Ultra-red
ANNUAL REPORT
2011

with reports on base-community investigations in . . .

Berlin by Manuela Bojadžijev and Ceren Türkmen
London by Janna Graham
Los Angeles by Dont Rhine
New York by Robert Sember
Torbay by Chris Jones and Elliot Perkins

as well as short-term investigations in . . .

Dundee and Glasgow by Chris Jones and Elliot Perkins
St. Marylebone High School by Robert Sember

and . . .

Amsterdam by Robert Sember
Mexico City by Janna Graham
Porto by Chris Jones and Elliot Perkins
"Mic check!" "MIC CHECK!" The refrain became a prominent soundmark on our political landscape. As we move into the New Year, the Occupy Wall Street moment that erupted in September in the wake of mass uprisings in Britain, North Africa, the Middle East, Europe, Latin America, and the mid-western United States, that moment continues to evolve from a site-specific convergence to a centrifugal force. Reflecting on the critical antagonisms within the image of a monolithic 99% who oppose capital’s oligopoly, Ultra-red member Robert Sember recently offered the following commentary about the use of the “people’s microphone” as a way into reading and activating those antagonisms.

Space heard is different from space seen. Listening is multi-directional. It enfolds us in space and maps a differentiated field of actions. As we hear the directionality, delay, frequency and reverberation of sounds, we discern the resonant qualities of space. We may also choose to work back through a sound to its cause. Thus, sound inhabits and organizes both space and time. This, at least, is the phenomenal condition we most likely imagine for sound-space.

Different spatial practices emerge, however, when listening is technologically mediated and occurs collectively. Multiple listeners configure critical spaces. What we hear in collective practices of situated listening are the needs and desires of others. That is, we hear how it is that we occupy a space. Our repetitions, echoes, and resonant shifts remind us that we are never alone in this space. They also confirm that we are always moving for when we learn to listen as others listen we alter the vectors that enfold and orient us to each other. The critical awareness of space arises from this practice of collective listening as organizing and not from the interpretative pronouncement of “experts” alone.

Days after Robert wrote these sentences police around the United States launched a coordinated assault. Following the violent removal of tents cities everywhere, the antagonisms within the symbolism of the 99% have been dramatically exposed as debates over strategy rage in cities and small towns. It is clear to many that we are no longer confined to the virtuality that once led the Electronic Disturbance Theatre to declare that the streets are nothing but “dead capital”, tactically impoverished sites for resistance.

The struggles of the poor have never been virtual. I was reminded of this fact participating in a Christmas Posada organized by Ultra-red member Elizabeth Blaney and Union de Vecinos in East Los Angeles. To make room for their annual celebration, the community closed the street off for music and dancing. Nearly five hundred neighbors cued up for bowls of Posole soup and children took swings at Piñatas. No emails were sent to organize the event. No one requested permission from the police to close the street. The act of occupation, albeit temporary and cloaked in religious observance, allowed the community to demonstrate the potential of their autonomy. What would happen if the community pushed the limits of that autonomy? Conversely, what would happen if occupy activists aligned themselves with the autonomy of the poor?

In the process of the middle classes re-learning collectivity, the negation of alienation has demanded new ways of speaking and listening. This is where the "mic check" became emblematic. When the original Occupy Wall Street in New York faced police-enforced prohibitions on the use of amplified sound,
protestors instituted the people's mic. I first came across the human amplification system during the anti-corporate globalization protests at the turn of the century. Affinity groups used it to communicate across large crowds during the Battle of Seattle in November 1999 and then, five months later, in mobilizations against the International Monetary Fund and World Bank in Washington, D.C. One can actually hear the people's mic being used on the Ultra-red EP, "A16" (released on CD-R to Indymedia outlets, summer 2000). Reflecting on the people's mic as a politics organized by listening, Robert writes:

*Two dimensions of the people's mic are particularly important to me. First, the manner in which it underscores how active listening must be in a movement. Under scoring this action is the fact that the mic includes not only the restating of the words of the primary speaker at that moment. It also involves a range of hand signals (pointing upward and moving the hand up and down to signal the need to increase volume, the wiggling of fingers to signify agreement, etc.). Consequently, re-stating what we have heard another person say becomes a powerful performance of listening — it slows things down, it moves words from voice to voice, it performs a collective listening.*

*The other dimension is the amplification function. A group of people calls for the people's mic to ensure that everyone hears the words. It is a taking on and a moving on of language. This is an act of care for the speaker as well as for the listener and the consensus process. The practices of care, from providing food, to teaching, to listening, to advocating for others, is the best of the occupy movement — it is the demonstration of the Occupy as a demand for a differently organized society. If it is to grow into a truly relevant and militantly radical movement, it is this ethic that will get it there. But it is fragile.*

*In discussing what a new occupation encampment might look like during a recent meeting, someone stated that unlike Liberty Park, the new occupation could not become a social service agency. There was a lot of wiggling fingers. This basically means that the homeless, the ill, the "expendables" will be excluded. It is in those moments that those who speak for the 99% move against the 1 out of 2 Americans who live in poverty. What is the demand of that occupation?*

*The movement is growing. Growth is painful. It requires errors and successes. The people's mic requires us, at times, to speak things with which we disagree. This disagreement becomes especially pronounced as we speak the words. The responsibility to compose a rebuttle becomes that much stronger.*

Elsewhere, in London, Ultra-red's Chris Jones noted a similar rift. The flood of new activists from the middle classes have insisted on focusing entirely on the banks. When others raise the specter of the poor and class antagonism, the accusation is made of elitism. As a result, the middle classes determine the very terms amplified when someone calls, "mic check!" "MIC CHECK!" Without an analysis of actual-existing capitalism, the strategies of resistance become greatly impoverished. Here in the States, the one-out-of-two of all Americans living at or below poverty find themselves alienated from a protest moment that claims to speak in their name. At the same time, a movement is the best classroom. This is the point made by Ultra-red's Manuela Bojadžijev. During a visit to the occupy encampment in Ljubljana, Slovenia she observed how access to the people's mic came with conditions. Protestors were permitted to use the human amplification system for making proposals only if they took responsibility for organizing what they proposed.

While Ultra-red continues to move forward with our own experiments with a literacy of listening, we each listen actively for the tide of anti-capitalist rage and hope that swells around us. The people's mic amplifies but one distinctive feature of the occupy/decolonize moment. While occupy groups have not hesitated in employing familiar tropes such as marches, rallies, banner-drops, picket-lines, sloganeering and visual signage, there is something qualitatively distinctive about this moment. Again, that distinction seems to be best signified in the practice of liberating the time and space to organize listening. No doubt many of us in Ultra-red possess a particular sensitivity to such distinctions because of our own commitment to organized listening that has become the primary focus of our work since the advent of the School Of Echoes initiative in 2009.
Launched during Ultra-red's collective residency at the Raven Row gallery in London in Spring of 2009, School Of Echoes has become a multi-site exploration into procedures of listening and how, as forms of cultural action, such procedures can contribute to political organizing. August of 2011 marked the end of Ultra-red's on-site work in the cities of Glasgow and Dundee as well as the RE: ASSEMBLY project at London's St. Marylebone High School. With the end of these projects, the year 2011 brought an end to our involvement in all short-term inquiries. When these U.K.-based projects began three years ago, we knew that a time would come for us to leave. That knowledge conditioned the work from the very beginning.

While Ultra-red wrapped up the projects in Scotland and St. Marylebone's High School, the majority of our collective devoted the year to nurturing School Of Echoes inquiries within the political fields and communities where we act as organizers, social researchers and educators. What we would call base-community inquiries often proceed without institutional inducement. Although these are social fields where we are well known and have years of involvement, coming to a shared desire for a sound inquiry can often feel like starting anew. Getting to that point where the community articulates the terms of an inquiry requires a gentle persistence. It can feel like cultivating trust for the very first time.

