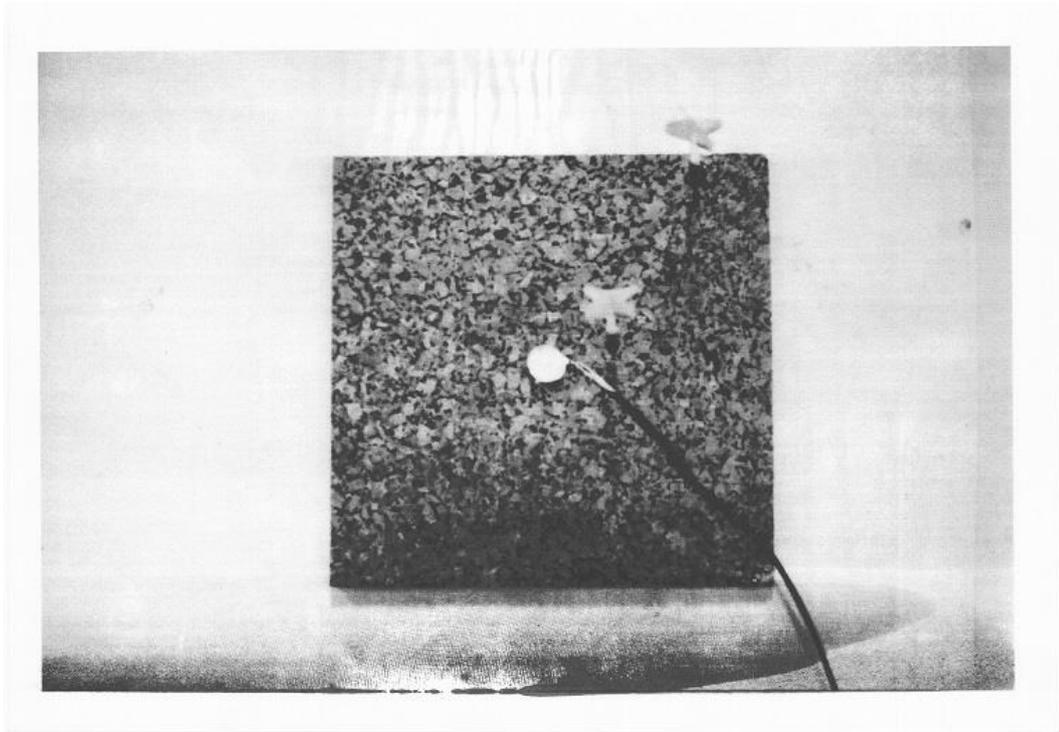


Action, Repetition and Distance:

Exploring Sound and The Body/Sounding The Body



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The work discussed here is presented on USB as three central videos; *Guitar Piñata*, *Dart Dart Dart* and *Drum Drum Drum*, which are then addressed in relation to a number of different artists and themes. In this contextualizing text there are personal reactions and reasoning, alongside a wider analysis of the work.

USB Contents

1. Guitar Pinata
2. Dart Dart Dart
3. Drum Drum Drum
4. Blind Deaf 1
5. Guitar Gap (image)
6. Dart Dart Dart Series

The USB stick presented with the thesis contains all work referred to in the text. Guitar Pinata, Dart Dart Dart, and Drum Drum Drum are the three central videos, Blind Deaf 1 is referred to in early stages of experimentation, and Guitar Gap (image) is an image of an object which is referred to in the text. Dart Dart Dart are scanned images of a series of screenprints that I produced, which are also referred to in the text. There is also a digital version of the thesis on the USB stick.

Contents

Introduction.....	4
Experimenting.....	9
Gender.....	13
Guitar Gap.....	15
Destruction.....	17
Guitar Piñata.....	22
Distance.....	32
Dart Dart Dart.....	40
Drum Drum Drum.....	45
Conclusion.....	46
Personal Reasoning.....	48
Bibliography.....	49

INTRODUCTION

The starting point was to attempt to make sounds that were physical. Originally this meant sounds that seem/sound physical; sounds that are declared as physical by the listener, not the artist ('visceral' is often used by music critics who try to describe music as sounding instinctive, guttural or perhaps just about/around function). So here, what is meant by 'physical', in the starting point of the investigation is quite a superficial and removed definition; a sonic experience that *seems* to communicate an experience where an artist has projected her body through a recording, suggesting some sort of bodily presence. This is in referral to recordings where the performer of the recording is not present at the moment of listening, but the listener is aware of the performance. This is opposed to the "disembodied voice"¹ where the listener hears a recording and has no idea or images in mind as to the actual source of the sound. Through works such as *Dart Dart Dart Series* and *Drum Drum Drum I* explore these ideas of performance as process and how that manifests into the present. However, what this investigation attempts to achieve and establish eventually is a close, successful, and practical exploration of the definition of 'physical' sounds. The definition of the term 'physical' is in flux throughout the thesis, due to the practical nature of the investigation, and the things that I establish in my performances and experiments. Initially in my works, striving for 'physicality' meant attempts at harnessing the power of the immediacy of direct physicality as a means of exploring more-than-representational relationally. So direct physicality here means my body in the moment of the performance, making direct contact with an

¹Young, M.. 2006: *Latent body—plastic, malleable, inscribed: The human voice, the body and the sound of its transformation through technology*, in Schroeder, F., *Contemporary Music Review*, Volume 25, Issue 1-2, Special Issue: *Bodily Instruments and Instrumental Bodies*, 81-92

object. 'Physical sounds' or 'physicality' means the eventuality of that direct contact, and the apparent manifestation of the direct contact within the produced sounds, communicating in way that is more than representational. So it is in reference to a conceived element of the communication; an element that is present through creation and listening; when experiencing the produced sound, it is possible to understand the no-representational relationality. This thesis is a project of realization, and so my role changes from listener to performer. Eventually this produces as a spectrum of investigations into embodied sound, where the distinction between the body and the instrument is blurred; the instrument is a body and the body is an instrument. Although technology is used in the form of contact mics and amplification, the work suggests that the idea of sonic physicality is rooted in gestural work, where the sounds created are as close to the actions that created them as possible. That is, the extremities of the sounds (volume, pitch) are affected by extremities of gesture.

Group Ongaku and Gutai married these ideas to improvisation, space and performance:

“Ongaku activated the musical moment with improvisational discovery.

Through such process, the relations to the body were implicated and brought into direct contact with sonic production through gestural movements and the physical agitation of objects and materials and the collective surge of disordered sound initiated by the group. Approaching musical production as a space of action or performance, sounds result as by-products, as traces of physical action exerted beyond the body and against the found: random objects function as

possible instruments, group dynamics unfolds as a conversation intent on uncovering new terrain, and the musical moment acts as a frame in which the found, the body, and sound intertwine to form composition, as noise”²

So for Group Ongaku, it seems that the only important physical aspect here is the direct physicality. The artistic focus is on the way that the sounds are created; in the moment of the performance. The performers body, the sounds it creates, and the actions within the performance are tied together as closely as possible. This exemplifies how I will define ‘noise’ throughout the work. Whilst Group Ongaku work with sound making through direct physicality like I intend to, the physicality only exists through the performance, and therefore, does not exist to become anything representational or not, as is my aim. These varying methods come into question when discussing my own work later in the exploration, but Group Ongaku’s context is within moments of performance, not composition. By composition, I mean organized sounds, and by sounds, I mean anything that can be heard. I mean music as considered, organized sound and noise as all other sound that is not considered music. The situation or location of the audience or listener is important in this case, and must be clarified in terms of my own, work. As I am required to comment critically on my own work, I must act as both performer and listener in the duration of the project.

With Group Ongaku, the inclusion of the body, and therefore the physicality of the sound is dependent on closeness. By interacting with objects and getting literally close to them, the sounds created are by-products of those actions. Furthermore, by

² LaBelle, B. 2006: *Background Noise: Perspectives On Sound Art*, New York, London: Continuum, 36

stretching or re-evaluating the classification of an object and an instrument; the space in between them then becomes an enquiry that *Dart Dart Dart*, for example, questions. Amelia Jones suggests “that the ‘artist’s body has functioned as a kind of “resistance to power” in relation to the body itself through its performance as “socially determined and determining”³, so in presenting the body as an object; subjective and socially determined and determining, the body questions hierarchy and power. By transferring an instrument into an object and an object into an instrument, the distance between all elements is irrelevant. Initially in *Dart Dart Dart* there is no instrument, and so all objects act as instruments, or tools with which to make music. But their status as an object remains. The blurring of the boundary between instruments and objects provides a basis that partly disables musical intention. This distance is an important element in the investigation and exists as a means to create noise, or at least sound that is not representational. Furthermore, looking forward to *Drum Drum Drum*, it is possible to treat an instrument as an object if the intention is not to create organised sound as music.

