

Stolen voices : DIY #11

With Johanna Linsley, Rebecca Louise Collins, Sound & Music, The Live Art Development Agency, Arts Bournemouth

Team Members

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Prequel

The team was assembled remotely, first thing. Readings, audio tracks and Internet ephemera began to appear on www.stolenvoicesdiy.tumblr.com

Meanwhile, on trains, in cafés and on buses, the team began to prick up their ears, training them toward strangers, listening in and overhearing. They were preparing...



overheard on train

[call 4]

[LISTEN] [gap] **click** yeah [gap] hi *tscchhh*
[LISTEN] [gap] this train's running late [gap]
click yeah [LISTEN]
[gap] won't get into London until about 1 in the morning **click** [gap]
[LISTEN] yeah **click**
[gap] ok [LISTEN] **click** yeah [gap]
[LISTEN] **click** it's ok [gap] be late in
[LISTEN] **click** yeah [gap]
tscchhh tomorrow by 10 [LISTEN] yeah **click** [gap]
[LISTEN] ok *tscchhh* [gap] see you [gap]
[LISTEN] yeah *tscchhh* ok
[gap] yeah [gap]

[end of call]

1952hrs

#eavesdropping #public transport #mobile phone #notation #transcription



Day 1 : Gather

... and when they were ready, they gathered at Flirt café, the triangle, Bournemouth.

Why Bournemouth? Wrong question. Why would they gather anywhere else? Bournemouth, a wholly specific place that also stands for something more than itself - British seaside, British summer, a nostalgic childhood landscape ripe for re-thinking.

The team members had their instructions:

to begin

Arrive at Flirt Café at 10am on Saturday. Buy a drink or a snack if you want one, and find a place to sit. If you see someone you know, ignore them. The workshop has begun. You have twenty minutes to yourself, to listen. At exactly 10.20am, get up and go outside. Stand under an umbrella outside the café and await further instructions.

10.00hr

One by one, they stepped into the café, their eyes surveying the other customers and staff. Who was in and who was out? A question that lingered throughout the

mission. Teas and coffees ordered, seats chosen, targets identified. An uncanny feeling settled on the team members as the video for *Every Breath You Take* by the Police played on a TV monitor on the wall ('I'll be watching you...').

Listen. Listen to the group of men speaking in Turkish around a table in the centre of the room. Listen to the baristas at the counter. Listen to your own breathing, your own heartbeat, your own hormones. Listen, but don't let anyone see you listening.

10.20hr

One by one, the team members left the café and joined together underneath the same umbrella.

A man in a hat stood across the courtyard, watching and listening in.



Thank you for coming, thank you for coming.

Johanna and Rebecca, our intrepid organisers, were gently effusive welcoming the group, their genuine gratitude

clear beneath the veneer of competent professionalism they maintained at all times.

Something had happened in Bournemouth, the team members were told.

The Event was not evident in any visual clues. It was only made manifest on the soundscape, right there on the tip of everyone's tongue. The team had assembled, whether they knew it or not, to stretch an ear to what was happening.

10.30hr

Team and intrepid organisers walked silently to temporary HQ keeping an ear to the ground for any strange goings on. The man in the hat followed closely behind.

10.50hr

On arrival at Pavilion Dance (temporary HQ) the team diligently recorded their initial listenings in relation to the Event. Everything is important at the beginning, any beginning, and the shape of an experience is defined by what stays important.



11.00hr

The man in the hat stepped in and revealed himself. He was an Expert Listener.¹

Training is crucial - as listeners we are always learning. Just as valuable, though, is a shared vocabulary, a shared sense of structure, a scaffold (however temporarily constructed) to support group tinkering.

The Expert Listener instructed the team on Active Listening (for the Active Eavesdropper). Active Listening

¹AKA Richard Whitelaw, Head of Programmes at Sound and Music, moonlighting as Expert Listener

is a set of techniques used in coaching and certain forms of psychotherapy. It cultivates a form of listening that minimizes the listener's imposition on the listened-to.

Now that you have a flavour of some of the Clean Language questions, we are going to turn our attention in the next chapter to metaphor and its role in the Clean process. To get a taste of Clean Language questions used with metaphor, we suggest the activity below.