The fieldwork that establishes a School Of Echoes inquiry bears little to no resemblance to the kind of processes framed by an arts institution. It is in the nature of the fieldwork itself to create a difference, a non-identity, between the sound investigation and the existing processes of organizing. Thus, the community is being asked to participate in something that is not the same as that in which they are already engaged. At the same time, art is that strangeness in/of the room that compels the community organizer to ask, "Why should I take this on in addition to the work I am already doing?" Convincing a community that a sound inquiry makes possible forms of knowledge unavailable or remote by conventional means of organizing is tantamount to arguing for the value of aesthetic autonomy from within the political. This has been the work of the majority of Ultra-red teams over the past year.

Already we see things beginning to come together that suggest 2012 will be an exciting year. The steady work on the ground is yielding precious fruit with emerging teams of sound investigators, the clear articulation of aims for the investigations, as well as new institutional partnerships both within and, interestingly, outside of the arts. We anticipate that 2012 will witness a maturing of the School Of Echoes initiative in its specific manifestations. We also anticipate that these specific efforts will contribute to positive changes within the practice of Ultra-red. The School Of Echoes teaches us all.

(Written by Dont Rhine)
In Memoriam

Arbert Santana

Arbert died in New York City in early March this year. In the year-and-a-half prior to his death, Arbert and Ultra-red collaborated on Vogue'ology, an Ultra-red investigation based within New York City's House|Ballroom scene. The Ballroom scene is a unique familial and experimental performance community formed by African-American and Latino transgender, lesbian, bisexual and gay men. It is organized into houses, each with a mother and father who functions as both nurturer and mentor. Participants' creative collaborations and day-to-day care for each other are a direct challenge to the racism, transphobia, gender oppression, homophobia, and poverty that condition their lives.

The seeds of our collaboration were planted in the early 2000s when I was part of a team based at Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) that trained young transgender, lesbian, bisexual and gay New Yorkers in innovative HIV-prevention strategies. Arbert was the director and Founding Mother of the House of Latex Project, the agency's HIV/AIDS-prevention program focused exclusively on the House|Ballroom scene. The group I trained included many House of Latex staff or, in Ballroom terms, Arbert's children. Thus, I came to know Arbert as both an HIV-prevention expert and a parent. After leaving GMHC, Arbert founded the House of Evisu, which he rapidly built into one of the most successful in the scene. He also continued his work in social service settings, where he specialized in addressing the needs of people living with AIDS, mental health difficulties and active alcohol and drug addictions.

In 2009, I invited Arbert to collaborate on Vogue'ology. He reciprocated with an invitation to help him establish a Ballroom archive, which began with the gathering of oral histories. The team Arbert gathered to undertake this work included our beloved mutual friend, Edgar Rivera Colon, and two of Arbert's closest children, J'Lin Evisu and Jennifer Evisu. Within a matter of months we gathered close to 40 in-depth interviews and organized two exhibitions, the first at BAK in Utrecht, Netherlands, and the second at Parsons in New York City.

Arbert and I spoke of the Ballroom Archive and Oral History Project as a lifelong endeavor and an investment in the survival of the Ballroom scene. Arbert wanted to make something that would "mother" the Ballroom children even after his death. By taking care of the community's collective memories, memory itself might become a form of care. History will provide a sense of place, a home, a house, and be a source of inspiration. Arbert's untimely death, followed just a few months later by the completely unexpected death of his Ballroom daughter, Jennifer Evisu, punctuated emphatically the terms of our investment in our work. We mourn Arbert deeply, as do we Jennifer and the many other members of the scene who have died long before their time.

(Written by Robert Sember)
In Memoriam

Gill Clarke

Gill died on the 15th of November. I received the news while I was editing footage of dance performances she had helped create as part of the final phase of Ultra-red's RE: ASSEMBLY project. RE: ASSEMBLY is, in part, an investigation of the how immigration experiences and pedagogy intersect in the lives of young women at St. Marylebone School in London. The piece we collaborated on with Gill consists of a series of short and extremely delicate movement and spoken word solo performances by five young women. The freeing generosity and thrilling inventiveness of Gill's guidance as a seasoned dancer, choreographer and as a teacher, is evident in every gesture. Now these have also become gestures of our grief.

The first phase of RE: ASSEMBLY culminated in a large performance at St. Marylebone School in June 2009. This was the first time Gill and Ultra-red collaborated and it was a revelation. Quite unintentionally, Gill shifted fundamentally the terms of our sound investigations by reminding us that listening is always embodied, that it has a choreography. Gill is praised in every obituary for her advocacy on behalf of dance. We experienced this side of her work in the form of her completely absorbing curiosity about what is possible in movement. As I moved with her and the many students and teachers involved in this phase of the project, my understanding of the relationship between the fields of experimental sound art and dance opened onto a set of questions concerning embodiment that now sit at the center of all the work I do with Ultra-red.

Gill and I met a number of times following that first collaboration to prepare for the subsequent phases of the project. These meetings were a benefit of the repeated postponements of this work. At each gathering, we watched recordings of various dance performances together and sketched out protocols for creative investigations that drew together the strategies of collective listening and improvisatory movement. Threading through this work was Gill's teaching about the terms of movement drawn from a long career as a teacher, dancer and investigator of the freedoms of the body. In our final conversations, she was also thinking through how she and her collaborators might respond to the devastating conservative shift in Britain and its oppressive consequences for students, teachers and artists. Now, as I watch the sequences Gill, Asal, Ashley, Nora, Sara, Tajmila and I created, it is that question of freedom within the context of regimes of citizenship, schooling and aesthetic practices that comes to fore. It is a question Gill and Ultra-red should be investigating together.

(Written by Robert Sember)
A. Base-Community investigations

School Of Echoes features a constellation of practices and procedures for organized listening. The use (and usefulness) of those practices depends upon engagements with specific constituencies. Just as such engagements have the potential to change the way local groups of people produce militant knowledge, so too do the engagements transform the practices and investments of School Of Echoes. For this reason, it might be useful to think of the local manifestations of School Of Echoes not as chapters or franchises, but as translations.

In 2011, members of Ultra-red continued to deepen that work of translation in multiple contexts. An investigation like Vogue'ology in New York has been able to build on phases of fieldwork and processes of collective listening begun in 2010. While the work in Berlin, London, Los Angeles, and Torbay involved laying the groundwork for initiating investigative processes. Even though Ultra-red members have been based in all of these locations for years, and even in some cases for decades, establishing a School Of Echoes project for organized listening feels very much like a fresh beginning with all the challenges, risks, and surprises that any beginning entails.

In the next section we will provide brief reports for each of the projects that we see as base-community investigations. Subsequent sections of the report will be devoted to other projects including inquiries in the School Of Echoes initiative that had more short-term goals. Finally, the report concludes with summaries about preliminary work done in 2011.
Berlin Sessions

*What is the sound of anti-racism?*

(Written by Manuela Bojadžiev and Ceren Türkmen)

Despite numerous appearances in Berlin over the years, Ultra-red has only presented itself in the context of electronic music performances at such venues as Volksbühne (1999), Club Transmediale (2003), Podewil (RIP, 2004), or General Public (2005). Over the last two years, Ultra-red in Berlin, led by Manuela Bojadžiev, have slowly and patiently laid the groundwork for a more sustained inquiry around the question; what is the sound of anti-racism in Berlin?