LaBelle notes that “random objects function as possible instruments”⁴, which enables a physical engagement with those objects. I propose that instruments pose as possible objects and bodies pose as possible objects. Therefore, objects pose as possible instruments, like LaBelle suggests is the case with Group Ongaku, but furthermore objects pose as possible bodies, such as in *Guitar Pinata* and Niki De Saint Phalle’s *Shooting Picture (1961)*. Although these all seem loosely interchangeable, what I am proposing is an emphasis on objects (in their most object

³ Ward, F. 2002: *Marina Abramovic: Approaching zero*, From Huxley, M., Witts, N., *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader*, London, New York: Routledge, 138

⁴ LaBelle, B. 2006: *Background Noise: Perspectives On Sound Art*, New York, London: Continuum, 36

form) and movement. In attempting to distill bodies, tools, objects and instruments to their most object form, and manipulating them; moving them so they respond with sound, I can sound the direct physicality. This means that to some extent the idea of physicality is anti-technology. In *'The flux between sounding and sound: Towards a relational understanding of music as embodied action'*, Nicholas Brown notes that:

“the realm of music is expanded accordingly, with the aid of technology, but bodily enaction is diminished as such practice remains ensorcelled by sound's vertiginous nature and divorced from embodied modes of production...The operation of a laptop, for example, particularly in a traditional concert venue, challenges the 'intuitive view' of performance insofar as listeners cease to feel the immediate proximity of human agency in apprehending the musical experience.”⁵

This type of purely representational, anti-visual musical experience is what I intend to oppose. Of course, “sound's vertiginous nature” means that human agency is ultimately unimportant in a musical experience. But posing an alternative, and attempting a documentary-style sound art, exposes the superficiality of that musical experience where human agency is not important. Furthermore, when combining a visual experience with a sonic experience, there is the potential for embodied communication. On its own, music has experiential limitations:

“Music unfolds only in time, and the physical basis of music is based on the time

⁵ Brown, N. 2006: *The flux between sounding and sound: Towards a relational understanding of music as embodied action* From Schroeder, F., *Contemporary Music Review*, Volume 25, Issue 1-2, *Special Issue: Bodily Instruments and Instrumental Bodies*, 37-46

patterns of vibrations. Within this temporal basis two additional dimensions emerge: sequentiality and simultaneity. Music's particular nature permits to express both at once. Language is sequential but monophonic. Visual art has analogies of time expressed, for example, in the fascinating writings and paintings of Kupka, Klee, Delauney, or the Cubist movement but it is essentially spatial. Music's whole physical and cognitive–perceptual nature, however, rests solely within this two-dimensional temporality.”⁶

So in presenting a sonic piece that fuses the experience and presentation of direct physicality, it might be possible to communicate spatially, in a sculpture-like capacity but outside of the temporality of sound. Furthermore, to create an impression of the body, the sounds communicated, as well as the method of communication need to be gestural. I do not intend to ‘sound’ anything that is created by anything other than muscle. Or rather affect anything technologically that is created by muscle. I am therefore attempting to ‘sound’ something real and literal. Not a feeling or something emotional; something physical, something that actually exists in mass and affects objects and makes sound in that way; by making cells move. In the moment of creation, the sounds are not AT ALL representational. And in its communication, the product is relational, but non-representational.

EXPERIMENTING

Sketch No.1 is an attempt at improvisation, and the first sonic exploration of the enquiry. Merely a starting point, it became apparent that improvisation is not an appropriate method of exploration into direct physicality. I am trying to get closer to

⁶ Thaut, M. H. 2005: *Rhythm, human temporality, and brain function* From Miell, D., Macdonld, R., Hargreaves, D. J., *Musical Communication*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 173

the instrument but playing in a conventional way. The result is sonic meandering and drawn out drones of feedback and fuzz. I used distortion pedals from the start as there was a premeditated end-point, which directly obstructed the opportunity for an unconscious foundation⁷ required for successful improvisation. The reason for experimenting with improvisation was to test the idea that “improvisation is rooted, beyond the realm of will, in an anthropological disposition”⁸, but with no experience, context, or ability for progression, this tool was not relevant. There is an obvious desire for the guitar to sound ‘noisy’ or ‘aggressive’ which means that the sounds are exactly what the piece aims to oppose; they are representational. Derek Bailey states, “in freely improvised music, its roots are in occasion rather than place. Maybe improvisation takes the place of idiom.”⁹, so it is essential that the musician has *something* to communicate. In order to ‘sound the body’, it is essential to provide restrictions or boundaries that attempt to cut off the body from the mind, or as mentioned previously, create a distance. Cutting off one of the senses creates a small boundary in that it is obstructing the ‘usual’ way that the artist would engage with the instrument; as an instrument, not an object. Disabling the ability to hear or see the instrument establishes it as an object to a greater extent – the guitar exists in the space as any other object – the fact that it is shaped specifically as a guitar or makes sounds have got less significance when these senses are cut off. Furthermore, it disables the decision-making process, as I seek new means to respond to alien

⁷ Coursil, J. 2008: ‘*Hidden Principles of Improvisation*’ From Zorn, J., *Arcana III: Musicians on Music*, New York: Hips Road, 58-65

⁸ Coursil, J. 2008: ‘*Hidden Principles of Improvisation*’ From Zorn, J., *Arcana III: Musicians on Music*, New York: Hips Road, 61

⁹ Bailey, D. 2009: in *Derek Bailey* by Philip Clark, From Young, R., *The Wire Primers: A Guide To Modern Music*, London: Verso, 121

environments.

In “Experimental Music: Doctrine’, John Cage writes defines experimental as “an act the outcome of which is unknown”¹⁰. This aligns the outcome I am striving for with experimental music. However, the fact that I do not know the outcome is not the whole purpose of the enquiry; I am not investigating my body to create anything that is un-known, but it is, however, essential that it is, in fact, unknown. This classification is not extraordinary, but the detachment that Cage aligns with experimentalism is certainly noteworthy. The extent to which experimental musicians remove themselves from decision-making could help me create the distance I require from my mind, or consciousness.

The ‘free improvisation’, heard on *Blind Deaf 1* reveals similar results. Because I could still see the guitar and pedals in my head; I know what they feel like, what they look like, and how I play them, so when I touched them, not seeing them didn’t actually make much difference – the guitar was static and in my arms and I could hear the sounds that I was making and I automatically conceived them and contrived them. There are minimal differences between *Sketch No.1* and *Blind Deaf 1*. Despite the removal of the sense of vision and then hearing, it is clear that the sounds in these tracks are not purely physical, they are representative and seem to just allude to something else; some solo or style from memory. Music alludes to something else. It is not just a form, or a solid representation of one thing, it is about something – music is not about music- it does not mirror the notes that build it, it is a way to communicate and connect emotions, people and experiences. These tracks, although

¹⁰ Cage, J. 2009: *Silence*, London: Marion Boyars, 13

they could be seen as roughly *expressive*, they do not communicate anything muscular or physical.

The problem here is the process. In these two examples of early experimentation it is clear that I am 'making' sound and making implies intention. John Cage writes that "those involved with the composition of experimental music find ways and means to remove themselves from the activities of the sounds they make."¹¹, and furthermore liken a composer of experimental music to "the maker of a camera who allows someone else to take the picture"¹². Not only does this reveal a removal, or distance from the process, but the role of 'making' and 'maker' is in flux. Changing 'making' or 'playing' to 'doing' would be closer to creating something that is from the body, and closer to the picture taker in Cage's example. This requires the aforementioned blurring of objects within a process; 'making' and 'playing' require a fixed performer and determined intentions, whereas if the elements within a piece are just objects providing forces or materials then the responsibility to create meaning, or simply just 'make' or 'play' is no longer in the hands of the performer. In reference to Fluxus 'Happenings', Brandon LaBelle reveals the ways in which this is transferable; "As the body gains presence as an artistic medium, it brings with it questions of agency, location, and representation in such a way as to alter the aesthetic category as one separate or divorced from the real."¹³ So the viewer gains access to the performer as an object also, and the meaning created from the performance is based around this interplay between objects and reality.

¹¹ Cage, J. 2009: *Silence*, London: Marion Boyars, 10

¹² Cage, J. 2009: *Silence*, London: Marion Boyars, 11

¹³ LaBelle, B. 2006: *Background Noise: Perspectives On Sound Art*, New York, London: Continuum, 55

GENDER

Objectification and agency highlight aspects of gender within the focus of my work, and attempting to work with my own body, for which gender is a constant point of questioning and self-awareness, focuses the work quite drastically on gender. All of the work I produce in the duration of this project is specifically monochrome and gender-less as possible; I attempt to create a blank impression of my own gender and of the objects around me in order to question the way that gender is projected, assumed, or affiliated. Whilst throughout the thesis I talk about the masculine image of the guitar, of the darts, of violence, and then of the drums, I do not simply intend to present myself as a woman who is performing as masculine, I do not explicitly claim ANY gender. So the blank-ness of all of the work intends to highlight historical gender inscription and therefore expose it.