Activity: Listening like what?



Use Clean Language questions to develop a metaphor of what it is like when you are listening at your best. Here's how:

1. Ask yourself, "When I am listening at my best, that's like what?"

For example, it might be like:

- A bright spotlight illuminating the person who is speaking
- A heart-to-heart connection
- The speaker's voice rings out loud and clear and other sounds are muffled.

Probably your metaphor is quite different from these examples. Whatever it is like for you is fine. There's no wrong metaphor. Whatever your metaphor is, value it.

2. Then ask yourself the Name and Address Questions:

- (And) what kind of X (is that X)?
- (And) is there anything else about X?

and

- (And) where is X? or (And) whereabouts is X?

a few times, in any order, where 'X' is your metaphor.

Using the example metaphors above, questions could be:

"And when it is like a bright spotlight, what kind of bright spotlight?"

11.30hr

Some things are better done sat in rows, all facing the same direction. For other things, though, a circle with everyone facing each other is best. These include campfires, séances in films, and open discussions. So in a circle, armed with Active Listening training and a sense of mission, the team began to discuss what is at stake when eavesdropping - as background to considering what might have constituted the Bournemouth Event.

12.00hr

Lunch. It is impossible to overestimate the importance of lunch. Residual conversational stiffness melts away with the application of good food, and if circles are good for discussion, circles around a table are transcendently good...

13.00hr

...and yet circles are made to be broken. The Event could not be penetrated indoors. After lunch each team member was assigned a partner and a prompt that framed how they might pursue their eavesdropping practice.

The prompts included the following:

1. How might you modify or extend your body in the space in order to increase/improve acoustic capture?

2. Find and exploit natural architectures in the town for eavesdropping purposes. Think 'whispering arches'.
3. Rushing water is a great cover for eavesdroppers or the ideal scenario for a secret conversation to take place. Go forth and explore this...
4. Put some technology to work or find some technology already at work and make it work for you.
5. Put yourself in a situation where money is changing hands and investigate the acoustic properties of the exchange
6. Voices travel in this town. Explore some of their modes of transportation.

13.45hr; 14.30hr; 15.15hr; 16.00hr

Our intrepid organisers pitched up at the Arlington Hotel Bar, and offered Acoustic Consultations to the pairs at 45-minute intervals. Through on-site research, and with the benefit of local Bournemouth expertise,² the organisers had to hand a series of Top Tips for Aural Stimulation, specially tailored for each pair's needs.

These Audio Inspirations included:

² Particularly via Carol Maund, director of Arts Bournemouth and master of aural localism

A car park that plays bagpipe music on loop in the stairwell with such high fidelity that visitors search in vain for absent musicians.

An art gallery that has a hole in the floor which allows you to hear what those upstairs are saying.

The toilets in Harry Ramsdens, which play seagull sounds.

A conference for the local chapter of the Rotary Club, and a Vamps concert, both taking place at the Bournemouth International Centre.

An overhead PA at Beales department store that announces deals.

The camera obscura at the edge of the pleasure garden.

St Peter's church, where an elderly man plays piano for an audience of one, and the adjoining chapel, which can only be accessed if you interrupt the pianist and ask for the key.

The aviary in the park (birds, it was discovered, played a crucial role in the Event).

The café at the end of the pier, with a dome ceiling (perfect acoustics for eavesdropping!) which lit up pink and green.







16.30hr

At the end of the afternoon, everyone gathered at the Arlington Hotel Bar to report back on their findings. The team members and the intrepid organisers were the only patrons of the bar, apart from a woman with a martini reading a copy of *Grazia* magazine on a corner sofa.

The team told of infiltrating the Rotary Club convention during a speech by Falklands War veteran Simon Weston; of speculations by a car park attendant that the Event might be a rave; of remote performance scores transmitted via mobile phone; of the structural linguistics of mini-golf

players; of overly familiar seagulls, an actual dead crow, and a mysterious crow riot.