In the last year, Manuela teamed up with Ultra-red's newest member, Ceren Türkmen. Working independently from any institution invitation (both in terms of resources and demand), Manuela and Ceren began mapping their own desires for an investigation. Drawing on conversations with other Ultra-red members, the Berlin team began to conceptualize both the opportunities and the limitations of other Ultra-red investigations for the specific context of Berlin. In addition to long skype calls with Dont in Los Angeles, Manuela and Ceren were able to visit with Elliot in the autumn. This visit brought them a more complete understanding of the work — particularly that work addressing anti-racism — and its procedures in Scotland and the Southwest of England.

One of the more significant differences between the Berlin work and Ultra-red’s activities elsewhere is the nature of potential institutional partnerships. Most of the collective’s endeavors in Britain and North America have drawn on the support of arts organizations, whether museums, festivals or art colleges. In 2011, the Berlin team entered into a conversation with a political foundation. The foundation, explicitly connected to an established political institution, Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, has access to public funding for social and cultural programs. While a future Berlin inquiry would have autonomy in terms of the community network, methodology, and content, the institutional partnership traces a connection to both community networks and party politics. The Berlin team, and many of us in Ultra-red, are intrigued by the potential opportunities and contradictions that such an association brings to our work — particularly given our investment in the problematic of art and political practices.
As Manuela and Ceren move into the New Year, one of our first tasks will be to assemble a larger team of sound investigators. Individuals for the larger team will come from our own networks of anti-racism activists, community organizers, researchers, and cultural workers living in Berlin. Here we have been intrigued to follow the efforts of Robert in New York in building up a team of collaborators from his own network in the House|Ballroom scene and other local political and cultural associations. We anticipate following a similar route in Berlin. However, where we differ from the New York effort is our relationship to what the Spanish and English speakers in Ultra-red have been referring to as, Comunidades de base or base-communities.

Given Manuela's own personal involvement in the history of anti-racism activism and organizing in Germany, specifically with Kanak Attak, we have a different understanding of the relationship between our own experiences of self-organization and that of base-communities. This is not to say that they are the same thing. Part of the challenge in the next year will be to develop a greater understanding of, what we have come to call, the field. In this sense, we see the potential impact of a sound investigation to research both the fragmentation across the field between specific anti-racism organization, groups and communities as well as the disconnections between anti-racism organizing and a popular base. Our sound investigation will need to interrogate both of these tensions simultaneously. How our association with a political institution might open up additional challenges becomes a third line of inquiry to which we will be listening a great deal.

We welcome the larger Ultra-red network of sound investigators and supports to follow our journey. No doubt we will have learned a great deal in a year's time.

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London Sessions

What is the sound of radical education today?

(Written by Janna Graham)

For much of the year, Ultra-red's research and engagement in London built on the question, what is the sound of radical education today? This inquiry had begun the year before but by early 2011, the larger political context for this question had exploded on a massive scale. Here is a brief sketch of what that context looked and sounded like on the ground. In late 2010, the newly installed Tory and Liberal Democrat coalition government passed sweeping austerity cuts through parliament despite tens of thousands of demonstrators in the streets. Among the broad social program cuts, the parliament vote enabled universities to increase tuition threefold. The same vote resulted in the complete elimination of the Education Maintenance Allowance that has supported working class people in their access of higher education.

Even before the events of Cairo's Tahrir Square in late January, the passage of austerity cuts in Britain provoked a broad cross-section of London groups to plan mobilizations on a number of fronts. On March 26, anywhere from 250,000 to half a million Londoners took to the streets. Students, housing activists and others occupied empty buildings in central London. Gathering under the banner, the Really Free School, the occupation mocked the government's cynical "free school" initiative. Others groups, such as U.K. Uncut, drew attention to the tax evasions of the rich through sit-ins at banks and luxury food shops — turning them into day care centres, teaching spaces and comedy clubs. In the arts, groups such as Arts Against Cuts and Precarious Workers Brigade provided central meeting hubs for organising direct actions to coincide with mass public sector demonstrations in June. The coalition of Arts Against Cuts and Precarious Workers Brigade also led creative actions against Sotheby's during their annual contemporary art auction. The group also targeted the Whitechapel Gallery in response to an exhibition of government art curated by Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg and Samantha Cameron, the wife of Britain's Tory Prime Minister. The fury of the spring flared up again on June 30 when the trade unions called for a one-
day walk out for workers. While the public sector demonstrations did not, as was frequently predicted, result in a general strike, the large-scale actions did offer moments of solidarity between workers, many of whom had not been politically active.

The wave of dissent continued into August. Following the police murder of a 29-year old black man, Mark Duggan, local organisers came together in the neighbourhood of Tottenham to protest the police cover-up. This ignited acts of rebellion across the U.K., known in the press as the "Riots." Government rhetoric and action in response was colonial and brutal; fast-tracking court cases and threatening eviction from public housing for anyone even suspected of involvement. Some government officials called for 'sweeping up' campaigns before asking any questions about why the events occurred in the first place. The press was equally one-sided, suggesting that "rioters" were wild youth in the heat of the summer, acting out of greed without cause or critique. The opposite has proven to be true. Interviews with protestors showed insightful critical assessments of the impact of the cuts, the increasing gap between rich and poor, and unjust policing on poor communities. Much was learned from the events of the summer about the differences in class composition and in tactics between the formal anti-cuts movement and the summer insurrection, about the relationship between local communities, and about the viral power of movement.

Some of these issues were taken up in the Occupy movement in the fall — albeit in a much quieter and, some might say, less effective way. Stimulated by Occupy Wall Street in New York, encampments emerged across the U.K. in the autumn, including a fully functional living camp in front of St. Paul’s Cathedral in London. The camp offered a meeting space, recruiting points and amazing food for those who opposed the cuts and, in particular, those who had not participated in the anti-austerity actions earlier in the year. The St. Paul’s occupation continues to stimulate debates amongst the gatekeepers of the City of London and the highest Clergy of the Church. It has also lent a renewed profile to the anti-cuts movement. Meanwhile, in the wake of such dramatic events, local level anti-gentrification struggles continue in places like Elephant and Castle, where activists have moved against plans to tear down large modernist public housing estates such as the Heygate and in Hackney in preparation for the 2012 Olympics in London.
Throughout 2011, students involved in the various protest movements started to express a frustration with the kind of education they receive. A real desire emerged to learn about past initiatives for radical pedagogy and the links between strategies and tactics of resistance to those more militant education projects. Ultra-red's on-going investigation into the histories of radical pedagogy became one space for people to put those histories in relation to contemporary struggles. Pedagogical questions and histories have always woven through and across Ultra-red's work. However, the members in London involved in the struggles within education made pedagogy the focus of inquiry in 2010 through a collaborative inquiry with teachers in London’s Radical Education Forum. This work came together as part of our participation in the Exhibition Best Laid Plans, curated by Cylena Simonds at The Drawing Room. Titled, A Curriculum as a Score as a Call to Action, the investigation took the form of workshops involving teachers from formal education, social movements, and anarchist organisations as well as from London’s student movement. Responding to the inquiry’s question about radical education today, workshop participants shared histories and demonstrated practices in radical or critical education. In 2011 these workshops continued in occupations including the Really Free School and Offmarket, a collectively run space in Hackney. It also spawned a monthly reading group at a community centre in London’s East End. Transcripts of these workshops are being edited into a popular education workbook to be released in 2012. Designer Jackson Lam of Hato Press has worked with Ultra-red members to design a template based on historical popular education from around the world.