“The body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a disassociated self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perceptual disintegration. Genealogy as an analysis of descent is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose the body totally imprinted by history and the processes of history’s destruction of the body.”¹⁴

So according to Foucault, the female body is trapped by its own history. Patriarchal society forces gendered stereotypes onto images and sounds and it is normal, expected, and not even questioned. My work attempts to subtly exist within those boundaries in order to disrupt them. *Guitar Pinata*, *Drum Drum Drum*, and even *Dart Dart* could easily exist in the male dominated experimentalism of the past 60

¹⁴ Foucault, M. 1984: *Nietzsche, genealogy history* in Rainbow, P. *The Foucault Reader*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, in McNay, L. 1992: *Foucault & Feminism*, Boston: Northeastern University Press, 15

years, but the fact that I am female and queer means that the historical imprinting that Foucault talks about is questioned and I can critique the gender, not ascribe it. In Christian Marclay's *Guitar Drag*, which I will analyse in more depth later in the thesis, he exhibits similar masculine signifiers such as violence, technology (a guitar), a rope, as well as his own; a pick-up-truck (machine), but the gender is not questioned. It is about his body, in the way that it represents himself, but it is not about bodies in that it will question how the viewer thinks about their body and other peoples. I intend to use what Marclay intrinsically has within his work. The point is not that as a female artist, my work is allowed to be regarded differently, but I am communicating with my body, and gender is one of the biggest identity aspects that I deal with every day and therefore within my work. When I was learning guitar at school, I was the only girl who played guitar. Part of the GCSE requirements was to form a group of some kind, and as a female guitar player, no-one wanted me in their band; not because I was worse or better than anyone else, because I was female. That's when my gender explorations and subversions began, and whilst I do not attempt to disassociate myself from my gender at all, I do aim to blur what it means to be a female artist or musician; the work that I create should be genderless, but talk about gender and create a fluid spectrum where femininity and masculinity can be re-defined.

So although I am employing social and historical manifestations of gender in the reception of my work, I attempt to disrupt them, and in a way deny that they exist (or at least question why). By focusing on harnessing the immediacy of direct physicality as previously explained, I aim to dissociate specific genders with specific actions too, so questioning essentialism and the way that gender is differentiated

biologically. Whilst I am aware of biological differences, I disagree that these should be so gendered, and I propose that not only the characteristics that we attribute should be less binary, but the way that bodies themselves are classified in terms of gender should be less binary too. As Susan Foster claims, gender is an “unstable, non-ordinary, historically specific orchestration.... of performed sociality”¹⁵, and as a social construct that I do not feel part of, my work attempts question this ‘performed sociality’.

GUITAR GAP

The guitar looks like a disjointed or broken bone, the neck of the guitar is literally sawed in two and then joined using another guitar neck, creating a gap in the neck where the strings are. This not only creates a gap/void in the sound making part of the guitar, but it sort of exposes parts of the guitar that are not supposed to be exposed, not necessarily as if it’s insides are exposed, but it looks broken in an unnatural way. The guitar is made to represent my body, and exists as a sort of sculpture as well as an instrument. It is possible to play the guitar, but here, the physicality of the piece exists in a more literal way. Here, I created a piece that doesn’t explore physicality through sound, as previously mentioned, but with space and mass. This could cross over in a performance using ‘Guitar Gap’, but the process that I am aiming for in my performance does not fit with this instrument. After playing ‘Guitar Gap’, it was apparent that the difference between this and *Sketch No. 1* was not great enough. ‘Guitar Gap’ communicates best as an object that has been

¹⁵ Foster, S. 1998: *Choreographies of Gender*, Signs 24, in Stimpson, C. R., and Herdt, G., *Critical Terms For The Study Of Gender*, Chicago and London: The University Of Chicago Press, 38

broken. It is an object that suggests potential but also loss. I intended it to be an opportunity to create sounds with less boundaries and expectations, but playing the guitar, those boundaries still existed for me. 'Guitar Gap' exists in the contour of the project as a sort of detour investigation, as a visual piece. Although it alludes to sound, it uses sound, and the guitar in a more abstract way. It would hang in a gallery like a body. It would be displayed as an object; so to highlight the unnaturalness of the broken neck, and to make it an object that is supposed to be looked at. The emphasis is on the neck and if it was presented on it's own it's importance would be heightened; the idea when creating it was to think of it as a body, so in presenting it, furthering the bodily aspect would be an important element to the piece. There are countless examples of the instrument-as-body, and vice versa in art history, from *Le Violin d'Ingres* by Man Ray, Clara Rockmore's theremin performances, Laetitia Sonami's *Lady Glove*, to George Brecht's idea that "everything that happens is music"¹⁶ and the use of the body in fluxus 'Happenings'. Blurring the distinction between the body and the instrument like this creates an environment where the body can be scrutinized in an objective way. However as Chris Burden finds, when presenting himself to a curator as an object, it presents problems as well as questions; "I wanted to force him to deal with me by presenting myself as an object. But I'm not an object, so there'd be this moral dilemma."¹⁷ The 'moral dilemma' that Burden mentions is to do with agency and ownership, factors that come into play when bodies are not 'claimed' by their owners, but by subjective ideas, representations and frameworks within a piece of work or performance. By

¹⁶ LaBelle, B. 2006: *Background Noise: Perspectives On Sound Art*, New York, London: Continuum, 60

¹⁷ Ward, F. 2002: *Marina Abramovic: Approaching zero*, From Huxley, M., Witts, N., *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader*, London, New York: Routledge, 138

presenting an instrument as a body and a body as an instrument, both articles are subjective.

DESTRUCTION

In relation to the destructive nature of *Guitar Gap*, Christian Marclay treats vinyl records in similar ways in *Recycled Records Series*. Marclay cuts 12" records in half and then sticks them back together so when they are played on a turntable there is surface noise and the sound of the actual vinyl record, not the music on the record. Not only does this act as a tool of destruction, but "by foregrounding surface noise, Marclay attempt[s] to jolt the listener out of the reification created by the medium of recording"¹⁸. The two records stuck together allows the turntable to jump between two different tracks, creating a mix of expected sounds and unexpected sounds. This is what is gained from *Guitar Gap*; it plays with expectations and disturbs them. As Christian Marclay says, "you have this kind of tension between the actual recording and the unstable medium", so the tension is created by the juxtaposition, the intrusion and the disturbance.

There is definitely an element of destruction in *Guitar Gap*; the object is broken, it can no longer achieve the pitches that an electric guitar should be able to make. Furthermore, it is an object that forces both the player and the listener to think about the guitar differently; the sounds that the guitar makes seem to be coming from unnatural places. It forces the listener to notice sounds that are not 'guitar-like' and that perhaps are a result of the broken neck. Whilst this is something that is explored sonically in *Guitar Gap 1*, the piece exists most successfully as an object.

¹⁸ Shapiro, P. 2009: *Turntablism*, From Young, R., *The Wire Primers: A Guide To Modern Music*, London: Verso, 103

However, when the guitar is presented as an object, it still has both visual and sonic connotations. If there are no frets behind the strings then there are no 'notes' so the user cannot craft sounds based around expectations of how the notes should sound, they would be forced to play with it as an object. But not 'playing' like one would 'play' a guitar or someone would 'play' a piano, it is more playful/naïve than that, like a child would 'play' with something. It is less like an instrument and more like a tool that a body could interact with. Celeste B Mougnot's *40 Finches* executes this type of interaction ingeniously; the finches are not aware of the guitars they are standing on; the sounds are accidental and naïve/innocent of crafting. They approach an object as they would any other that exists in their world, as something to stand on. So the sounds produced are literally the sounds of a guitar being stood on by birds. When there are no musical intentions then the sounds can just be descriptions of actions. This is to say that the sounds do not communicate anything other than the sounds themselves. To define this more clearly, Ian Cross states, "music bears meanings that extend beyond the 'music itself'. One obvious candidate for what music might be about, for what it might *intend*- is emotion."¹⁹, so sounds that have no musical intentions do not communicate emotion, or anything other than the sounds themselves. However, sounds inherently have meaning, so although this strive for non-representational relationality is possible in process, by distancing and using experimental techniques to create sound, the emphasis on process in communicating sound is difficult to distill: "What is more angry than the flash of lighting and the sound of thunder? These responses to nature are mine and will not necessarily correspond with another's. Emotion takes place in the person who has it.

