

How can objects and sound in a space
manipulate/affect the audience's
perspective

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Table of contents

List of illustrations.....	p, 4
Summary of topic	p, 5
Introduction	p, 6-8
Chapter 1	p, 9-16
Chapter 2	p, 17-24
Conclusion	p, 25-26
Reference	p, 27-30

List of figures

Fig 1 : Cardiff, J & Miller, G (2019) 'Night walk for Edinburgh'. Available at

<https://cardiffmiller.com/walks/night-walk-for-Edinburgh/>

Fig 2 : Cardiff, J (1991) 'Whispering room'. [Multimedia installation], 16 audio speakers

mounted on metal stands. Available at <https://fortynotes.Wordpress.com/2011/02/24/the-whispering-room/>

Fig 3 : Neuhaus, M (1990) 'Three similar rooms'. [Installation] Available at

<https://artmap.com/giorgiopersano/exhibition/max-Neuhaus-2009>

Fig 4 : Viola, B (2005) 'The sound of a mountain under a waterfall'. [Video Installation]

Available at <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/bill-Viola-Tristan's-ascension-the-sound-of-a-mountain-under-a-waterfall>

Fig 5 : Turrel, J (2013) 'Ganzfeld'. [Installation]. Available at

<https://www.designisthis.com/blog/en/post/James-Turrell-ganzfeld/amp>

Summary of topic

This independent project will examine how artists manipulate the perception/perspective of a space by using sound and objects. The research is important as it's a topic in my current practice, as I'm exploring how artists can manipulate a space. The artists I will be researching are, Janet Cardiff, Max Neuhaus, James Turrell and Bill Viola, who manipulates a space to challenge the audience's perspective. I will also be researching theorists such as Bandura, who discuss how the environment we associate ourselves with can evoke psychological reactions. It aims to explore how artists challenge sound and objects in a space to manipulate the audience's perspective.

Introduction

This dissertation outlines the ways in which objects and sounds in a space can manipulate the perspective of the audience during the present time. I believe that the space we surround ourselves with influences how we behave. A theorist that I researched is Bandura, he stated, (Bandura,1986) 'Social cognitive theory posits that behaviour is influenced by individual factors in combination with the social and physical environment'. Which states that the environment that we associate ourselves with can affect our behaviour and emotions. Inspiration for this essay came from my interest, and my current practice in how sound and objects in a space can manipulate how we view reality and thus change our perspective.

To gain a deeper insight into the representation of objects and sound in a space, I will be investigating the meaning of sound and objects in a specific location. I will be incorporating the ideas of theorists such as Bandura, Salomé Voegelin and Alexius Meinong that challenge the idea of how an environment/sound/objects that we associate ourselves with can influence and change our perspective. I will be looking at artists such as Bill Viola, Janet Cardiff and Max Neuhaus, who incorporate objects and sound into a space to manipulate their surroundings. To gain more knowledge on space and sound installations, I visited exhibitions, read books and researched on the internet.

In chapter one, I will first begin to deconstruct the meaning of what is sound, and how artists manipulate space by using sound, which raises the question of what is the difference between sound and music. I will be deconstructing pieces of work created by Cardiff who

argues that manipulating space and sound, allows the audience to be transported into a different reality, and enhances the understanding of the relationship between sound and the audience. Licht argues that sound connotes companionship, for example a radio, there's a person communicating with the individual. There will be discussions about how the audience can use their imagination to change their perception of the space. I will be discussing installation pieces of work by the artist Max Neuhaus, who created multiple similar rooms, but each room were slightly different from the others, which caused drastically different reactions from the audience.

In chapter two I will be discussing the meaning of objects in a space. An artist by the name of Viola, who challenges the perception of reality as we see it. He creates a link between the imagination and reality, as he investigates the functioning of human sensory interpretation. This then leads to how the audience describing a specific space can influence the perception of the space. Tanizaki created a book discussing the important role that shadows played in shaping Japanese culture. Shadows are created from light, which brings opportunities for the audiences to use their imagination. I will be discussing how artists such as James Turrell challenges the idea of using light in an empty space to evoke emotions and influence the visual perception of how the space is perceived. In Turrell's installation, (which is called *Ganzfeld*) he uses the 'Ganzfeld effect', which is an experiment where the individual is engaged in sensory deprivation for a long time, and the brain tries to understand what is happening.