17.00hr

As the team wrapped up the afternoon session, the lone woman with the martini in the corner of the room got up to leave the lounge, and, passing the group, dropped her copy of *Grazia*. A pile of envelopes fell out of the magazine, and the woman³ leaned over to pick one up, glanced at it, and handed it to a team member. She said, 'I think this has your name on it' - and she was right.

19.00hr - late

³ Lucy Taylor, Bournemouth-based artist and acoustic spy extraordinaire

Each team member had an envelope with their name on it, in fact, containing instructions for the final mission of the day. These were prompts/provocations/strategies aimed to further fuel the evening activities. Some suggestions included:

- stretch an ear
- get an earful
- talk someone's ear off
- block your ears
- sound someone out
- what's the difference between noisy and loud
- make yourself heard
- sound off about something
- lend an ear
- bug someone
- if the walls have ears, what does Bournemouth have?

These strategies were deployed by the team members at a locally run pizza restaurant and at DYMK (Does Your Mother Know), an anchor institution in the Bournemouth Triangle gay scene.

Day 2 - Process, compile, compose

10.00hr

The team gathered in the Garden Studio at Pavilion Dance, overlooking the pleasure garden through a wall of windows. They had soaked in Bournemouth the previous day, in two senses - they were drenched and they were full. The raw fragments of the Event needed processing before they could become evidence. So, back to basics.

If there is a process that can be successfully accomplished without large pieces of paper and chunky markers, we haven't heard of it. Using these indispensable tools, team members listed all of the materials they had gathered the previous day, as well as the materials gathered before arriving in Bournemouth. They then worked out methods to classify and categorise these lists, to put some kind of order to the unruly acoustic territory they were mapping.



10.30hr

Each pair joined with another pair to form a group. By then, it had become clear that the Bournemouth Event was not one thing, not one shape. The tactics used to approach it must also shift.

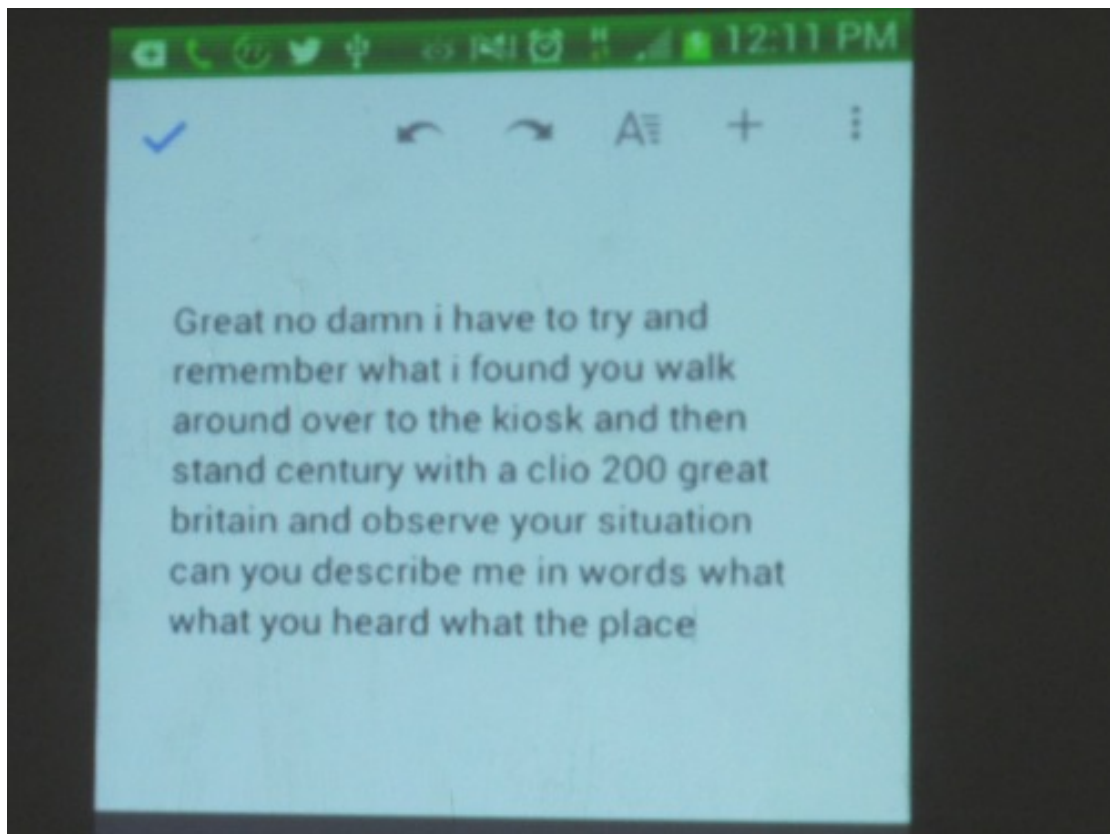
Translation, then. From a list on a piece of paper to a spatial manifestation. From ears moving through a town to a small composition in a big room overlooking a garden.