A second dimension of the London investigation has been initiated in collaboration with students from the MA in Aural and Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths University. Ultra-red members Janna Graham and Elliot Perkins, with input from a distance from Don't Rhine and Robert Sember, have initiated a curriculum based in listening to the sounds of the university. At the beginning of the semester in November, we invited students to participate in a co-investigation in which they have actively shaped the curriculum-as-an-investigation. At the center of this collaboration among the students are a series of listening exercises. The first of these listening exercises took place in relation to the sounds of the university itself. Students made audio recordings documenting the Graduate Sales day during which courses are sold for the following year. The significance of this particular year’s event was that it coincided with undergraduate fee increases of up to 300%. Questions related to the phenomenology of sound, the manipulative quality of voices, and the sounds of those which history does not record are some of the key areas of this co-investigation.
Los Angeles Sessions

What is the sound of democracy?

(Written by Dont Rhine)


Although Ultra-red began in Los Angeles in the mid-90s, in recent years the center of gravity in the group has shifted to the U.K. Some of the reasons for this clearly stems from the existence of a discourse in the U.K. around research-based art practices beginning as early as the Mass Observation movement in 1930s and '40s to the present. Such a discourse makes work like Ultra-red’s legible to a wider range of institutions who understand the importance of “long-term” engagements. The strength of Ultra-red’s work in the U.K. cannot be entirely attributed to a more conducive funding system. Since relocating to London in 2006, Janna Graham has tirelessly explored partnerships with a wide variety of institutions and base-community groups. In 2007, thanks to Elliot Perkin's own organizing in the South West, he and Janna launched a sound investigation in Devon County. That work established much of the basis for Ultra-red’s work with School Of Echoes. It also innovated an entirely new way we practice sound as a pedagogy of the ear within community organizing.

Many of us in Ultra-red saw the year as an opportunity to translate School Of Echoes into the vernacular of Southern California. At the end of 2010, I concluded a long run of extended traveling participating in projects in Europe and New York. I chose to spend the year close to home. Precipitating this decision was my receiving a fellowship from the City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs department (COLA). The fellowship consisted of a $10,000 award for creating new work to be premiered in an exhibition at the Los Angeles Municipal Gallery beginning in May. I felt that the COLA exhibition offered an opportunity to introduce to our Los Angeles audience the changes in Ultra-red’s way of working. The decision was made to create a series of print works based on the various protocols we have developed as part of the School Of Echoes initiative. The various teams working in Ultra-red submitted protocols for the exhibition; protocols for fieldwork, sound walks, and for listening sessions. Additionally, with a nod to what has become a ubiquitous feature of our work, the exhibition also contained tablets of flip-chart paper. Each tablet contained 50 sheets; each sheet off-set printed with the words, "What did you hear?" Completing the exhibition, I collaborated with my mother, artist Jan Rhine, to create three gorgeous collage works. Affixed to 3’ x 3’ stretched canvas, the collage pieces are made entirely from flip-chart papers written on as part of past Ultra-red listening events.
While I brought the COLA exhibition together, I also reunited with my old Ultra-red colleagues in Los Angeles. Conversations with Elizabeth Blaney and Leonardo Vilchis of Union de Vecinos and Pablo García of Woodcraft Rangers (the same member of Ultra-red who conducted the very first School Of Echoes enquiry in 2001) would eventually result in a number of public events over the year. These events brought the four Los Angeles members together for the first time in eight years when they collaborated on The Debt (2003) in Dublin and Los Angeles. Initially, the four of us allowed for the events in Los Angeles to remain thematically open. We wanted to create a space of conversation to become reacquainted with each other’s work and to see what possibilities might emerge. At the same time, we wanted to facilitate listening procedures together to see what ideas for our political work those experiences might trigger.

The first public conversation occurred on Saturday, 21 May at the small storefront space Outpost for Contemporary Art in the Eagle Rock neighborhood where a small group of people assembled to hear a conversation with Pablo and Leonardo. Also taking part in the discussion was Janna from London who was passing through Los Angeles on her way to Mexico City where she, Leonardo and Elizabeth would facilitate a workshop at the Rufino Tamayo Museum. The theme of that workshop, “What is the sound of radical education?” served as the question for the conversation in Eagle Rock. Pablo, Janna and Leonardo talked about the need for an actual pedagogical program and space, but for very different reasons.

Leonardo talked about the need for political education among community members involved in the direct democracy processes of Union de Vecinos. Pablo passionately talked about how the collapse of public education has created a historic opportunity for radical experimentation. Janna drew on her experiences with the Center for Possible Studies and the Radical Education Forum in London. She urged us all to move beyond the art world’s current fascination with education as an end in itself. Reflecting on the mass uprising of students and workers that were taking place in London, protest movements had an urgent need for new educational to provide access to the very radical histories and practices that schools and universities refuse to acknowledge let alone teach. The conversation proved an important moment in developing some of the ideas that would come to dominate our thinking by the end of the year.

Over the summer months, all of us in the Ultra-red Los Angeles group had opportunities to facilitate listening sessions at different art spaces across Los Angeles. While not always successful, the sessions did help us become more familiarized with the possibilities of a sound inquiry. These experiences encouraged us to begin to think seriously about how the inquiry process could contribute to the actual political work taking place locally, specifically, the organizing of Union de Vecinos and Woodcraft Ranger.

On Thursday evening, 7 July, Leonardo and a group of organizers associated with Union de Vecinos in the City of Maywood came to the art space, LACE in Hollywood. They presented to a small but engaged art audience some of the political issues facing the residents of Maywood. The event offered an alternative narrative to the sensational media stories about government corruption that have characterized the cities in that part of Los Angeles County. The event ended with an invitation for people to come to Maywood and participate in a walking tour of the area. Preparing for the walk, we all worked doubly hard to ensure the event brought together members of our specific constituencies. On the day of the event, on a scorching Saturday in August, six high school students from Woodcraft Rangers joined us for the walk. The students described how earlier in the year, the school district fired all of the teachers at their school on the grounds of poor test scores. To protest, the students led an all-school walkout and marched to the school district headquarters far away in downtown Los Angeles. Also participating in the Maywood walk were a dozen artist and activists, most of whom had come to Maywood for the first time. Walking through the neighborhoods, the group heard stories from residents about community-led struggles for environmental justice, fair housing, legal protections for renters, successful campaigns against police corruption, and attempts by the residents to take over the local water utility.

After these experiences, the four of us in Ultra-red have begun to envision how a School Of Echoes project might contribute to the different organizing efforts, not just in Maywood, but also in Boyle Heights and with the local youth in Woodcraft Rangers. Our friends Carol Stakenas and Robert Crouch at LACE have generously thrown their support behind Ultra-red’s plans for School Of Echoes in Los Angeles. Those plans begin with the question, what is the sound of democracy? Residents involved in the neighborhood committees organized by Union de Vecinos could participate in oral history interviews and recording sessions to address the question of democracy based on their lived experiences with concrete struggles.
The investigation could transform the committees into classrooms. Eventually, we would bring the committees together in a series of large-scale events where the different groups listen to each other and begin to articulate the terms for future action. These are some ideas for our work in the coming year. We look forward to twelve months from now when we can report to you what we have learned from the realization and metamorphosis of things we can now only imagine.

New York Sessions

What is the sound of freedom?

(Written by Robert Sember)

Vogue'ology is a multi-phased, long-term collaboration between the sound-art collective, Ultra-red, and members of New York City's House|Ballroom scene. It rests on a common commitment to struggles for individual and collective freedom in the face of poverty, racism, and gender and sexual oppression. We are still reeling from the death in March 2011 of Arbert Santana, founder of the Ballroom Archive and Oral History Project, one of the key elements of the project.

The Vogue’ology team is committed to developing the archive and identifying how it can contribute to organizing within the Ballroom scene. Especially important is connecting the archiving process to initiatives aimed at reducing the extremely high HIV-infection rates among Ballroom members. This was a struggle to which Arbert dedicated most of his adult life and it is the cause that initially brought many of us together. Toward this end, Vogue’ology members attended a four-day meeting of Ballroom leaders from across the United States held in Los Angeles in October. The meeting was organized by the AIDS service organization, Reach LA, and focused exclusively on the AIDS crisis in the Ballroom community. The meeting participants emphasized the need to develop indigenous interventions or "intraventions" and identified the Ballroom Archive Project as an emerging strategy. This is now the focus of our ongoing consultations with AIDS service organizations in New York and gathering of Ballroom members.