Space has significant importance in my practice, as I am exploring the influence a specific space can have on the audience, that's including the context of the space. Chapter one

focuses on the idea of sound in a space, and the installations that artists created to manipulate a space.

Chapter 1

In this chapter I will be discussing the meaning of sound, and how sound can be manipulated in an installation piece of work, to challenge the audience's perception of how they know reality. I'm convinced that sound has an expressive and evocative quality, not only the object that is creating the sound but the environment the object is in. Sounds are constantly surrounding us, from machinery to wildlife. Sound brings its qualities which are activated by the space and environment that's around them. An artist who I researched is Janet Cardiff, she stated (Cardiff, J, 2017) "Sound is a materially invisible but very visceral and emotive it can define a space at the same time as it triggers a memory".

There is a disagreement regarding sound art and its relation to music. According to an article (Dennis, 2021) "The variation between sound and music is that sound is those types of audio that show up undesirable to hear. In contrast, music shows up as pleasurable to listen to". Sound art and music are defined similarly, and they tend to cooperate, but they are different from each other. Sound art tends to show the rawness of reality and can be loud, which is not pleasant to hear, while music is created to please our sense of hearing. One specific similarity they share is that sound art and music are created to evoke emotions and alter one's mood, trigger memories, and a possibility to act as a comfort source and inspiration.

An artist that challenges the idea of sound art is Janet Cardiff, she is a well-known installation artist. In Cardiff's work, she challenges the physical aspect of sound and its effects on the body. Cardiff intends to construct and build with sound and make aural material, to give dimensionality to the sculpture. Cardiff argues that she can challenge the

ability to sound, that is to be transported into alternate realities. Cardiff (2018) stated, “We’re interested in the philosophical aspect of how we know reality. People can be transported into a particular physical situation, and it can totally change their belief about what it is”. Which states that by manipulating a space, it has the power to change the perception of the space and change their belief. Additionally, it allows the audience to interpret their imagination while deconstructing the space.