12.30hrs

Our intrepid organisers toured the spatialisations. Things were starting to come together, though that coming-together might just as well have been described as a taking-apart.







13.00hrs

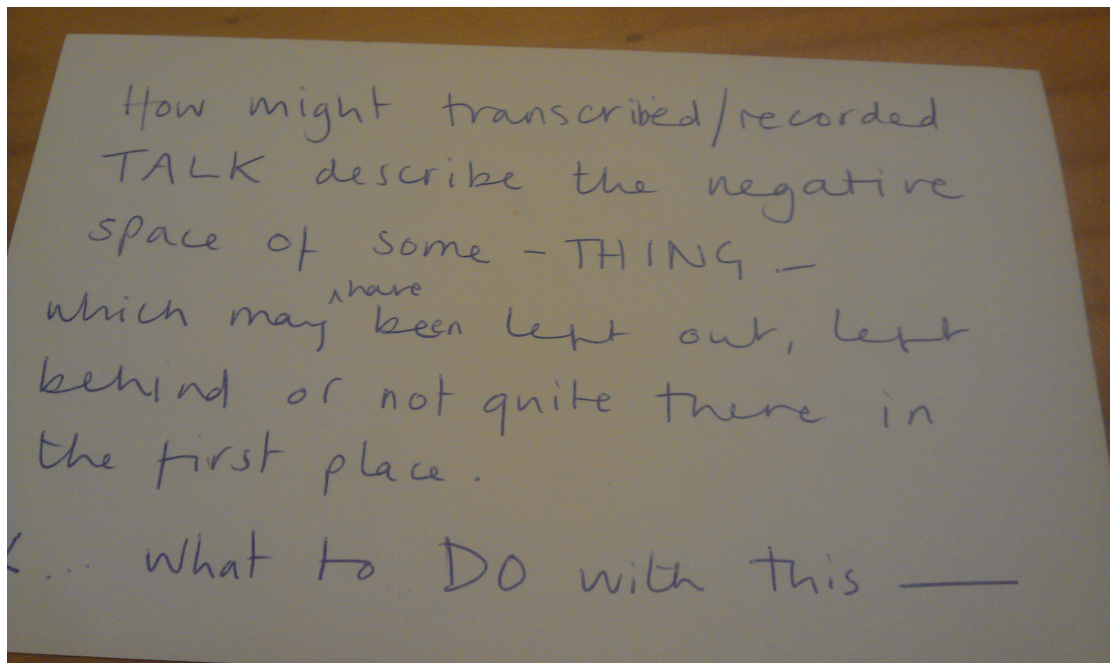
Lunch. If anything, an even more important session than the previous day, given the focus on digestion in Day 2...

14.00hrs

Plot twist.

Cast out the usual suspects. Peel off the mask, only to find a pair of novelty glasses and a false moustache. Complication not just for the sake of it, but because we're available for detours, diversions and deviations. We are absolutely available.

Recognising that until this moment the mission had been driven by outside forces, now the team members reflected on how their enquiry might have moved away from the prompts previously given. The last stage of the mission was placed in their eminently capable hands (or ears?) as they defined in writing the question or curiosity that was now driving them and their investigations.



14.15hrs

Set change.

While the team dealt with the plot twist outside (because sometimes the sea air in your face is enough to give you a new perspective), our intrepid organisers set the final

stage inside temporary HQ. A table of evidence was assembled, with slots marked out in masking tape, giving a clue that the Event would eventually be represented in discrete physical chunks. Or that was the idea.