The other major activity of the year was the university course, Vogue'ology, taught in the Dance Program at Eugene Lang College at The New School. Ultra-red member, Robert Sember, and Father of the House of Garcon, Michael Roberson, co-taught the course. Derrick Xtravaganza and Pony Zion, icons for vogue performance, the Ballroom scene's signature dance form, and Ballroom historian Derrick Murphy lectured and taught studio classes over the course of the semester. The course provided an opportunity for sustained, in-depth conversations about how the Ballroom scene’s various creative practices might reflect on or function as strategies of freedom. This made explicit the relationship Ballroom has with the African American and Latino/a communities' strategies of collaborative, creative work concerned with emancipation and liberation.

This class resulted in an invitation for Ultra-red to teach a course in early 2012 at The New School that is open to art students across the various schools and colleges that make up The New School. The Vogue’ology team has also been invited to teach Vogue’ology again in the Fall 2012. We will use these courses to deepen our explorations of the terms for the Vogue’ology project as a whole. To really move the project forward, particularly the archive project, it will be necessary to raise funds to cover the costs of transcribing the oral histories, purchase and maintain equipment, inventory and digitize the multiple individual archives to which we have been granted access, and to develop and publish work based on the archive for members of the Ballroom scene.
This year saw the Ultra-red members in the U.K. finally make the time to return to Torbay. Located in the County Devon, Torbay is an East-facing bay located midway between the cities of Plymouth to the southwest and Exeter to the northeast. While the area is historically known as a bastion for Tory supporters, the sizeable population of ethnic minorities and migrants has steadily changed the homogenous culture of the area. With those changes has come an increase in racist hostility, sometimes organized by supporters of extreme nationalist political forces. Torbay is also the home of Ultra-red member Elliot Perkins and his partner Iris and daughter Lily.

For seven years, Elliot has been involved in anti-racist organizing in the area first with the southwest chapter of The Monitoring Group and, since 2009, with the member-supported community-based Rural Racism Project. In 2007, Ultra-red conducted our first collaboration with Rural Racism Project, the regional sound investigation, Rural Intavenshan. That project featured participation with Rural Racism Project members living in Torbay, Plymouth, Exeter, and Bridgwater. Combining a tour of community-based listening sessions and an exhibition at the Plymouth Arts Centre organized by Elliot and London-based Ultra-red member, Janna Graham, Rural Intavenshan served as the groundwork for the 2008 event We Come From Your Future staged at the Tate Britain in London. Now, nearly four years later, 2011 saw Elliot and London-based member Chris Jones returning to Torbay to consolidate some of the anti-racist and public space/anti-gentrification work Rural Racism Project and Elliot have been doing in the area. Funding for this initial work was given by our hosts in Scotland, Arika to facilitate a dialogue between migrant constituencies in Scotland and the South West. As the work in Scotland suffered its share of setbacks, a different premise for the Torbay work felt necessary.
Over the course of the year, the Rural Racism Project’s work and its collaborations with Ultra-red have straddled the intersection of racism and mental health. As Torbay undergoes a violent state-sponsored gentrification programme, a surge in activity around public space and services occurs with overlaps and cooperation between traditionally "siload" constituencies — migrants taking up the public space cause and folks from mental health projects involved in anti-racism. As the forces of political reaction in the Tory government consolidate their wins and advance a radical restructuring agenda throughout the country, the pushback occurring on the ground has led to interesting times with many profound moments.

In this sense Chris and Elliot decided to concentrate on structuring a series of activities that would generate reflection around this three-way intersectionality between constituencies and their shared struggles of anti-racism, mental health, and migration. Scheduled over August 8 to 13, we located the weeklong intensive investigation activities within the spaces of a group of local autonomous projects including the Rural Racism Project and The Devon Music Collective; an autonomous youth music space. The third site for the investigation was Cool Recovery, a self-organised, non-incorporated space for people with mental health problems and their care-givers. Not surprisingly, all three constituencies share common experiences of poverty and displacement. Furthermore, each has been greatly “over-consulted” in the usual way that social service organizations and policy-makers fetishise “the migrant,” “the mentally ill” or “the youth.” It has
become a dominant feature of neoliberalism to give the appearance of participation for marginalized members of society, embroiling them in consultation processes. Those same processes operate on the fundamental disempowerment of the poor and the marginal by never bothering to address, let alone resolve, the systemic determinants of poverty and marginalization; racism, xenophobia and capitalist exploitation. For these communities, a living analysis and critique of, what Ultra-red terms "the value form of participation," has become a shared part of their organic resistance to neoliberalism.

In planning the August week of events, we decided to refrain from leading off with the usual interrogative formulation used by School Of Echoes projects — e.g. what is the sound the border? Instead, we drew from ongoing Rural Racism Project fights against gentrification that disproportionately impact communities of color, migrants, and the poor. The local anti-gentrification fight had already been operating under the strap line "A Contested Idyll" — an allusion to the popular image of Torbay as a tranquil coastal scene, famously referred to as "The English Riviera." Ultra-red opened the investigation with the invitation to the surrounding community people to, "Bring Your Own Histories." This open call served as the pretext to a week of walks, listening, recording, and mapping the contested spaces, histories and memories of struggle and self-organising in the two Torbay towns of Paignton and Torquay.

The pivotal events of the week in August were two walks that visited and listened to spaces of past and present conflicts. As we walked the route through town, the group picked up on a number issues including about the significance of backstreets, former slums, a so-called "Community Punishment Centre", former self-help centres for the unemployed in the '80s, the legacies of colonialism hidden by the patrician facades of Torquay's harbourside, hotly contested regeneration sites, mass protests against the Poll Tax in 1990, and the failure of Business Improvement Districts to address the real challenges facing working people and the poor. At one important moment during the walk, we heard about the "provision" of new and slick state-sponsored "youth facilities" that were eclipsing the controversial punk-rock craziness of the Devon Music Collectives' garish seafront building. We learned that in that very week the building had been sold from under the DMC's feet by the proprietor to a hotel chain.

The walks were followed by screenings of really enjoyable and critical films that interrogated the misery and bizarre quirkiness of the regeneration and enquiry processes that have occurred in the U.K.'s former Victorian seaside resorts. Reviewing these recent histories opened up many themes for further investigation. One small group of local people that emerged out of the "A Contested Idyll" later participated in the national walk-out on November 30th in protest of government austerity measures. Chris and Elliot from Ultra-red joined the Torbay group armed with audio-recorders and conducted a sound walk in and around the protest march. This walk and subsequent listening sessions has resulted in the coming together of a small team of Cool Recovery and Rural Racism Project constituents. This team has since conducted a critical listening of the universal claims that dominated the anti-austerity march; claims such as, "A decent pension for everyone." The team has begun to raise questions about the exact class composition of this "everyone."