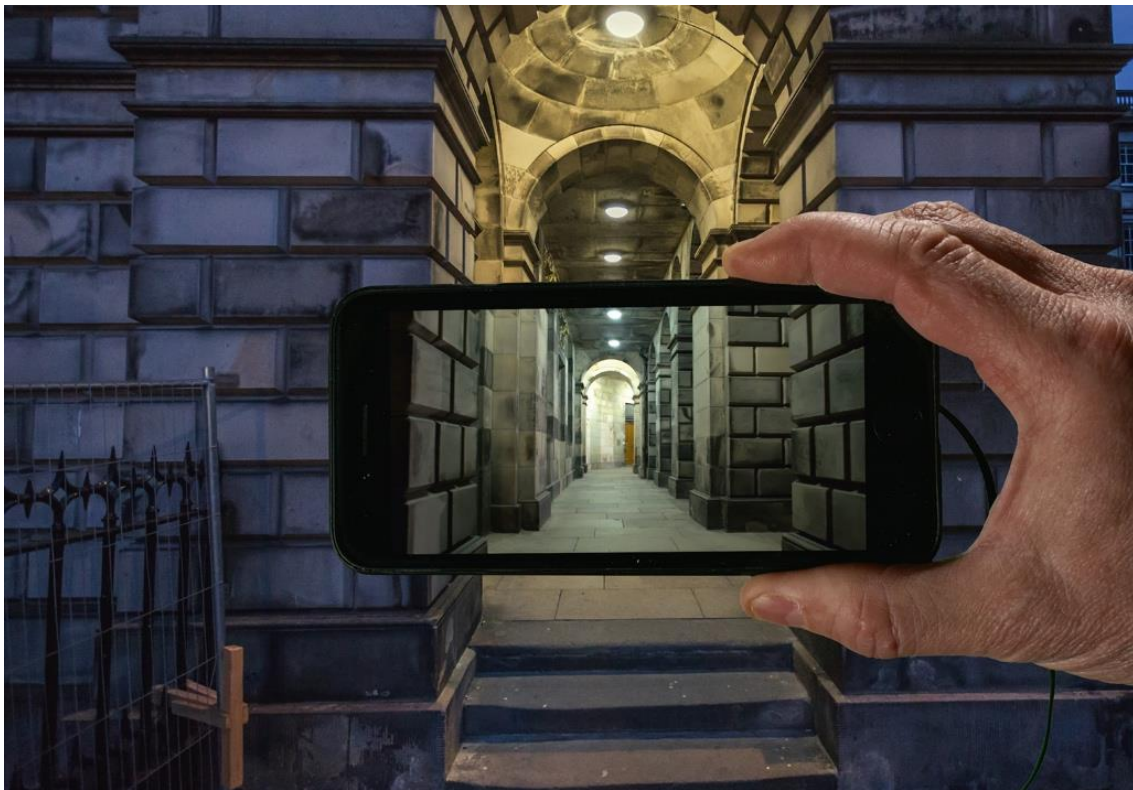


Fig 1, Cardiff (2019) *Night walk for Edinburgh*, Video walk.

Cardiff and George 2019, created a piece of work that is called *Night walk for Edinburgh*, 2019. This piece of work is a video, that consists of Cardiff walking through the backstreets of Edinburgh for 60 minutes, with Cardiff navigating the walk, and George

filming the walk. Throughout the video Cardiff is stating brief historical facts while walking to historical places, a majority of them were gruesome facts that directed the attention of the audience to the specific space where the violence took place. In one section of the video, Cardiff states that in that specific space, criminals were tortured, during that period the video glitches, which creates a more haunting atmosphere. While walking through Edinburgh, the audience's senses of their surroundings become more heightened, for example, sound. Bruce Grenville is a senior curator at the Vancouver Art Gallery, he commented on Cardiff's installation (Grenville, 2021) "In many ways the story that Janet and George tell in their work is a story that's been repeated again and again. It's a story about relationships. It's a story about the mysteries of life- those things can perhaps emerge in a dream". Throughout the video, Cardiff allows the audience to deconstruct their surroundings, also, Cardiff allows the audience to emerge themselves into a story. While watching the installation from a device, there's a feeling that the viewer is looking into a new reality or a dream, that the audience is immersed into. That is created by the manipulation of the sound and the placement of the camera.

Edinburgh is a beautiful city in daylight, but walking through Edinburgh at night can be very daunting and sinister. Cardiff creates a more haunting atmosphere by stating gruesome facts and taking the viewers to the locations where the violence took place. It can influence the audiences' perception of Edinburgh, and create a negative effect. A quote by an individual who witnessed the walk stated, (Nurming-Por, 2019) "The use of binaural audio and augmented-reality-style video creates an immersive experience that makes it difficult to separate from the parallel experience of walking". Cardiff is well known for manipulating and challenging the perspective of a physical space/environment through her video and audio

installations, which was her aim for this specific installation. Cardiff's walk through Edinburgh demonstrates how the individual's reality can be influenced by space and sound being manipulated, which later can change the perspective of the audience's reality.



Fig 2, Janet Cardiff, 'Whispering room', 1991.

Another installation Cardiff created was *The whispering room*, (1991). The installations consist of multiple speakers surrounding an empty gallery space. Each speaker has 16 loops, and a mixture of 40 seconds to 4 minutes in length. Through the speakers there is a females voice that can be heard having a conversation, in effect, telling a story. The purpose of The whispering room is to break traditional ways of story telling, by sectioning them into parts. By the audience moving from one speaker to the other, it allows them to interact with the

story in their unique way. Cardiff reveals how sound and space communicate with each other, Cardiff allows the audience to challenge sound in relation to space. While walking into the space, the sound grabs the audience's attention, the viewers are immersed into a new perspective. Throughout this piece of work Cardiff aims to create a relationship between the sound and the audience, while walking to each speaker there is a sense of intimacy. In an interview, Cardiff stated (Cardiff, 2022) "I use voice as a means for the intimacy of my thoughts and writings. We definitely use sound for it's emotional resonance". A sound is a form of comfort, Suzanne Boothby stated (Boothby, 2017) "Similar studies indicate that music blends with nature sounds help people feel less anxious". A women's voice coming through the speakers might bring a feeling of comfort and companionship to the audience while walking through the space.

