

MKULTRA

I thought of the sun and the sea...

By MKULTRA – Lead Artists on this project Peader Kirk & Juliet Prauge
Shunt Lounge November 2009 and Touring

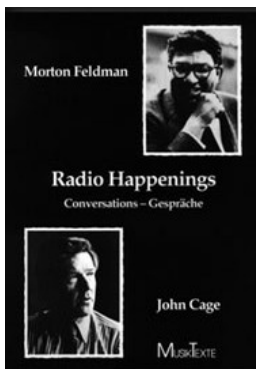
Two people face each other across a table. They talk of art and life, of changing the world. They talk of pain and escape; and when it all gets too much they try to think of "the sun and the sea".

The words the couple speak are fed to them over headphones and they must reproduce what they hear as accurately as they can. After 40 minutes the conversation concludes, the couple leave the table and a new couple replaces them. This new couple seem to have almost the same conversation but the words are going wrong, the sense is getting lost. Every 40 minutes a new couple takes their place and struggles with the same conversation. On each replaying the sense becomes more and more jumbled and during the



twenty-one hours of performance this most sophisticated of conversations transforms into stutters, mumbles, silences becoming a kind of guttural music.

Conceptual Background



In 1967 John Cage and Morton Feldman had a conversation. They discussed concerns central to own their work and to the melting pot of the New York avant-garde. These concerns became central to the emerging discipline of performance art - everyday tasks, chance actions in art, the commodification of the artwork and the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction.

Central to Gage and Feldman's work was the practice of repetition and this practice of "Looping" has gone on to inform the work of minimalist composers such as Glass, electronic musicians such as Brian Eno, Dance culture and artists working in the field of performance including Ontroerend Goed & Station House Opera.

This practice of reproduction has been more fully theorised in Nicholas Bourriaud's small but brilliant book Postproduction. Bourriaud identifies a trend in contemporary art emerging in the late 1990's where artists explicitly reproduce another artist's work – think of Gary Hume's Sid Vicious, of Kneehigh's Brief Encounter, of Douglas Gordon's 24 Hour Psycho. Postproduction embraces an ecological position changing the question for the artist from "What do we do to be new?" to "What do we do with what we have?"

At the same time as this reproductive tendency enters Art's genome the iPod and the digitisation of the sound artefact becomes a common practice removing surface noise and producing endless identical copies of an audio track. Our music library no longer becomes "ours," no longer gains a history of listening through the cracks and scratches emerging as we repeatedly played a vinyl record; surface noise and degradation over time is evaporated by the migration to the digital realm.

Following Bourriaud's thinking of Postproduction as a "re-mixing" of extant cultural artefacts I thought of the sun and the sea replays Cage and Feldman's conversation while embracing degradation as a creative action. Performers listen to Cage and Feldman's conversation over earphones and try to reproduce it. The iteration (looping) of this process over an extended time period leads to a degradation of meaning, promlematising the nature of legacy, the politics of post-production and our relation to the cultural past.

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Along with Hauntology, (<http://fs.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/full/59/3/373>) postproduction shares "a nostalgia for the possibilities inherent in the artistic moment before ours" while also seeking to find a way in which those concerns might intervene in the present. Hauntological works such as those by The Caretaker reintroduce surface noise into the pure aural sphere of digital sound in order to make us attend to our own experience of listening. I thought of the sun and the sea reintroduces the static of human procedures into a cultural artefact in order to make us attend to our own ingrained practices of ordering, sense making and evaluation.

Project Description

I thought of the sun and the sea uses two chairs and one table. Two performers sit at the table with an earpiece in one ear and a microphone taped to their cheek. The audio of Cage and Feldman's conversation plays over the earpiece for its 40-minute duration and the performers reproduce exactly what they perceive in an attempt to have a live conversation with each other. The microphones record their dialogue.

After 40 minutes performers One and Two leave and performers Three and Four sit down. Their earpieces replay the previous couple's dialogue and they in turn attempt to reproduce this in order to have a conversation. The audience are able to listen to and watch the performers but also have the option of simultaneously listening to the original recording on an earpiece and even playing the game with a partner.

This process is reiterated over twenty-one hours using 32 performers each couple attempting to reproduce the previous couples dialogue until sense has given over to sensuality.

About Mkultra

Peader Kirk has worked in the field of Live Art for the past fifteen years creating durational loop based performances. The works have ranged in duration from six to twenty four hours and have been presented in galleries, found spaces and at international festivals. As Artistic Director of Mkultra Peader creates intimate encounters between performers and watchers - delicate negotiations questioning how we meet another and the roles we play to get by. Mkultra is a group of artists working collectively to create new works; the group has created 12 pieces since 2001 and these have been presented in Greece, Italy and UK. See www.mkultra.org.uk

"I thought of the sun and the sea..." was originally created as part of O.P.A. 3 at Bios, Athens, May 2009. Funded by the Cultural Ministry of Greece.



Performers

Astor Agustsson, Tim Bell, Alfie Boyd, Suzannah Bryce, Isabel Carr, Jose Estudillo, Julia Finch, Mark Fitzgerald, Martin Gent, Rob Hale, Greg Henderson-Begg, Laura Hooper, Peader Kirk, Bloux Kirkby, Natasha Maggi, John Matthews, Marcus McCullum, Michael McFarlane, Juliet Prague,, Cassie Raine, Jonnie Riordan, Natalie Scott, Marcus Sydenham, Gaby Szabo,, Caroline Wildi, Lucy Wilson, Rosie Woodward.