The team came back inside and received instructions.

Go back out into the field with your own new question, and gather further evidence that can be distilled to fill one of the shapes on the table.

14.30hrs

Our intrepid organisers had discovered that their ideal habitat was a hotel bar in a British seaside town. So they pitched up in the bar of the Whitehall hotel, ensconced in pink walls and flowery upholstery, the perfect setting for solving an elaborate murder mystery, or for offering a second session of acoustic consultations. Our organisers opted for the latter, though in a bit more free-form than the previous day's. While the rest of the team chased down concrete forms of evidence, our organisers chatted with a self-selecting few about lost sounds - sounds that are no longer heard because they were made by obsolete technology or extinct animals or languages that are no longer spoken. They

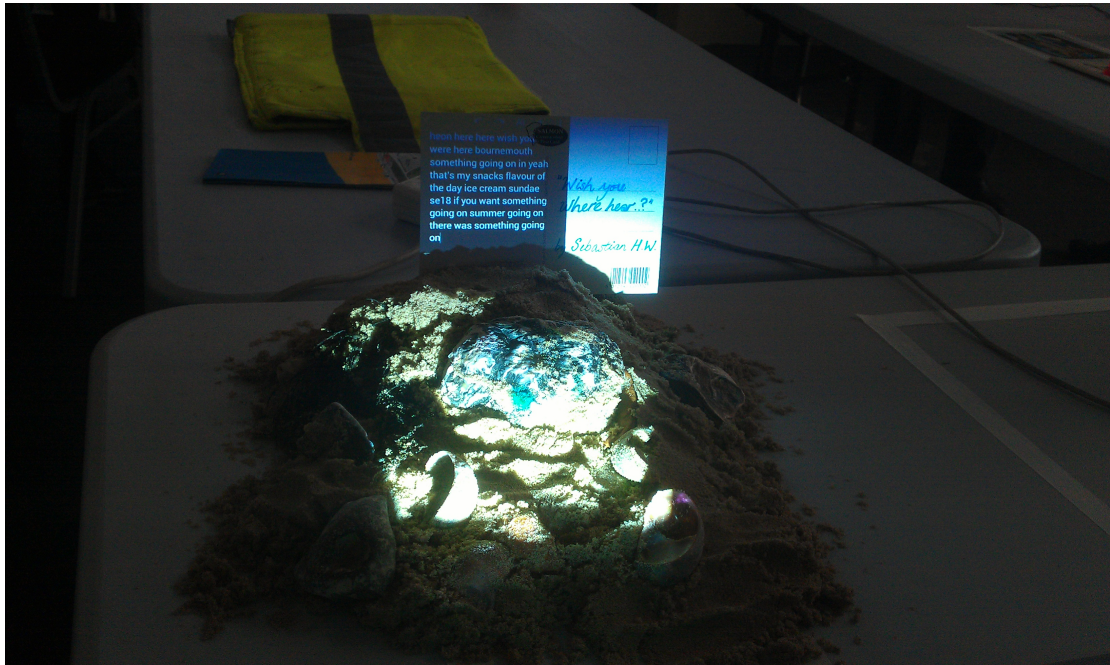
chatted, as well, about the duck race which was taking place on the stream in the pleasure garden, organised by the same Rotarians that had convened at the Bournemouth International Centre the day before.

16.00hrs

The evidence was installed on the evidence table back at temporary HQ.

This was then shared.







With wine & cheese savouries.

17.00hrs

A final coup de théâtre.

The Event had fractured by now into a teeming multiplicity of events, evidenced in images, sounds, piles of sand, gummy fish, a silver skeleton mask, postcards, songs and whispering voices. The team had listened-in on Bournemouth, and they had found not an answer, but a set of possibilities.

And yet they deserved one small gesture of completion, that might also be one point of light marking the next path. So each team member took a small red luggage tag

and wrote down one word, phrase, question that might help
fuel a future mission.

This they hung on a glowstick and let it shine in the
space!

18.00hrs

Fin.

Sequel...???