A book that has influenced my research is Sound art revisited, 2007 by Licht, p, 16. In one chapter he argues that hearing extends further than sight. Sound is detectable from any direction. But vision is the most dominant sense, we can tune out sounds more easily than ignore what the eye beholds. Although, we lack control over sound concerning sight. (Murray, 1977) "The sense of hearing cannot be turned off at will. There are no earlids". Which suggests that as you can't physically stop listening, the noise will create a constant flow.

Licht states that sound connotes companionship, which is the appeal of radio, there is a voice that is engaging and communicating to the audience, which is similar to Cardiff's installation, *The whispering room, 1991*. Although the space is empty, speakers are surrounding the empty space, with a woman's voice which creates a feeling of

companionship while walking through the space. Sound art is created and directed towards the individuals by highlighting the perceptual experience, which then allows the audience to use their imagination and create a perception of the space, or what the audience desire. (Gendler, 2011) 'The debates on the relationship between imagination and desire is, not surprisingly, thoroughly entangled with the debates on the relationship between imagination and belief'. This is in relation to what the audience experience while walking into a dark/empty installation space, they try to understand their surroundings by imagining what they desire or what their beliefs are, as a form of coping mechanism. Every individual reacts differently to a piece of work, it's interesting for the artist to see the variety of reactions and emotions.

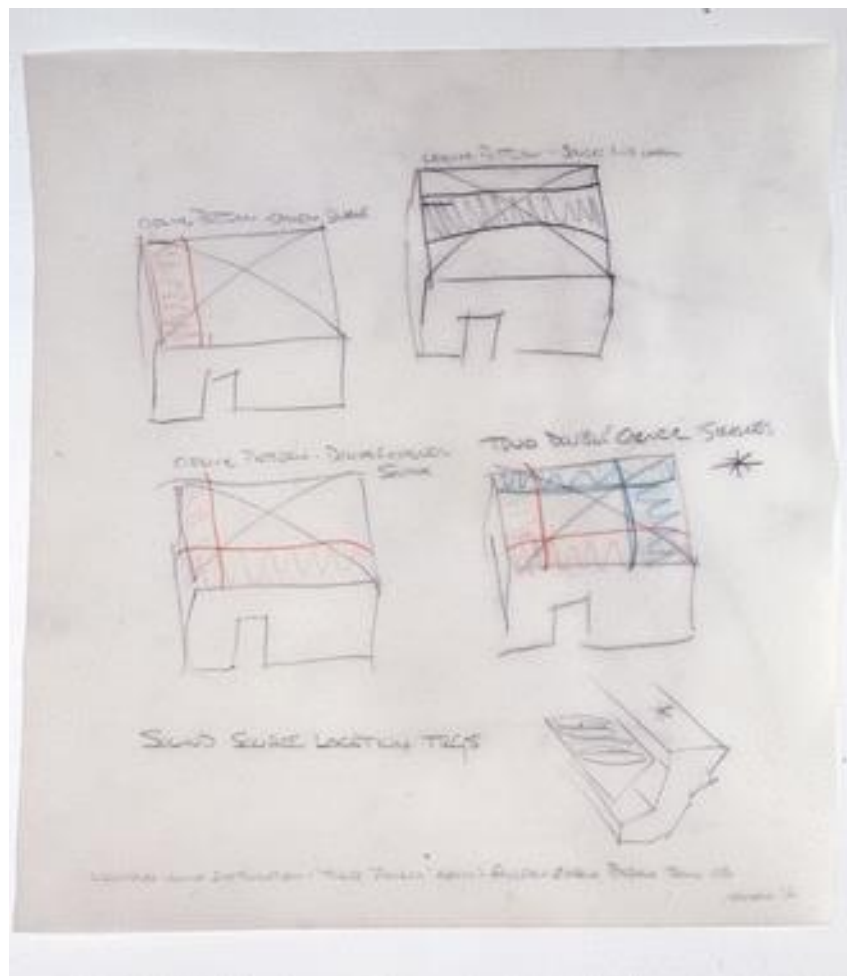


Fig 3, Max Neuhaus (1990) '*Three similar rooms*' .