¹⁹ Cross, I. 2005: *Music and meaning, ambiguity and evolution* From Miell, D., Macdonald, R., Hargreaves, D. J., *Musical Communication*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 33

And sounds, when allowed to be themselves, do not require that those who hear them do so unfeelingly.”²⁰ So it is necessary to consider the process and the communication as separate entities and to an extent, after process, communication cannot be controlled. This brings into question the format of the piece; how it is presented. As the creator, although I can accept a minimal loss of control, in order to regain some of the control, I must include visual elements to the work. This can blankly suggest process and although the audience, viewer or listener will still view the work with their emotions in the framework, if I visualise the process, then the emphasis will be there. Much like in *Guitar Gap* where I am presenting a guitar that has been partly destructed, rather than playing the guitar that has been destructed; the presentation reveals that it is the body and shape of the guitar – the literal physical part of it, which is important to the piece.

In *Guitar Gap* the viewer realizes characteristics of the guitar that are expected and then unexpected. Within music, the expected is based on repetition, where the viewer or listener has expectation based on what they expect to come next, which will be determined by what they have heard before.

“The present time of our casual experience always contains a part of radical novelty, probable *a-posteriori*, yet never predicted. Indeed, we can predict many things, we can repeat procedures, but in the advent of a given moment, the present will always show its uniqueness”²¹.

With this example of the guitar, the viewer has expectations about the guitar

²⁰ Cage, J. 2009: *Silence*, London: Marion Boyars, 10

²¹ Coursil, J. 2008: ‘*Hidden Principles of Improvisation*’, from Zorn, J., *Arcana III: Musicians on Music*, New York: Hips Road, 64

because of the simple fact that they have seen a guitar before. When this is fractured or, when the present reveals it's uniqueness, it makes the viewer or the listener more aware and curious about the potential sounds that the guitar could make, what they represent, and what could happen next. Marclays records in *Recycled Records Series* have been exhibited as just an object on display, which changes the enquiry. When just looking at the broken records stuck together, the piece seems to be more about destructing the music than creating new sounds and a different perspective or way of looking at an object. In cutting up the records he devalues them, and creates a sort of cultural collage when he sticks seemingly random records together. *Guitar Gap* could similarly be seen as a destruction of the symbols and connotations of a guitar. It is important to note that whilst the representational aspects of sound are not the end creation, these are unavoidable representational elements that I must be aware of, and use. I intend everything to be as blank as possible in order to focus on process, but the electric guitar and records have history and meanings outside of the framework of the piece.

There is a progression from *Blind Deaf 1* in that the guitar is solely an instrument, to *Guitar Gap* where the guitar is more of an object to be explored. This creates an environment where the sounds produced can be untrained, or produced outside of learned musical conventions. This does not necessarily make the sounds more *bodily* but it does force the user to resort to basic problem solving and creative ideas that are not hindered by specific musical rules. Although this is true of free improvisation, which was attempted early on, in this case these sounds are points, and simple blows to an instrument that have been restricted; their potential is much less than the

potential available in free improvisation.

The guitar could be seen as a body. The neck of the guitar, is comparable to the neck of a human, and furthermore, is part of the spine. The fracture is representative of bodily abnormalities and differences. I wanted to create something that was physically comparable to my body, in appearance and shape, and I was getting frustrated with using guitars, as I was feeling uninspired. My spine is a 'S' shape and so in attempting to create something that would help me to make sounds away from the dead end of the guitar. In cutting up the guitar I could see the insides of the neck, which made me think about my spine, and the things it would or has allowed me to see and experience. Feeling and seeing my spine on different ways makes me think about my body differently, and the pain I get makes me aware of differences and experiences that I have. I wanted to impose that onto a musical instrument; see if the mechanics and the shape of it alter, and how that affects a viewer and me as the artist. The object definitely looks strange and I don't view it as a guitar. It is hard to hold and looks awkward and big. Although having something acting as my body does not necessarily make me think about my body in the same way, it does make me think about the differences between my bodies and others. Furthermore, the ways that I communicate and how they will be different from other artists.

The method that *Guitar Gap* brings into the project is a significant turning point. The idea of learning through unlearning; I do not want to know how to play an instrument, I am concerned with shifting my creativity through learning, enabling me to focus on alternative and new aspects of my work, that do not follow the social, historical and cultural boundaries. In Agamben's *Potentialities*, he claims that

“existing potentiality differs from [the] generic potentiality”²², so the potential to create sound on an instrument that I already know how to play is *existing* potentiality, and the potential to create sound with an instrument that I do not know how to play is *generic* potentiality. However, the latter means that I must suffer “an alteration (a becoming other) through learning”²³, and it is this that I am interested in surfacing. Becoming another and exposing an alteration through learning.

GUITAR PINATA

Guitar Piñata aims to make sound in the most physical way possible, it is void of any musical intentions because I am forced to treat the guitar as an object. Because of the restrictions of the baseball bat and the blindfold, the noise created is audibly the result of muscular movement, or direct physicality. It is clear that there is no specific score or rhythmical intention to what I am doing; the musical aim is somewhat unknown, which places the piece in John Cage’s definition of experimental. There are minimal preconceived plans of what is being communicated and there is minimal control over how it is being communicated. If 10 different people performed this piece, although there would be limits of what happened sonically within the performance, the performances would all be different. More importantly, the piece is about my body and my practice. So someone else performing this would not have been through the practical processes required to get to this point. In *Blind Deaf 1* it is still possible to make decisions based around musical expertise, because although the instrument or performer has changed or been altered, the end product does not

²² Agamben, G. 1999: *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 179

²³ Agamben, G. 1999: *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 179

harness purifies, raw, and direct communication. However, in *Guitar Piñata*, the ability to make a decision based on musical expertise has been taken away, and so the sounds are not restricted. They are more than representations of experience. The blows are physical acts *committed* onto the guitar. Using the baseball bat as a tool exposes the guitar as an object and *lets* it make sound from direct physicality not *makes* it make sound. It is naïve to claim that there is no agency here, as it is obvious that I am aware that hitting the baseball bat against the guitar is making sound, but even if I wanted to, I could not change what I do to enhance this.

The fact that a Piñata is a traditional Mexican kids game is not at the forefront of the meaning of the video, in fact if it weren't in the title, the reference would be very minimal. The title is a purposeful reference to the playfulness of the destruction. Although the video comments on destruction, it is important that the destruction is not too violent or threatening; the destruction is aimed at conventions, tropes and gender presumptions, it is not just inane violence.

The nature of the performance is significant – a piñata is made for destruction, but a guitar is not. Treating a guitar like a piñata involves physical violence, and the blindfold means that the actions are not considered musically in the instance of the performance. By this I mean that the blindfold obscures my ability to hit the guitar where I want, how I want, so it would be impossible for me to consider the performance rhythmically; the blows are relatively accidental. Hanging up a guitar and hitting it with a baseball bat whilst blindfolded produces sounds representative of that process, that is not to say that they don't have meaning outside of that, but in the moment of creation, they are about the process. The sounds recorded are pure

or true to the physical experience; they represent direct physicality. There is some significance in this (the violence), (as much as there would be significance if the action was kissing a guitar); the aim is brutal, not necessarily brutal in a violent sense, but it is definitely physical and requires ACTION and MOVEMENT and engaging with an object in a gestural manner. The purpose or aim of the piece is destruction, much like a piñata, but with a piñata the end result is positive, and there are sweets. With the Guitar Piñata the end result is that the guitar is broken.

On *Guitar Piñata Take One* the guitar is made to be as responsive as possible with volume and effects in order to communicate with greater contrast. This makes the tone aggressive, and there is a lot of feedback. Here there is less contrast in the sounds; it is not apparent what the sounds are, where the 'blows' happen. This adds a conscious musical feature that is affected and ultimately distorts the performance. It tampers with the method of communication, sensationalises it, and is not only unnecessary, but undermines the intentions of the performance. In *Guitar Piñata*, the guitar is presented in a clean state and it is literally the sound of the actions of hitting and destroying a guitar, albeit with the guitar plugged in. Although these sounds present destruction, they do not present emotion. Although I am not suggesting that one can remove the relationality of how sounds mean, the communication is centered around direct physicality. It is implicit within destruction and how destruction sounds that negativity, aggression, anger, and violence would be involved. There is no forced emotional communication. In fact, aside from the aggressive act, the performance could be seen as an expression of positivity or creative expression, not negativity. It is evident in the audio track that the physical approach to the performance is not based around the sounds of the guitar seeming

rhythmical, musical, or 'nice', the sounds reveal a physical and instinctive (seemingly random) exploration of space. Movement can be heard in the blows, which are extreme peaks and climaxes within the track. The sounds communicate destruction. It is clear that the performance forces the performer to be physically aware. Not just through actions or swings at the guitar, but the space around the body, and how the guitar moves and swings around the space forces both the viewer and the performer to be conscious of the surrounding space. Everything in the space is sensitive to the other objects and limbs, the guitar, and the baseball bat move in a considered and cautious way. There are moments when the performer swings for the guitar but misses it and the realization of the mass of the guitar creates tension between the viewer, the performer and the guitar. In *Guitar Pinata 2* the guitar actually inflicts a wound and draws blood, and the element of (relative) danger definitely creates tension. The guitar sort of reacts and responds in an unpredictable way which likens the guitar again to a body. The performance forces the performer to be more sensitive to the literal physical guitar, as well as their own physicality, which forces a heightened realisation of the somatosensory system/body schema.