Many of the people who have participated in the work in the South West have never held a conventional job. Some live outside of the employment structures due to health reasons, while other refuse to work as an act of sabotage. For these reasons, debates and demands about pensions mark largely hidden but real class divisions that undermine a universalized petite bourgeois politics. Through their critical listening to the march and its political demands, the Torbay team began to investigate new territory with regards to the tyranny of working life, a sense of purpose outside of work and, critically, the hierarchy of voices — particularly that of the self-interested trade unionists. These themes are all very new for the kind of political work being done by Rural Racism Project, The Devon Music Collective, and Cool Recovery. The sound investigation work done in 2011 has given us much more to interrogate. The New Year offers exciting possibilities for the Contested Idyll group as we reconvene in the weeks ahead for more listening, research and collective programming.
B. Short-term projects and investigations

While the previous investigations grow out of Ultra-red’s commitment to long-term engagements with communities and struggles, members of Ultra-red also convened three short-termed School Of Echoes projects. In recent years, we have come to refer to short-term projects as any inquiry where it is presumed that we will leave the scene when the investigation concludes. The assumption of our departure conditions the work and the practical relationship between inquiry and organization. While all of the following two projects concluded in 2011 after three years in the field, all of the parties involved knew from the beginning that at some point the project would come to an end. It is always our hope that the processes of sound investigation will continue under the guidance of the local people with whom we have collaborated. Without our direct involvement in bringing that possibility to material reality, it remains an abstract hope for us as sound investigators.
Ultra-red received our first invitation to come to Scotland in late 2008. The email came from Barry Esson and Bryony McIntyre from the experimental music and arts organisation, Arika. Based in Edinburgh, Arika has organised avant-garde music festivals and film programs across Scotland since 2001. Over the course of their work, Barry and Bryony had established themselves as one of the most uncompromising promoters of music and sound art performance in. But with that reputation has come an increasing uncertainty on their part as to whether experimental music simply become another institution. For them, this question posed something of a contradiction; how could an aesthetic operation whose outcome is unknown assume the conventions of a genre, or musical style? Adding to their ambivalence was the observation that with increased conventionality comes an almost dogmatic opposition to the links between avant-garde art and avant-garde political practice. The severing of that link seems to go hand in hand with the institutionalization of the field. The risks behind such questions become further compounded by Arika’s very self-conscious role in that institutionalization as promoters and curators.

And so Arika invited Ultra-red on an experiment into the procedures of listening and organising. Over the next three years, as many as six members of Ultra-red would take part in the work in Scotland, with two markedly different inquiries unfolding in the cities of Glasgow and Dundee. In 2010, this would become the primary work of Elliot Perkins, based in southwest England and, from London, Chris Jones in his first major Ultra-red project as a new member of the collective. The different efforts in Glasgow and Dundee pursued their own timing and pace. Both demanded that Elliot and Chris make regular journeys north for all of 2010 and ’11. As of August 2011, Ultra-red’s direct involvement in the two projects reached its conclusion. It will require much more time to reflect on all the lessons learned. As Chris said recently, in many respects, that reflection process will take place in the context of future work when we encounter similar challenges. What did we learn in Scotland? This will become the query to making sense of the experience and drawing from it new wisdom and instruction.
This time a year ago, in January 2011, the greater part of the investigation in Dundee had already occurred. Through numerous visits and an extended Ultra-red residency in the summer of 2010, our community partners initiated a collaborative inquiry into the sound of community action in Dundee. Participating in the initial investigation were members of three community groups in the city: Art Angel, a local mental health arts advocacy project; and Generator Projects, a collectively run gallery space by young artists; Tin Roof, a self-organised arts collective of again young artists in the process of securing a building for communal use as studios and meeting space. A fourth group, Pure MediaUK, a teenage empowerment project run by young people and involving many young artists, withdrew from the collaboration to dedicate their energy on their own efforts.

Through a wide range of activities including recording sounds in the streets, mapping walks, small group workshops, presentations of ideas and sounds, to performative actions both inside Art Angel’s offices and outside in the street, the Dundee group named three themes for their research. The themes also served as catalysts for forming three teams. The themes were: 1) Community spaces — How can we talk of/define community? How do we understand the setting up, use of, and the control of spaces for community? What goes on in those community spaces? 2) Listening — How do we listen? What are the expectations/prejudices in listening? What are spaces to listen and spaces to be listened to? When is it a time to listen and when is it a time to act? And 3) Histories — Dundee seems to have a long history of alternative spaces and community organising. What do we know and what can we discover and learn from that past in Dundee that helps us to understand better and make use of the above ideas?

In addition to organising the teams, the three themes provided the terms to guide the collaboration among the people in Dundee. The terms also offered a framework for their partnership with Ultra-red. When differences of investments and artistic desires emerged among the different participants in the project, the terms gave us a way back to an agreed-upon process for making group decisions.

Collected Spaces (First Listen), 12” album insert side-one, design and artwork by Ultra-red (forthcoming 2012)
Much of the work in Dundee for the year 2010 focused on the determination of themes and the assembling of sound materials that codified those themes. For 2011, the nature of the work shifted as everyone involved in the project began composing with those materials. The aim of the composition was to create a curriculum for investigating the themes of community spaces, situated listening and histories of organising. Early in the year, the group had determined that the curriculum would take the form of a 12" vinyl record and 7" vinyl single. The objects would include compositions made from the sound materials, written accounts of the investigative processes, visual art that expanded on the themes, and copies of the protocols used in the inquiry. The records would not only document the investigation. They would also invite listeners to take up their own inquiry into the sounds of community action.

As anyone who has been engaged in a community arts project can tell you, the process of collaborating is a big part of the investigation in itself. Negotiating different aesthetic interests, individual desires and anxieties, as well the multiple and often contradictory institutional expectations very quickly performs the (highly contested) sounds of community action. Most of our community partners in Dundee had never worked with sound before. Neither had they conceptualized art making as process or investigation. For some of our friends, even holding a Zoom audio-recorder proved an uncomfortable and intimidating experience. But at every step along the way, everyone assumed a shared commitment to take care of each other. This included a very real dedication to including everyone and ensuring that everyone had a say in what the work became. By the end of the project, these were the things that made our time in Dundee one of the nicest working experiences we as Ultra-red have encountered. Between the ArtAngel folks and the younger artists there was a willingness to work slowly and demonstrate great patience with each other. Not only that, but the group also built up the kind of trust needed to leap into the dark, which is precisely how many people experience Ultra-red's way of working. After all, it is no easy thing to sit in a room with twenty-plus people and "simply" listen.

At times Ultra-red's practice delves quite deeply into the conceptual and experimental aspects of participatory work. However, this is not the first port of call for many users of Art Angel who were often suspicious (with good reason) or hesitant around contemporary art production. Therefore, we found it extremely gratifying when the organisers at Art Angel told us that they were very happy to have been introduced to the practice of Ultra-red and the resulting collaboration. In Ultra-red we make a great deal about wanting an investigation to be useful to the communities with whom we collaborate. The perception of us as “the experts” can stand in the way of precisely that. It was enormously rewarding when the Art Angel organisers told us how happy they were to have seen some of the users of their program form teams with people they did not know and to see them leave the building to make recordings unaccompanied. Apparently, this was a first time the organisers knew this to happen. They also added that they appreciated how, when tensions arose between the teams and us in Ultra-red, we acted in a way that "did not make a great drama out of it.” Instead, we just got on with pushing the work ahead with all concerned.

For us, it has been sad to leave Dundee and all the folks there. We learned a great deal about what is possible with a long, well funded project, where the people you are working with make a commitment to both the project and also the relationships it creates. It was a wonderful experience spending time in Dundee itself. Our partners always made us feel welcome. Each time they showed us around the city was a wonderful experience. To also experience collective learning, the participants' and ours, put into action constantly amazed us. It is after all why we continue to work the way we do as Ultra-red. It is why we continue to believe the reasons and feelings that keep us invested in these moments of genuine collaboration.
Glasgow Sessions

*What is the sound of the border?*

(Written by Chris Jones and Elliot Perkins)

When members of Ultra-red first arrived in Glasgow in March 2009, we swiftly surveyed community-based groups in the city whose work touched on some aspects of the politics of poverty. One of the groups who impressed us the most was the Unity Centre, a group of activists organising around the needs of asylum seekers, particularly those who are destitute. Much of the Centre’s work and political orientation seemed to resonate with Ultra-red’s many long-term projects investigating the fields of racism and migration both through our projects as a collective and through the political activities of individual members. As Chris Jones and Elliot Perkins became Ultra-red’s lead artists in Glasgow, the two of us had a particular interest in fostering an exchange between the people in Glasgow who were embedded in activism with asylum seekers and with ourselves, working in grass-roots politics and the arts.