Max Neuhaus is a well known artist who is involved with contemporary art and music.

Neuhaus created multiple pieces of work that explore how sound in similar spaces can have a different psychological reaction. Neuhaus created a body of work by placing different sounds in rooms that have similar dimensions and looks, there were *Two identical rooms* (1989) and *Three similar rooms* (1990), which demonstrates the reaction that sound can have on the perspective of a space. The sounds that were placed in the two identical rooms had contrasting sounds, one room had (Neuhaus,1994) “a texture of very dense clicks which seems to be suspended above your head when you walk into the space”. Which created a tense and anxious space. In the space where Neuhaus created the three similar rooms, he stated (Neuhaus, 1990) ‘form textures which envelop each space, not so much as something to listen to, more something one is immersed in’. By manipulating the objects and the context in a space, how the audience perceives the space has changed.

In the installation where he divided the room into two sections, he placed identical sounds in the rooms, but the interior in the spaces were slightly different. By manipulating the interior of the rooms slightly, it produced different psychological reactions, that is of one space feeling claustrophobic and the other feeling open. (Belazs, Bela,124) “Every sound has a space-bound character of its own. The same sound sounds different in a small room, in a cellar, in a large, empty hall, in a street, in a forest, or on the sea”. That suggests that every sound has a different meaning/character depending on the surroundings of the space, which is what Neuhaus experimented with in his installations. The sound can be manipulated to

create a warm inviting space or a haunting space, depending on the layout of the objects and interior of the space.

(S, Veogelin, 2010) 'Sound and as concept invites us into the materiality of things, not to deny the visual but to augment how we might see; and it transgresses the boundaries between the object, the thing looked at, and the space and context of its appreciation, introducing a sense of simultaneity instead of pre-existence...'.
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Installation art is created by artists who want to evoke the audience's emotions, but also as a form of communication. Sound is capable of producing powerful reactions, it can be inviting. Researchers at Brighton and Sussex Medical school (BSMS) stated 'Griffiths, 2017) "playing natural sounds affected the bodily systems that control the flight-fright and rest-digest autonomic nervous systems". This is a similar reaction the audiences experienced while looking at an installation piece created by Neuhaus, some individuals felt claustrophobic and left the space, while a majority stayed.

In summary, there are multiple ways of manipulating sound in a space to create different psychological reactions. Although sound can have a more influential effect on the audience's emotions and perception, the layout of a space is equally an important factor. (Neuhaus,2020) "Our perception of space depends as much on what we hear as on what we see". The manipulation of a sound can change the meaning/perception of a space, causing it to become a comfortable space or an anxious space. Neuhaus demonstrated this by creating two similar rooms, but the exterior and sound in one room were slightly different, changing the perception/perspective of the space.

Chapter 2.

Installation art has become the most decisive and influential development within the practice of art. It has become popular as a method to achieve more immersive and interactive pieces of work. (Lansroth,2016) "Installation art is a purely temporary work of art, but its impact, message and the notion behind remain forever". Throughout this chapter, I will be discussing how objects in the space can manipulate the audience's perception of reality.

According to the Cambridge dictionary, the meaning of space is, (Cambridge dictionary) 'an empty area that is available to be used". Artists intentionally create or manipulate a space to encourage the audience to immerse themselves in a physical and conceptual transformation of a place. It allows the artists and the audience to deconstruct and interrogate their surroundings by manipulating and creating a new perception of the space. To be able to create these spaces, the artist must intentionally dissolve boundaries between disciplines. Not only the space has the power to influence the audience but the objects that coexist in the space can change the perception of the space. A philosopher by the name of Michel de Certeau stated, (1984, 117) "A place, [lieu] in the order (of whatever kind) in accordance with which elements are distributed in relationship of coexistence". Not only can space change the perception of reality, but also the objects that coexist in the space can be influential in changing perspective.