The aim of the performance is to hit the guitar until it is destroyed and stops making sound; the rules of the performance are determined by elements of the process, and not arbitrary decisions determined by taste or opinion. There is no score, as a score would indicate direction or rhythmical intention. If there was a score, it would be in the format of the Fluxus happenings, where "Hit a guitar with a baseball bat" would be on a card. However, the piece is personal and is performed as part of an explorative journey. Furthermore, it expresses opinions about destruction, gender

and the body that are personal to me; it is not made to be performed by anyone else. In this way, the sound is mostly accidental. Expertise is not an element of the performance and in fact there is strong stance against expertise. By putting the body through creative processes that are not about reiterating knowledge, known techniques, learned musical tropes, even learned muscular movements, the performance exposes core decision making processes, core musicality, and by repetition, how we deal with or resist (relative) expertise. As Phil Archer says, “when approaching an unfamiliar system, discipline or doctrine without any prior knowledge, the sets of understanding we have developed and accumulated for successfully dealing with other situations and schema are brought to bear”²⁴, and although this is not always a new experience, it is evident that no predetermined plans have been taken to each individual performance. There is accidental sound due to uncontrollable variables. The performer doesn’t know exactly what the guitar would sound like, how it would move, or how it would need to be struck. Because of this, the sound is not contrived or considered. There are glitches and stutters in the recording that are part of the guitar breaking which are accidental in an even greater sense as it comes from the guitars insides. This is an exciting point in the performance as it marks a dramatic change in the sounds that the guitar makes; they switch from being from the guitars standard sound making properties; from the pickup, and then it sort of bleeds this new electrical sound substance. Mirroring the intentions to ‘get at’ or expose the body and bones and components, these sounds

24 Archer, P. 2004: *Intervention and Appropriation: Studies in the Aesthetics of the Homemade in Real-Time Electroacoustic Composition*, School of Music, University Of East Anglia, 56

are a moment of synergy; actions and physicality breaking down the physicality and function of the guitar.

In *Guitar Drag* (2000) Christian Marclay ties a guitar by its neck, much like in *Guitar Piñata*, but instead of hanging it, he drags it behind a pick up truck. Marclay presents the guitar as an object and as a body by focusing on the way it reacts to the abuse that the artist puts it through. The aggression and violence in the video is compounded by the masculine signifiers of a guitar, a car, and the machine-heavy actions seem to oppose any direct physicality. The acts of violence are executed in an easy way that is brimming with masculinity and power, and although the comparable aspects of the video liken it to *Guitar Pinata*, the notions of gender are very different and contradictory. *Guitar Drag* is about violence in general and more specifically about the lynching of James Byrd Jr. who was dragged to his death behind a pick up truck.²⁵ The guitar hangs inanimately from the back of the truck, helpless and deferential to the forces that move it. In making the guitar the determining object in the piece, the focus point in the video, and the reactive object, it becomes bodily in quite a disturbing way. The weight and mass of the object is uncannily body-like and when hanging in *Guitar Piñata* or being dragged in *Guitar Drag*, and the dead weight is tangible. Hanging from its neck, the guitar is being treated as a human. There is a neck and a body, and although there is no life in the guitar itself, presenting the inanimate object like this exposes a disturbing human vulnerability. It is vulnerable but also functional in a submissive way; it makes sounds and breaks.

The sounds are reactions or responses from the blows. In *Guitar Drag*, the sounds are constant and level the whole way through, sounding like a drone or a moan. The

²⁵ Marclay, C. 2000: on <http://soundart.zkm.de/en/guitar-drag-2000-christian-marclay/>

violence is not in one moment, one point or one blow, the violence is spread across the whole video with an historical context forcing the viewer to consider wider implications and extremities. In *Guitar Piñata*, the historical and cultural reference is very different and furthermore the mentions of violence are distilled to sonic points. Both videos present 'real life' sound tracks, where the sounds in the video are the sounds that the image actually created, so we see the source of the sound, and the guitar or performer 'sounding' it. However, the blows in *Guitar Piñata* seem to attempt to document the action in a heightened way. As discussed earlier, the intentions of the performer can be detached from the audiovisual artefact here. The absence of a body in this performance is a noticeable difference from *Guitar Pinata*; the act itself of dragging a guitar behind a pick up truck is flooded with masculinity and violence. The act and meaning of the performance for the Christian Marclay is revealed by the artist himself, however, the reading/experience of the audiovisual artefact of the performance is detached from the artist quite significantly. The only audio remnant creates the distance and veils the act significantly.

The gaps of silence create suspense, a suspense that is absent in *Guitar Drag*, where the sounds document and mirror the deterioration of the object itself, rather than the enactment of violence.

Every time the guitar is hit in *Guitar Piñata*, the sound is sudden, loud, and shocking; the banality of the violence is enforced by the repetition and the unnecessary force applied to such an inanimate object. The use of the amplifier is to disorient the performer; using an acoustic object would produce very different results, or indeed just hitting the electric guitar unplugged. So whilst there is a focus on action, I was always aware that there was sound being produced, and the sounds created acted as

another level of distance from the performance. When I had the blindfold on and I was hearing the sounds, it seemed as though the sounds were against me somehow, and the distance between the amplifier, and the point of sound creation (where the guitar was being hit) made the experience unnatural and disorienting. All aspects attempt to create distance and give the performer less power.

The guitar has the ability to make sound, a performer could even make the sounds very similar to the sounds that are being made by the baseball bat without inflicting any violence at all, but the violence is disposable, repetitive, relentless and therefore brutal. If it was rational and considered, it would not justify or explain the violence, but it would create a different relationship between the guitar and the performer, where the performer and the object might be equal, or more equal. But the role of power in the performance is vital; in both *Guitar Drag* and *Guitar Piñata* the performers are inflicting the 'wounds', and examining them, aware of an inevitable deterioration. The sound is the wound, the blood, and the reaction. Although the performer ultimately has power, the guitar is the subject of the performance and the objects' reaction is the reason for the violence.

As well as destructing the guitar, the idea deconstructs music itself. The disregard for technical ability or musicianship is an important aspect of the work. The work presents a binary; inexpertise and the body vs. expertise and the mind. When presenting physical experience through sound, it is only hindered and diluted by technical training. The performance should be unconsidered and therefore not contrived; relying on impact and not knowledge.

The clothing, and in fact all visuals are androgynous, so the way in which it is gendered is centered on the electric guitar. The masculine identity of the electric

guitar is something that female musicians have to deal with from the moment they start learning to play, and the video embraces and perhaps exaggerates this in order to expose it. In order to play electric guitar, girls have to submit to the masculinity of it to some extent; this is to do with the shape, aesthetics, and the general physical mass of it, but mainly the cultural history, which is dominated by men. By playing an electric guitar, the player enhances their masculinity, not femininity. Whilst the body of the guitar is shaped more like a female body, the happenings in the video suggest that the guitar is an emblem of the male. There is ritualised aggression, and male power is inherent within this aggression.

An electric guitar is phallic; the way that it is held, the way that it is played, who it is played by – it is a phallic object. Whilst it seems dated to say that the electric guitar is coded masculine, it is true that music with which the electric guitar is aligned is historically dominated by men, so what anyone plays on it is associated with sounds made by men, for men. This is changing, and it is not exclusive; an electric guitar is not inherently masculine. But its socio-cultural image is undeniably masculine.

According to Mavis Bayton in *Noise/Music: A History*, “rock is associated with technology, which is itself strongly categorized as ‘masculine’”²⁶, which as well as linking rock with masculinity, links skill with masculinity. Furthermore, as mentioned previously, technology’s relationship to the ‘physical’ is worth noting here; in rejecting technology, because it diminishes bodily enaction, the work also rejects masculinity. In the same paragraph, Paul Hegarty not only says that “[skill is] something males possess and do, and [is] something that is imagined as inherently

26 Bayton, M., from Hegarty P. 2008: *Noise/Music: A History*, New York: Continuum, 99

masculine”²⁷, he goes further and links the lack of skill within No Wave with femininity. As well as adopting masculinity through aggression and the use of the electric guitar, the work also adopts femininity through the distance that is created from the guitar itself, and any kind of skill. It is true that most virtuosos of the electric guitar are male, but the guitar itself is not seen as an object that represents the male body. The work attempts to destroy the masculine coding of the guitar. Rather than targeting one gender in particular, the video blurs gender and poses questions about what masculinity and femininity mean. Aggression represents masculinity in the performance. This does not serve to oppose masculinity, but just question the way that the viewer makes assumptions about gender. The performance is anchored by the fact that the performer is female, but it questions what this means by disrupting both femininity and masculinity within the performance.