After a series of difficult impasses in the process with the Unity Centre, by the time we reached the summer, our efforts in Glasgow shifted focus to asylum seekers living or using the accommodation facilities in the Red Road neighbourhood on the outskirts of the city. For many years, the state has used the Red Road housing estate as reception accommodations to house asylum seekers with open claims. Roughly four years ago, migrants and non-migrant residents banded together to resist the attempts by authorities to remove families who had over-stayed their legal residency. In fact, it was because of that flash of activity that Glasgow activists formed the Unity Centre to provide tactical and legal support.

Because of the relative autonomy between the various initiatives within the Unity organisation, we continued our engagements with the Unity Café and the organisation's Women’s Group. We also began making regular visits each week out to the Red Road neighbourhood, which quickly led to robust interactions with people living in the area and the resident-support group, the YPeople Glasgow Residents Association (YGRA). Due to these connections, this leg of the work focused intensely on the conditions which frame the lives of migrants living in the city and how they negotiate them, create new spaces within them as sites of social (re)production and what knowledge this produces both in their use and constitution and in the listening and dialogue which they mediate.

During these processes, our own team expanded with the addition of Sacha Kahir, an Edinburgh-based filmmaker and anti-poverty activist. Sacha had an ongoing relationship with Arika as the latter had continued to support the Right to the City Forum after the listening session that Ultra-red organised in...
May 2010. Chris and Elliot were also joined by Leeds-based Isobel Kamiya, an anti-racism and employment discrimination activist with links to Rural Racism Project in Devon. We recruited Isobel to help us with the Women’s Group component of the investigation when Janna Graham was not able to join us because of her obligations to the work in London. Finally, a regular presence in our activities over the summer was Richard McKean, one of the founding volunteers of the Unity Café.

Over the weeks of late July and through August, Ultra-red visited the Red Road area on a nearly daily basis. We began inviting people from the neighbourhood to join us for trips into the city centre. We described the purpose of the trips as opportunities to walk around and spend time together. Instead of taking snapshots of what we saw, we asked them to take audio recordings of what they heard. We introduced some of the themes that had emerged over the year of conversations with Unity as well as the original question; what is the sound of the border? These trips involved small groups of five to eight residents. Sometimes volunteers from the Unity Café and from YGRA itself would join us. Early in our outreach, we found ourselves in an all-too familiar conversation about our motives. If our time in Glasgow has taught us anything it is that trust comes from working together. We had to ask for folks to take a leap into the dark with us based on our solidarity with them. Even with the most compelling assurances nothing was going to happen without trust. We told them that our way of working with sounds had the potential to take them to a place that they could not know in advance. It was a moment when it becomes necessary to put aside the endless negotiations that keeps a group from acting. Just doing something made an impact and engaging in a shared activity resulted in a tangible sense of affinity among everyone.

As we began to assemble a new archive of sound recordings, this time largely made by the residents themselves, we turned our focus to the possibility of convening a new round of listening sessions. We experimented with locating the sessions in informal situations such as inside the YGRA offices, at the Unity Café, and other places either easily accessible to the residents of Red Road. We learned to facilitate the sessions very casually, allowing for people to come and go. Another important innovation for us was the development of a different form of protocols. Instead of the usual text-based protocols that guide the listening procedure, we developed a kind of place-mat like the kind one would use in a restaurant. The
laminated place-mat had simple drawings, a map of Glasgow and words that represented all of the themes we had encountered thus far in our process. These place-mats proved to be hugely successful. Rather than alienating participants with stern instructions or a question like, what did you hear? (that some people find quite aggressive), the place-mat gave the listening session a wholly different feeling.

As the work with the small groups of residents in the Red Road neighbourhood took shape, Isobel's engagement with the Unity Women's Group came to an end. Probably the most successful intervention made with the group was the "Ultra-red Beauty Salon," where providing scissors, make-up, hair-dye and so on, made it possible for the migrant women and their supporters to create a small affective space for friendship and sharing. This intimately knit group of women were able to make quite a few sound recordings. Isobel was able to guide the group through the listening and dialogue process. The group related their responses to various discursive themes around borders, refugee subjectivity, freedoms and so on. This was followed by a dynamic analysis of the audio around the themes of borders in Glasgow, class systems, and freedom. The latter theme held an especially strong resonance for the group; the possibility that being free could mean not being dismissed as a woman, or reduced to the role of mother, or wife, and freedom from the system but, instead, having the freedom to be a person.

Through Isobel's incredibly generous work in the Unity Women's Group, the women began to develop an appreciation for how sound and the processes of reflection and archiving could benefit the group. There was also, however, a feeling that the work begun in the sound investigation might take the group in a different direction from their basic mission, which is to help women with their asylum-seeking process. While the inquiry was constantly raising issues of everyday life, gender roles, and community, there was real pressure to always bring the conversation back to that primary aim of the group. Everyone in Ultra-red knows this tension very well. Advice work and status work for people with urgent needs centres the solidarity between service-providers and users upon a delicate balance between the affective as well as the practical. Since the pursuit of legal status as migrants endures constant waves of crisis, panic, and distress, the ties of solidarity often suffer due to live-altering time-constraints as well as emotional burn-out. Ultra-red's work with the Unity Women's Group brought all of this to the fore.

The end of August brought us to the conclusion of our time in Glasgow. On Monday, 29 August, the Ultra-red team held a final gathering with our friends we had met on the Red Road and YGRA. We offered a quick summary of all the work we had done together so far. We asked the group to imagine where the work could go after Ultra-red leaves. After a tentative exchange involving familiar language about "final outcomes," one of the residents gave an earnest evaluation of how the use of sound offers something new. He contrasted older ways of organising involving flyers and poster with, in his words, "this new method." Reflecting on the last weeks of moving through the city in groups, visiting new spaces, learning about current struggles in Glasgow, and developing new ideas for action, he proposed that this was something from which the group, and YGRA in particular, could benefit. This kind of process could attract folks to the community work YPeople were doing as well as help asylum-seekers to organise themselves at Red Road. His appeal was something of a tour de force. It seemed to be an affirmation, if not also an outright defence of using sound, process, listening and reflection as a way to working collectively.

YGRA were still keen to take on a facilitating role for the Red Road project. A week after Elliot, Chris and Isobel returned to the south, we composed an email to the people in Glasgow reiterating our commitment to supporting them. We outlined a few possible next steps on how the investigation could continue from where we left off. We also sent them the protocols for conducting fieldwork and for facilitating listening sessions. And we made sure that they had received two of the digital audio recorders that we had used during our time together. As for Ultra-red and what will become of our long journey with the people of Glasgow? We can only repeat the words we wrote in our email; "The process always begins with listening. It's important to understand that the sounds are just a tool or method to begin to work collectively. Slowly the sounds become less important and the process of collective investigation through conversation, debate, reflection and analysis becomes the primary work of the inquiry."
St. Marylebone Sessions

What is the sound of collectivity?

(Written by Robert Sember)

RE: ASSEMBLY is one of a number of art projects commissioned by the Serpentine Gallery in London as part of its multi-year Edgware Road initiative. For its contribution, Ultra-red investigated contradictions between state-defined citizenship (organized around borders and nations) and social citizenship (based on participation and constituency). We considered these forms of citizenship in relation to the practices and experiences of pedagogy and migration, the primary concerns for the project’s core participants: the students, teachers and staff at St. Marylebone Church of England School.