De Certeau states (De Certeau,1984) 'Space is a practiced place'. A place can be a representation of a location, an example of Viola's work recreated a waterfall in an empty

gallery space. Artists also transform physical places into conceptual spaces, which are zones of possibility and creative thinking. A space can be unpredictable, a space can be subject not only for alteration but ambiguity.



Fig 4 Bill Viola (2005), *'The sound of a mountain under a waterfall'*

One piece of work that challenges the idea of objects in a new different space is *The sound of a mountain under a waterfall* (Viola, B, 2005). Viola is an American contemporary video artist, who is well-known for his video installations. In Violas' work he focuses on the concept of basic human experiences, for example, death, birth and aspects of consciousness, that can be sensitive and triggering for some viewers. Viola creates work that combines filmed images and music, that are inviting for the audience, he stated (Viola, 2005)

‘total environments that envelop the viewer in image and sound’. He intends to create a piece of work that the audience immerses themselves in.

This specific installation was a video installation projected onto a screen. In the video, there is a figure that is lying on a stone slab in an empty concrete room. Drips of water began to fall on the body, which then led to a storm of rain hammering the body that is lying peacefully on the stone. Speakers surround the space, echoing the sounds of a waterfall. Viola finds it interesting when nature's power is interacting with the opposites, an example is light and dark, fire and water, he takes them from their well-known traditional habitats and places them in a dissimilar space. Viola stated, (Viola, 2019) “There’s more than just the surface of life... the real thing is underneath”. While creating his installations, Viola creates a link between the imaginary and reality as he investigates the functioning of human sensory systems. Viola argues how the act of perception becomes a conception.

Viola challenges our perspective/perception of reality by taking an object or material from its traditional space and placing it into a new space. It allows the audience to embrace the installation that they are in the presence of. The idea of his installation is out of the ordinary, a waterfall placed in the centre of an empty space causes an element of unpredictability. The audience has the opportunity to communicate with each other and create a perception of the space. A philosopher by the name of De Certeau stated,

(De Certeau, 1984, 117) “In relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken, that is, when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualisation, transformed into a term dependant upon many different conversations, situated as the act of a present (or of a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts. In contradistinction to the place, it has thus none of the univocity or stability of a proper”

This suggests that by the audience discussing with each other, they create an image of what they have heard from each other about that particular space. How the audience reacts and communicates about the specific installation in the space can influence the perception of the particular space.

A book that discusses the correlation between dark and light in a space is *In praise of shadows*, by Junichiro Tanizaki. Throughout the book, Tanizaki mentions Japanese architecture and culture, and how they appreciate the darker colours. Shadows convey the fragile beauty of light, which can create a mysterious and overwhelming atmosphere. Tanizaki explores Japanese architecture, and the space in the buildings, he discusses the thought-out plan of the placement of the windows, which results in Tanizaki watching the sun brighten the dark room. In a section of the book, Tanizaki discusses and challenges how the variety of different tones of shadows and their power to reflect low-sheen materials, for example, gold in a candle-lit room (Tanizaki, 1993) "How, in such dark places, gold draws so much light to itself is a mystery to me". He argues the important role that shadows have played in shaping Japanese culture.

A shadow is ephemeral and silent, we cannot physically touch or grab it. It hovers somewhere between reality and the non-physicality of the unreal. A quote by Kentridge (Kentridge, 2001, p. 159) "The world of shadows tells us things about seeing that are invisible by the light of the sun". Shadows bring endless opportunities to use our imagination, which then influences our perception of the space. A quote by Dolci ; (Xiao, 2005) "It seems that shadows always come to mind when we want to express sensations of restlessness, deceitfulness, inseparableness or nothingness because the shadow is often

seen as the opposite of light and therefore a synonym for darkness". I believe that shadows can evoke a positive or negative emotion, depending on the space the light is in.