The relationship that *Guitar Piñata*, *Dart Dart Dart*, and even *Drum Drum Drum* have with the body means that it addresses questions about gender; of course it is not strikingly obvious that the body in question is in fact female. Taking into account Simone De Beauviour’s claim that “‘woman’ and by extension, any gender, is an historical situation rather than a natural fact”²⁸ the representation of the body as an object in *Guitar Piñata* brings the historical elements to bear and allows them to dictate and explore gender ambiguities within the performance. However, the representation of gender can also be seen in a way that attempts to question the binary between historical situations and natural facts. The performer is presented as

²⁷ Hegarty, P. 2008: *Noise/Music: A History*, New York: Continuum, 99

²⁸ Butler, J., 2002: *Performative Acts and Gender Contitution*, in *The Twentieth Century Performance reader* From Huxley, M., and Witts, N., *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader*, London, New York: Routledge, 122

an object, although it is impossible for the body to be totally 'object', the closest entity is a natural fact; a female body object. Gender is not wholly performative; at the very start there is the body object. However, in *Guitar Piñata*, the 'natural fact' is contradicted by masculine coded 'historical situations' such as aggression. Although in her essay *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution*, Judith Butler argues that "to be a woman is to *become* a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of 'woman', to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project."²⁹, the works *Guitar Piñata*, *Dart Dart Dart* and *Drum Drum Drum* question this performative definition of gender by performing acts that are gendered, but questioning whether this is truly what defines the gender of the performance.

DISTANCE

Niki De Saint-Phalle's *Shooting Picture (1961)* is a canvas that has been 'treated' with paint-filled balloons, which have been stuck to the back of the canvas, and then the canvas is shot from a distance, creating wound-like holes in the canvas and visible coloured paint dripping out from these holes. The canvas is presented as a sort of relic, a representation of actions and a performance. The idea of art as relic is evident in *Drum Drum Drum* and *Drum Flag 1*, where the element of performance is diminished, and instead remnants, relics, or suggestions of performances are presented in their place. Of Joseph Beuys' 'Actions' evolving into, or 'becoming'

²⁹ Butler, J., 2002: *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution*, in *The Twentieth Century Performance reader* From Huxley, M., and Witts, N., *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader*, London, New York: Routledge, 122

relics, Mark Rosenthal comments: “By taking objects from the Actions, the Actions effectively become the creative process whereby an object is formed; the prop gains new life by subsequently becoming a work of art, or the prop is simply a relic of the earlier event.”³⁰ The performance becomes a process of production. As well as creating a sort of new kind of sculpture, where objects and materials are not only experiential metaphors of greater meaning they are also signs, traces and mementos of actions and movements. They present rational and phenomenological thinking rather than philosophical thinking. This requires a way of looking at a sculptural object or creation that is not about what it could mean, but how it came to be. The objects are artefacts of a set of actions within a performance. Because the performance has rules, all actions and objects are the creation of these set of rules. In reference to systemic abstract painting in minimalist art, Lawrence Alloway notes that “the end state of the painting is known prior to completion (unlike the theory of Abstract Expressionism).”³¹ The undertaking of a preconceived process and the presentation of the relic is comparable in Beuys’ Action objects, such as *Three Pots for the Poorhouse*, to Frank Stella’s *Geometric Variations*, to my *Drum Drum Drum*. These pieces act as a pointer to physicality in the visual remnant. SO where Christian Marclay and *Guitar Pinata* focus on a process within a performance, these pieces successfully suggest physicality in a representational way, which is also highly evocative of direct physicality. The element that would be exhibited from *Drum Drum Drum* is the flag, alongside the video of the flag being created. The image is the relic of the sound. In this process the direct physicality has a greater distance from the

³⁰ Rosenthal, M. 2004: *Joseph Beuys : Actions, Victrines, Environments*, Houston: The Menil Collection in association with Tate Publishing, 48

³¹ Alloway, L., *Systemic Painting*, From Battcock, G. 1968: *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, New York: E.P. Dutton, 58

manifestation of more than representational relationality. So merely the fact that they DO represent the beating of a drum as hard as it can be hit is not necessarily enough, but in the context of a performance, or a process, perhaps it is known. In the examples previously mentioned the manifestations of the process within the object are variable in their evidence and form. *Shooting Picture (1961)* immediately looks like an action painting; it conjures process immediately, and the drips of brightly colored paint drip down the canvas in a way that immediately suggests that how the paint arrives on the canvas is unconventional, and it is obvious that her body has engaged with the paint or the canvas in an unusual way. By unusual I mean that the texture of the paint is not created with classic craftsmanship or careful mark making; it is apparent that the drips were created with drastic actions, and not close, subtle, repeated movements or strokes. Furthermore, the painting appears to be relatively accidental, the textured surface and absence of brush strokes suggest that the paint has found its own way around the canvas. This is part of the success of the painting and the performance; in order to create violence and some abstract impression of opposing something, Saint Phalle executes a 'rebellion' in both content and in form. In presenting a painting that does not prove or boast ability or technical talent, she champions a sort of simplistic communication; she doesn't use accepted forms of mark making. Whilst this does not explicitly denounce conventions based around painting, it does denounce constructions associated with painting. In *Niki De Saint Phalle*, Simon Groom says that *Shooting Picture (1961)* "evokes the whole Western tradition in which the canvas stands in for the female body...Niki shoots the whole Western tradition in art"³². It is interesting here that in the same way that Guitar

³² Groom, S. 2008: *Niki De Saint Phalle*, London: Tate Publishing, 14

Piñata is inflicting a violent act on a set of traditions, symbols, or icons; Saint Phalle uses the canvas as the target. Saint Phalle's use of the canvas is comparable to the use of the guitar in *Guitar Piñata*, as in Saint Phalle invests the canvas with the weight and power of the oppressive legacy of Western traditions in art, and I invest the guitar with the weight and power of the oppressive legacy of Western traditions in music. One distinction however is that I do not mean for my work to be read as 'music'. The conversation it presents, while explicitly about music (because of the guitar) is formally sound art. Whilst the canvas and the guitar operate within the works in similar ways, it is equally relevant to discuss the key differences between the guitar and the canvas. Perhaps a score, or even silence, are more comparable to the role of the canvas. Whilst it could be said that the *Guitar Piñata* does oppose or inflict violence upon both silence and the concept of a score, these are more abstract conclusions, as the way in which they oppose is through lack of silence, and a lack of a score. As previously mentioned, *Guitar Pinata* aims to be anti-score; it there are instructions, which would be a score if re-performed, but the piece is only to be performed by me, so a score is not necessary or fitting. The point of *Guitar Piñata* is not 'anti-silence'. The lack of a score could be more significant, as the use of the blindfold, a baseball bat and a focus on process (the only determined sound in the performance is the silence when the performance is over), is arguably an exercise in indeterminacy³³.

Saint Phalle establishes the significance of the object, the canvas, because it is presented and contained in its finite form, whereas *Guitar Piñata* is a performance

³³ Cage, J. 2009: *Silence*, London: Marion Boyars, 260-274

where the significance of the guitar is constantly in flux. It is the centre of the video, the creator, but also the object being destroyed. There are allusions to masculinity, androgyny; an intentionally 'blank' gender spectrum is portrayed, so the guitar moves and its state alters on the duration of the video.

Saint Phalle eventually presents the destroyed object, not the object being destroyed. The focus and point of the piece seems to be more about the object, not the process. This could be purely down to a difference in medium priority; mine is sound, and Niki De Saint Phalle's is paint. But if I had been making *Shooting Picture* (1961), I would have focused on the sounds of the gun being shot, the sounds of the balloons popping, and visual documentation of the bullets hitting the balloons; my focus is on process and sound, whereas Saint Phalle's focus is arguably on visual impact.

