forum in which this practice is now being presented. It has been received as the 'other' in both the performance and sonic arts circles. Both see it as peripheral, winning an international performance design award<sup>424</sup> for possessing this property of being other and therefore emergent within both discourses.

The value of this research in its potential for further dissemination of practice or publication is within a field of integrated sound into decommissioned Twentieth Century military spaces, as short-lived experiences or, as I proposed, the performed installation event. The notion

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<sup>421</sup> Higgins, C (2010) "Turner prize won by Susan Philipsz for a sound installation". *The Guardian* [online]. 6/12/2010. Accessed 31/7/2012 URL:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2010/dec/06/turner-prize-winner-susan-philipsz>

<sup>422</sup> Tate Online (2012) *Turner Prize Series* [online] Accessed 31/7/2012. URL:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain-other-venues/exhibitionseries/turner-prize-series>

<sup>423</sup> Smalley, D (2007) "Space-form and the Acousmatic Image". Organised Sound. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Vol 12, Issue 1. P.35.

<sup>424</sup> *International Jury Special Award for Excellence in Sound Design*, Prague Quadrennial, 2011.

of the performed installation emerged through recognising the site as a space where the audience/subject employ their own method of navigation, on a journey to, through and departure from the work. This journey was one that required the subject to introduce a level of anamnestic assimilation with the present, in order to generate a narrative for the site already animated by sound. Positioning the subject as a participant within the installation has enabled a position of protagonist within the journey as they have individually 'performed' their own reading of the site.

The specificity of the Cold War site is important to the research at this point in time due to the low level of published declassified information surrounding these sites. It is still at a level whereby an element of mystery is still retained. Within the next twenty years, as more information is declassified and these sites are emancipated, this mystery will gradually decrease and the potential for the self-written narrative of these sites will be replaced by factual evidence.

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## **Appendices**

## **Appendix A**

Interview with Nancy Taylor, Director of the Skystone Foundation, conducted at 114 North San Francisco Street, Flagstaff, AZ on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2008.

## **Appendix B**

Interview with Mariele Neudecker, Artist, conducted at ZhdK, Zurich University of the Arts, Zurich, on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2009.

### **Appendix C**

*Radioflash* feedback, conducted at the end of the installation as an informal discussion, with participants on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2009.

## **Appendix D**

*Hush House* feedback, conducted at the end of the installation as informal group discussions and as visitor book entries, at RAF Bentwaters, Woodbridge, Suffolk on 12<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> March 2010.

## **Appendix E**

*Hush House* feedback, conducted as post event email questionnaire, with response from Subject E on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2011.

## **Appendix F**

*Hush House* feedback, conducted as post event email questionnaire, with response from Subject F on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2011.