Light allows us to have a meaningful relationship with the world, by how the people respond to the space based on the way the light exposes it to them. Artificial and natural light can influence the visual perception of how the space is appreciated and perceived. An artist who explores light is James Turrell, he is known for his work within the light and space movement. Turrell created a piece of work that is called *Ganzfeld*, he was inspired by a psychological experiment that is called the 'ganzfeld effect', which occurs when your field of vision becomes entirely featureless. (Parker, 2017) "The effect of lack of structure in this homogenous field is to stimulate the brain to replace ordinary sensory stimulate with internal imagery". Ganzfeld is a German word to characterise the sensory experience of losing a sense of surroundings and colour vision loss. Ganzfeld effect happens when the individual is in absence of signals, shape or distance in the particular space, the brain tries to understand the surroundings.

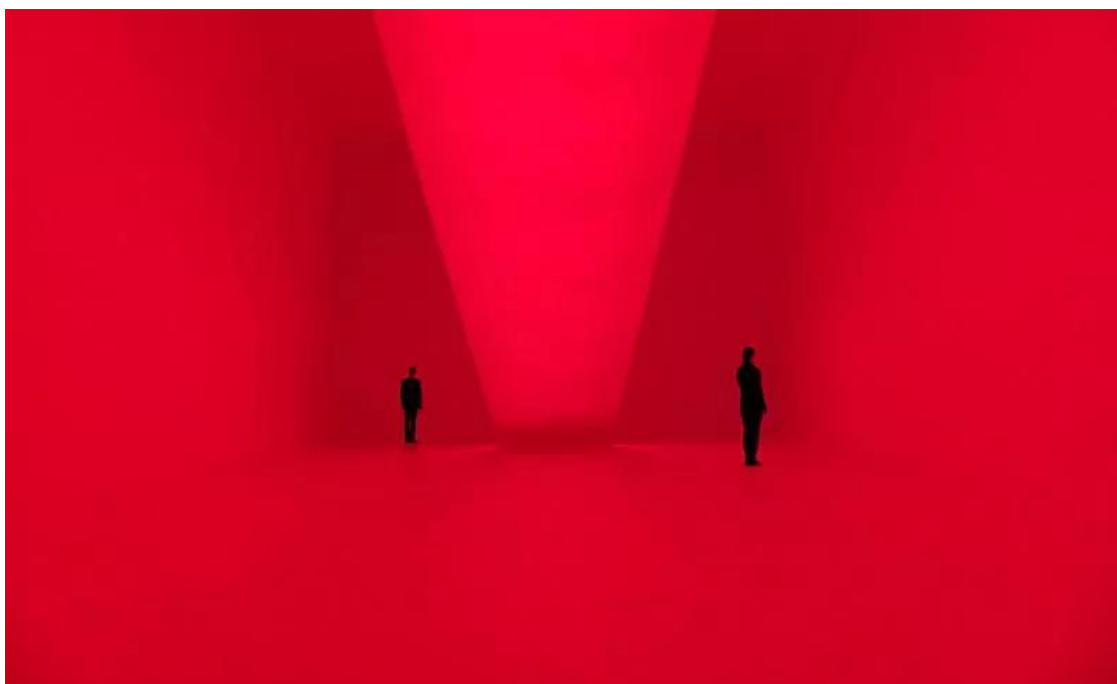


Fig 5, James Turrell (2013), '*Ganzfeld*', Installation

Turrell had no intention to create a dark, negative space, he intended to provoke the audience's perspective by choosing playful and pleasant colours. In this particular installation, the walls surrounding the empty space were white, and there were floods of bright colours that were overwhelming for some members who were witnessing the installation. (Turrell, 2018) "I tried to create a 'white-out' situation in this room. This is diffused light, where there no horizon, like for example when a pilot loses himself in a cloud". The installation was created for the audience to immerse themselves and accept the emotions that might be evoked, and to challenge their field of vision. The space was in complete silence, which created a more haunting atmosphere, but the effect of the installation was disrupted by the sound of people walking through the space and having conversations with each other.

Throughout the installation, the lights were flashing in sequences, which creates a sensory overload, that can be frustrating for the audience. In sections of the installation, the lights would disappear, which means that the space is in complete darkness, there is no visual field, nothing to see, no guidance. This creates an untrustworthy space and the audience's perception of how they knew reality was rendered helpless. The audience tries to touch the edges to get a sense of space in complete darkness, but the feeling of hopelessness and disorientating becomes overwhelming. Turrell creates this installation to provoke and challenge our perception of reality.