Despite this, the way that *Shooting Picture* (1961) is presented³⁴ ensures the viewer knows how the painting was created, so the process is still present in the work. The painting is presented alongside a photo of Saint Phalle in her shooting suite so although the piece of work is the canvas; it is obvious to the viewer that it is important to the artist that a sense of the action is obtained. Although this seems to lessen the impact of the painting, in that it makes it seem less unnatural; the display is sort of museum-like, and it contextualises and explains the painting. The painting still has impact, but the integrity does seem to be compromised. As Mel Bochner claims "everything that exists is three-dimensional and "takes up" space (space

³⁴ de Saint Phalle, N. 1961: *Shooting Picture*, In *A Bigger Splash: Painting After Performance*, 14 November 2012 – 1st April 2014, London: Tate Modern

considered as the medium in which the observer lives and moves). Art objects are qualitatively different from natural life yet are coextensive with it. This “intrusion factor” is the basis of the unnaturalness of all art.”³⁵ In *Shooting Picture* (1961), the ‘intrusion factor’ does seem to be lessened; the viewer has to rely on the explanation of the piece to understand it to the level at which the artist requires and desires. It would not be appropriate for the painting to be exhibited on its own (it is essential that the viewer knows how the painting was created). The photo of Saint Phalle in a shooting suit also makes the viewer aware that the artist is a woman. Whilst I don’t think it is essential that artists are always totally upfront about the important elements in their work Saint Phalle was. This lessened the mystery of the piece, but contextualised the performance, mainly the gendered aspects. A woman using a gun in the 60s was unexpected, so in order to expose the point that Phalle is attempting to destroy gender stereotypes with her gun was hinged on this insight. Furthermore, in reference to her work *Laedre*, Niki de Saint Phalle says, “She bears the child like a male sex organ. My births turn women into a goddess. They become at once father and mother.”³⁶ So Saint Phalle is not only presenting feminist work that attempts to destroy stereotypes, but she blurs gender, much like *Guitar Pinata* attempts to. Whilst there is not so much reference to specific bodily parts, the gender is blanked, or made to be androgynous as much as possible in order to dispute and question wider implications about gender.

Perhaps it is a focus on sound that makes the appropriate medium for *Guitar Piñata* a video and a live performance. I could have exhibited the broken, smashed up guitar

³⁵ Bochner, M., *Serial Art, Systems, Solipsism*, from Battcock, G. 1968: *Minimal Art : A Critical Anthology*, New York: E.P. Dutton, 93

³⁶ de Saint Phalle, N., from Groom, S. 2008: *Niki De Saint Phalle*, London: Tate Publishing, 15

as the work and a pointer to the performance, but this would not necessarily communicate anything about the performance. A broken up guitar presented on its own in an art gallery would just look like the result of an angry (male) musician performing on stage; it would ultimately be a piece that reinforces the Western tradition of masculine power/dominance in music. Whereas when Saint Phalle was shooting canvases in 1961, the act was much more politically appropriate (for her work) and although experimental and abstract art had been developing since the end of the 19th Century, the performative way that Saint Phalle shoots the canvas would have been quite new, shocking, and associated with notions of rebellion, opposing classical traditions in art, and again, oppressive traditions of masculinity appropriate for what she intended to communicate. So, contextually the canvas presented might have had more weight and 'unnaturalness'.

Saint Phalle does not focus on sound, although with the use of a gun, the presence of sound is inherent, so it could be argued that the sound is still present and important in the piece. It is undisputable that it is not the focus, but with this kind of action art, a sense of sound and time is always present.

Saint Phalle uses aggression as a performative tool to attack symbols, systems and traditions, similar to the way that *Guitar Piñata* does. The aggression is controlled, repetitive and contained. This is more prevalent in *Guitar Piñata*, but as Maurice Berger observes, "Saint Phalle was clearly commenting on the machismo and militaristic aggression that shapes the dynamics of masculine power". Whilst masculine power is an issue that both works definitely address, *Guitar Piñata* uses aggression in more of a metaphorical way than *Shooting Pictures* (1961), which

actually attempts to comment on aggression itself. The inane and repetitive mock-violence in *Guitar Piñata* is used as a tool to express frustration and appear as a reactionary and intrinsic result of everything that it sets up to destroy. So the process is mundane and reinforces the obviousness of the meaning, and the long, boring battle for gender equality.

The paint in *Shooting Picture* (1961) is quite obviously presented as blood; there are bullet 'wounds', and the blood trickles out of them as blood would. The reason Saint Phalle sticks the balloons to the back of the canvas and not the front could be to heighten and continue the bodily illusion, so the canvas is sort of hiding some entrails or innards, and exists as a body within the performance. The sounds of *Guitar Piñata* could equally be seen as blood; as previously discussed, both the guitar and the canvas have bodily features, and like the gun, the baseball bat inflicts wounds onto the guitar. The canvas reacts anthropomorphically with the paint, and the guitar reacts anthropomorphically with sounds. This again makes the piece more shocking and affecting, although the aggression is inflicted on an object, in both cases there is a metaphorical body.

Saint Phalle's rejection of a (hypothetical) paintbrush is comparable to my reconfiguration of an instrument in *Dart Dart Dart*. Although in both cases, there are sound-making or mark making devices that replace the instrument, they are chosen to create distance from both the piece of work itself (literal distance), and therefore distance from conventional ways that paintings or sounds are created. The use of a gun with Saint Phalle, and darts in *Dart Dart Dart* enables both artists to engage with the eventual work without actually touching it. This distance is prominent in all of the

work that I have made in this project, and I never actually touch any of the instruments that I work with. However, in *Guitar Pinata* and *Drum Drum Drum* I use a tool or an extension of my arm to interact with the object to make noise. So the distance is always there, it just exists in varying degrees of removal. Considering the title of the thesis, and the initial aims set out in the introduction, this distance is an interesting anomaly. I am championing the body but also distancing it from all objects and performances; although my body is present in *Guitar Pinata*, I quickly move away from this and focus on some kind of relic from the performance of the process of production. So the fact that I am performing the process is important, but that performance itself isn't the end point, or the relevant vehicle to harness the immediacy of direct physicality.

DART DART DART

Brandon LaBelle states that by using a contact mic, “the potential of any object becoming a source of acoustical promise radically increases”³⁷, and the use of a contact mic in *Dart Dart Dart* enables the central role of the object to develop from an instrument-as-object in *Guitar Piñata* to abstract materials and devices for making sound in *Dart Dart Dart*. Although this slightly shifts the nature of the piece, in that it does not feature a recognisable musical instrument, the focus on sound is at the forefront of the enquiry.

In *Rhythm 10*, Marina Abramovic stabs 10 different knives in between her fingers, changing knives each time she cuts herself. She records the sounds, and then plays

³⁷ LaBelle, B. 2006: *Background Noise: Perspectives On Sound Art*, New York, London: Continuum, 40

the sounds back, attempting to copy the rhythm of the initial stabs. The performance tests the capabilities and limits of the body³⁸, exploring how the body learns and improves with practice. However, this is not always for the benefit of the artist, and as Frazer Ward suggests, “Abramovic claims to have cut herself in the same places and has written that in this performance, ‘the mistakes of time past and time present are synchronised’. Presumably, if you practiced at this you might improve, both at missing your fingers, and at your ability to reproduce the initial rhythm. Except, however, that if you got really good at missing, you might disable the work.”³⁹

Although the artist is not aiming to cut herself, the tension in the piece is dependent on the fact that she might, and the fact that she eventually will. Although Abramovic claims that she didn’t improve, the viewer expects her to get better and more precise in her stabs, which only prolongs and heightens the suspense. By attempting to copy the initial stabs rhythmically, Abramovic contrasts the precision or ‘quality’ (by quality in this instance I mean whether she successfully misses her fingers) of the initial instinctive stabs, where her preoccupation was purely with missing her fingers, with the stabs that were preoccupied with rhythmical (technical) precision. She states that ‘the mistakes of time past and time present are synchronised’, which suggests that learning and practicing makes no ultimate difference to the will or instinct of the body, but whether intentional or not, the piece, through repetition and violence, forces the viewer to will technical progression onto the performer. In *Dart Dart Dart* the stakes are much smaller. With Abramovic, as her stabs get more precise, the piece lasts longer, but the point at which she stabs her finger is getting

³⁸ Ward, F. 2002: *Marina Abramovic: Approaching zero*, From Huxley, M., Witts, N., *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader*, London, New York: Routledge, 133

³⁹ Ward, F. 2002: *Marina Abramovic: Approaching zero*, From Huxley, M., Witts, N., *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader*, London, New York: Routledge, 133

ever closer; the stab must come as it is the only way the piece can end. In *Dart Dart Dart* the same inevitability takes place, but the viewer is not willing the performer to miss, as the aim is not a finger, it is a target, so the audience is complicit in the performers development of precision and therefore destruction. By placing the contact mic in the middle of a cork board, it acts as a bull's eye and documents each time the dart hits the board. Each hit is a sound point, of which the dynamics are dependent on the bodies' ability to practice, improve and adjust. So the sound gets louder when the darts get closer to the microphone. The aim is to hit the target, which is when the piece will stop, unlike Marina Abramovic, who is aiming to miss something, but the end of the performance is still inevitable. It is not essential that the tension is built up around these targets, and the inevitability of the piece, as the use of a cork board instead of a target diminishes the sporting aspect of the piece. However the repetition in the sound points acts as a linear sort of narrative that must lead to somewhere. *Rhythm 10* has variables dependent on intention and violence, which gives Abramovic more control than *Dart Dart Dart* does. The end point is inevitable so to Abramovic, it makes no difference if she immediately stabs her finger, or if she tries to miss it for as long as possible. She knows that the longer she can manage to miss for, the greater the tension will be, but the power is ultimately with Abramovic and there *could* be an element of significant decision making within the performance. Ward comments, "Abramovic herself set up these situations, in which her agency was to be surrendered or transformed; and the works may rely on or manipulate patterns of behavior, but even so, the outcomes were not predictable."⁴⁰ The element of agency is significant, because agency effects process