(Turrell, 2013) 'My works are not a looking at, but looking into; not the displacement of space with mass, but the working of space; not objects in a room, but the room. The format is not things within space, but the space itself'.

Turrell challenges the idea of how light in a space can evoke emotions and influence our perception. (Turrell, 2011) "It's about perception. For me, it's using light as a material to influence or affect the medium of perception". During the installation, the audience began to use their imagination, which might have led them to experience unusual visual and auditory patterns. That challenges the idea of how an object, for example, a light source can manipulate and change the audience's perspective.

Art isn't only created with visual qualities in mind, but with an aim to provoke understanding of the embodied perception, the overall experience. Human beings are known for being interactive, we naturally want to engage with space and our surroundings through our senses; (Wesseling, 2017) "We orientate ourselves in our surroundings by the way of embodied perception". The concept that we as a species need to be physically connected with our surroundings stems from the construct of phenomenology. A philosopher who challenges this idea is Maurice Merleau-ponty, whose research revolved around phenomenology and perception. For the duration of his research, he created a theory, that when the audience experience a piece of artwork, there are interpretations that are made from the involvement. While researching his concept, he focused on the phenomenology of perception, Merleau-Ponty believed that phenomenology is a method for describing the nature of how humans connect with their surroundings and perception. Scott stated (Scott,2002) "Maurice Merleau-Ponty defines phenomenology as the study of essences, including the essence of perception and of consciousness". He also discussed how

phenomenology is a system of describing the nature of our perceptual contact with our surroundings. By the audience interacting with the installation art, there's a possibility that the experience will change their perception. I believe that his research is relevant in today's society, because artists create pieces of work for the audience to interact with the work. Artists create art to evokes the audience, and gives them an out-of-body experience.

In summary, the artists that I have researched have demonstrated the multiple ways a space can be manipulated to change the audience's perception through the use of objects. Turrell challenges the idea of manipulating the space, by using an object which is a light, to evoke the audience's emotions and to influence psychological reactions. As interactive human beings, we naturally want to engage and immerse ourselves in our surroundings, it can influence and portray who we are. (Bandura, 1973) "Proposed the idea of reciprocal determinism, in which our behaviour, personal factors, and environmental factors all influence each other". This indicates that the environment we associate ourselves with can affect how we behave and evoke emotions.

Conclusion.

In conclusion to the following question: 'How can objects and sound in a space manipulate/affect the audience's perspective'. The information that I have discussed in this essay has given a brief overview of how artists can use an object or a sound to manipulate a space. Evaluating works from artists such as Janet Cardiff and James Turrell leads to an understanding of how the interior and objects in a space can be manipulated to create an eerie or a positive atmosphere, depending on the individual.

The Research that I have discovered in chapter 1, confirms how a sound being manipulated can change the perception/perspective of a space. Cardiff suggests that by manipulating a sound, it has the power to transport the audience into alternate realities. I discussed Licht, who argues that sound connotes companionship. An installation piece that Neuhaus created, *Two similar rooms*, demonstrated how manipulating one room slightly can create different psychological reactions

In chapter 2, I discussed the important roles that objects play in a space, and how they can be manipulated to create different psychological reactions. I discussed artists such as Viola who manipulated a space by placing an object, i.e a waterfall, that is not in its traditional space by transporting it to a new space, and his use of speakers surrounding the space enhances the perception of a waterfall. A book that I read, *In praise of shadows*, discussed the important role a shadow played to shape Japanese culture. A shadow in a space can manipulate the atmosphere and the perspective of the space. James Turrell's installation,

Ganzfeld, revealed how vision interacts with the brain. Turrell challenges the idea of how light in a space can evoke emotions, and create different psychological reactions.

An environment that individuals associate themselves with influences how they behave and communicate. I find it interesting how a space can evoke emotions and psychological reactions. As interactive human beings, we communicate and express our feelings, that is the reason why artists create art, to express and evoke emotion. Throughout this thesis, I attempted to address how can objects and sounds in space manipulate/affect the audience's perspective.

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