⁴⁰ Ward, F. 2002: *Marina Abramovic: Approaching zero*, From Huxley, M., Witts, N., *The Twentieth*

and both works are *about* process. It's about following rules of a rhythm or an action; "whether or not Abramovic actually cut herself in the same places is less important than the fact that – however wilfully – she subjected her activity to an anterior scheme (or rhythm), over which she had limited control"⁴¹. Abramovic comments on the intentions and limits of her body, but also the agency of the performer. Does she do what she, the performer chooses, what is best for the piece, or what the audience is willing her to do? And who has the power? In *Dart Dart Dart*, the artist has not got the power. The whole point of the piece is that artist cannot just decide to hit the cork board; the frustration comes from inability, not ability. Both performers test how their bodies react by providing restraints on actions, and then scrutinize ability and inability. They both force bodies to something that they do not do naturally, and in this way *Rhythm 10* and *Dart Dart Dart* test the instinctive capabilities of the body.

The percussive noise in both is comparable to a 'tick' on a clock, the end point of destruction moves closer with every sound point, every dart, and every stab. The repetition in *Dart Dart Dart* is extended or exaggerated in *Dart Dart Dart Series* and in fact repetition itself is explored. In presenting one image of one sound of one dart, and repeating it through screen-printing, the visual piece *Dart Dart Dart Series* exposes the apparent repetition in *Dart Dart Dart* but it also explodes the subtle differences. Taking this idea of exposing work through repetition from Hal Foster's essay on Warhol's repeated images, where he claims "if you enter it totally, you might expose it; that is, you might reveal its automatism, even its autism, through

Century Performance Reader, London, New York: Routledge, 133
⁴¹ Ward, F. 2002: *Marina Abramovic: Approaching zero*, From Huxley, M., Witts, N., *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader*, London, New York: Routledge, 133

your excessive example.”⁴² So by taking one part of a whole (an image from *Dart Dart Dart*) and repeating it to make a new whole (*Dart Dart Dart Series*), it not only examines *Dart Dart Dart* more closely, but it examines a new process, and the effect that the impression of this process has on the work, as a relic of that process; the act of screen-printing here serves as a new element in the performance.

This adopts an approach that is similar to Fluxus ideas about repetition. Their emphasis on process, action, but also indeterminacy means that repetition sort of takes on a new meaning where although things are essentially repeated, no two things are the same; “while Cage asserted that despite repetition there is always change, these artists would reverse the problematic: *because of* repetition there is always change.”⁴³ In David Blamey’s sound piece “O.K.,” he repeats the word ‘OK’ over and over again in varying grains, tones and speeds. The repetition is boring and mundane but it puts the listener through phases, where the word and the sounds loose and gain meaning. The result is that through repetition in this different medium, it is possible to fully explore the idea sonically. The screen-prints are the sound points, the darts and the actions. Furthermore, moving away from sound was an exercise in repetition and probably an intrigue in the representation that I was initially trying to avoid; the screen prints REPRESENT the sound points and this was a test to see if the sound still exists with no sound at all. So these start an enquiry into the extremities of the investigation; presenting a relic from the performance of the process of production.

⁴² Foster, H. 1996: *Death In America, October, Vol 75*, Massachusetts: MIT Press

⁴³Bloom, I., *Boredom and Oblivion* From Friedman, K. 1999: *The Fluxus Reader*, West Sussex: Academy Editions, 82

DRUM DRUM DRUM

In works such as *Sound Cooking II* and *Backstage*, Rolf Julius makes objects audible and sound visible. Julius works with natural objects such as stone, trees and pigments, and transfers sound through objects and states. There is a remoteness that makes mass and movement significant in his work, but it is presented in a way that is very subtle and quiet. *Song Books* are blotches of ink that Julius gives to an audience who then make a composition based on the ink 'drawings'. The drawings are a score; they are both an end point and a starting point to produce compositions. They are a relic and an action.

In *Small Stones Singing* Julius puts speakers on stones and appears to *sound* these stones, and he then visualises them by putting particles on the speaker. Julius creates a synergy between mass, sound and visual art that is seamless. In *Drum Drum Drum* the idea of transferable form, of sounding the body, manifests into a video where the essence, the gesture, the poetic meaning is distilled into something that has comparable subtlety to Julius' work, and similarly such huge potential in the way that it communicates. In Julius' work, "a small loudspeaker on a stone lends the stone a voice. A speaker behind glass makes the glass resonate. A speaker below an iron plate sings quietly of the metal's weight. Speakers in an empty space are music for emptiness. Everything merges to become an indissoluble union."⁴⁴, and this indissoluble union is the point at which there is action, distance, and repetition, and the body is sounded.

⁴⁴ Blume, E., *Does The Eye Hear*, from Canell, N. and Julius, R. 2012: *Lautlos*, 126

Drum Drum Drum is more about distance than any of the other pieces, as there is more removal between the created piece (the video) and the direct physicality that I act onto the drum. However, the physicality still exists and so the work still deals with the issues discussed at the start of the thesis. The direct physicality is executed in a traditionally masculine way; I hit the drum as hard as I possibly can and make the microphones as close as possible to the drums to get the speaker as loud as possible. Distilling these bold actions into silence and subtle movements creates does not mean feminising the work, it means that I can show a range of actions and test how the reception of these alters their existence. By this I mean that because the viewer cannot see the direct physicality, or my body, it does not mean that it did not happen, and is not integral to the work. The sounds of the drum go from my arm to the drum stick, to the drum, to the microphone, to the speaker, to the ink, to the video, and these things are not representation, they are representational and communication does not have to be qualitative; actions can be felt and shown through flags of ink and screenprints.

CONCLUSION

The concern of the enquiry has been to make sounds as gestural and muscular as possible, and that emanates eventually as *Drum Drum Drum*, the most abstract and silent of all the works. The investigation started noisy and ends visually with no noise at all. The possibilities for 'sounding the body' are much less restricted than the original trajectory of the enquiry seemed to indicate. It is possible, with subtle images and sounds, to communicate the complexities and thrill of the most expressive and extreme gestures that create loud, non-musical sound.

It was essential to test and attempt to harness the immediacy of the direct physicality of objects, bodies, and instruments, but the fact that this can be dwindled eventually to *Drum Drum Drum* which removes the actions of hitting a drum as hard as physically possible, quite significantly and transferring that sound and movement onto an abstract impression of those, despite admitting a physical reduction in the communication; big sounds became no sounds, gestures so repetitive and muscular that they produced blisters became subtle and slow ink blots; the communication does not have to be qualitative; actions can be communicated without actually communicating direct physicality. Maybe it is admitting defeat to eventually and suddenly claim an idea akin to abstract expressionism; representational communication. But it is where my enquiry has led me. *Drum Drum Drum* appears to be representational mark making, which it could be, but the element that I have tried to capture is that it is a physical response to my muscular movements. So the process is not representation, it is the direct physicality as more-than-representational, but the product that documents the journey and the process IS representational. This does not dilute the conclusion, or the process in the first place, as it happened and led me to realisations about my body; I tested my limits and practically explored my own direct physical relationship with processes and objects. And as an artist, that is my investment and my oeuvre; once I have made that investment, my responsibility is to communicate it, and when working with sound and visual art, where meaning and signs *are* representational, it is foolish to be purist. For if I *really* wanted to just test my body and its limits, without dealing the complexities of sonic and visual communication into the foreground, then I would just go for a run until I collapsed. Or stop eating until I starved.

PERSONAL REASONING

It is relevant and necessary to think about my body specifically. About the shape of my body and the things about my body that represent ME and not everyone, and where my need to reflect/create my bodily sonically comes from. I.e. I have an arm and everyone has an arm, and although this arm will be part of the 'machine', or the whole, I know that the arm is not the point. I have scoliosis, which means that my spine is in an 'S' shape and acts/looks differently to how it should. It sometimes gives me pain, and I am aware of the bones in my body, on my insides, more than most other people. Furthermore, it causes more problems in my body, which makes me aware and sensitive to feelings or just general nerves – not more than EVERYONE else, but more than most people and so in my life, I think about my bones and my organs and my insides and what they feel like. I know what they look like from X Rays and scans and I have felt what it is like to disassociate my body parts from their primary functions. I don't think this is necessarily damaging at all, but I do think it is why, when I am going through creative processes, or things appeal to me and I recall notable experiences, I make sense of them through my body.

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