The process of developing the project as well as its figurative structure began with St. Marylebone’s Church of England School, located beside St. Marylebone’s Parish Church. Over the subsequent two years and through numerous processes involving hundreds of students as well as School faculty and staff, RE: ASSEMBLY eventually progressed through the streets of nearby Portman Estates to Edgware Road and from Paddington Basin into the larger London metropolitan area along trajectories leading to other parts of the world.

RE: ASSEMBLY launched in Spring 2009 with a series of investigations of the terms of learning, citizenship and the city. We assembled a large archive of texts, recordings and images from this initial round of activities. A selection of these materials was composed into a performance overture that announced the terms for subsequent phases of the project. For the final section of RE: ASSEMBLY, we returned to the archive of materials gathered over the life of the project to formulate responses to the question, "What is the sound of collectivity?"

We began by delivering an Ultra-red devised art curriculum for a group of St. Marylebone students. Over a number of sessions held in the school during the scheduled art periods, students brought their observations of the Edgware Road area into relation to its radical history. Then from May to early July 2011, three investigative teams consisting of high school students, art teachers, and residents of the Edgware Road worked independently to respond to the investigations central question regarding collectivity.

The three investigative teams spent several weeks collectively reflecting on a series of texts that have emerged over the two years of the project. The texts included lists of analytic statements and terms of analysis relevant to different radical struggles. The teams also assembled an anthology of lyrics from popular songs that individual students find helpful to “get through” examinations and other stressful situations within school, family and among friends. Other texts used in the project included "hymns"
constructed from descriptive and critical observations of urban sites as well as official documents, indexes and archival summaries of research materials and studies made in preparation for various art works, and, principles to guide teaching and learning.

No swearing no eating in lessons no hating Spiderman wear correct uniform no chewing gum no make up complete all your homework!! no laughing no bullying be kind to others look smart feel proud!!

Refrain:
no swearing no eating in class nationalism cultures

"Songs for Rules," #50
Hymnal (2009)

Drawing upon these different textual sources, each investigation team produced a final work and contributed to a collaborative piece. The works are presented in different media, including audio and video recordings, embroidery, paper and plaster. We are currently editing the video works and completing the fabrication of the other pieces. Once completed, all of the final works will be exhibited together in London in mid-2012. To coincide with the culminating exhibition, participants in the project will gather for a final round of listening sessions. The interplay of language and material will provide opportunities for individual and collective acts of listening, learning, teaching, and reflection. Most importantly, the listening sessions will invite participants to consider terms for the annunciation of future citizenships.

RE: ASSEMBLY is a large undertaking. Over the years, many wonderful artists, teachers, students and representatives from the larger community assisted Ultra-red in our work. Special thanks go to: Sally Tallant, Amal Khalaf and Joceline Howe at the Serpentine; the dancer and choreographer Gill Clarke, the filmmaker Bevis Bowden, sound technician and photographer, Brada Barassi, and ceramicist, Simeon Featherstone; the art teachers at St. Marylebone School, especially Stephanie Cubbin whose influence is evident in every aspect of this project, and the members of the investigative teams, Jide Macaulay, Ellis Slack, Alusaine Kamara, Sylvia Velasquez, Ashley Blissett-Jones, Nora Abdoun-Mohammed, Sara Djadi, Asal-Bonu Allaberganova, and Tajmila Chowdhury.
C. Preliminary investigations

From time to time, universities, museums, and local groups will invite Ultra-red to conduct inquiries of only a few days or a few weeks in duration. Often these invitations occur within the context of art exhibitions, music festivals or conferences. Such encounters provide members of our collective with opportunities to expand our network, to briefly visit with local organizers and to experiment with changes to existing protocols. The resulting situation allows us to demonstrate the basic ideas related to a sound investigation alongside the possibility that this may someday lead to a more extended invitation in the future. Some of us in Ultra-red have come to think of these brief encounters as preliminary investigations; explorations in potentiality. Sometimes the host institution or group selects the theme of the inquiry. The Ultra-red members who facilitate such events can come from an already established team working out of a specific base-community inquiry elsewhere or, as in the cases of Amsterdam and Mexico City, the facilitating team can be a collaboration of individuals from across different locations. In 2011, Ultra-red members conducted three such preliminary inquiries.
Amsterdam Sessions

How can you be at home in an alien world?

(Written by Robert Sember)

How can you be at home in an alien world?, rehearsal, Felix Meritis, Amsterdam (November 2011). Robert Sember, second from left and Elliot Perkins, far right

In Fall 2010, Ultra-red participated in the group exhibition, "Vectors of the Possible, curated by Simon Sheikh at BAK | Basis voor actuele kunst in Utrecht. The St. Petersburg-based collective, Chto Delat? What is to be done?, were among the other artists in the show. This exhibition was part of the lead-up to the second conference in the ambitious "The Former West" cycle of activities organized by a consortium of European arts organizations. Ultra-red and Chto Delat? were invited to be in conversation in the closing session of this conference, held in Istanbul in November, 2010. Robert Sember represented Ultra-red and Dmitry Vilensky represented Chto Delat?

Many points of common concern emerged during the exchange. Both Robert and Dmitry expressed a deep commitment to collective practices as a foundation for politically engaged art production. The Amsterdam-based art institution, SKOR | Foundation for Art and Public Domain subsequently invited the two collectives to continue their conversation in the form of a seminar/workshop in Amsterdam on the occasion of the Social Housing — Housing the Social symposium. Ultra-red accepted the invitation as it provided us with an opportunity to share our approach with Chto Delat? and to learn some of their procedures. In preparatory meetings held in Amsterdam in July, the collectives agreed that the focus of the October workshop would be Chto Delat?’s approach to Bertolt Brecht’s Lehrstücke, or learning play model. If a second event is possible, Ultra-red’s militant sound investigation procedure will organize that future collaboration.

The four Chto Delat? members, three Ultra-red members and 18 seminar participants met for three days of intensive discussions and workshops. Representing Ultra-red were Elliot Perkins from Torbay, U.K., Robert from New York and from Los Angeles, Leonardo Vilchis. The workshops culminated in the performance of a learning play for the attendees of the SKOR symposium. The seminar intentionally broke with the conventions of discussions and conferences, in order to promote a dialogical and investigative relationship to knowledge production. We ate, talked and rehearsed together in order to experience as well analyze ideas around collectivity and the politicized subject of "the social".

Numerous ideological and strategic differences emerged over the course of the workshop. It was impossible to consider these differences in depth within the short time we had together and when faced
with the pressure to construct a performance. Among the critical themes raised during our short time together were the very different approaches Ultra-red and Chto Delat? have to participation. Ultra-red's investigative procedures are, for the most part, free of the need to resolve contradictions in order to arrive at an event. The identification of contradictions is in many respects the goal of these procedures. Chto Delat?'s intricately composed learning plays, on the other hand, articulate in advance a set of contradictions specific to particular institutions and historical moments. Following from Brecht's ideas, the Lehrstücke invite the audience to wrestle with some very specific questions. In the case of the learning play presented in Amsterdam, the contradictions concerned the tension between the closed organizing structures of radical collectives and their claims to be acting in the interest of the masses.

For the three of us who participated in this process, the encounter provided a valuable opportunity to take up again the long debate within Ultra-red of how to balance each of our deeply held ideological investments with our generously open investigative protocols. This concern is becoming more and more relevant as we produce works for exhibition. What happens when our objects exist outside of the investigative procedures that are the signature of our collective work? In our debrief with the Chto Delat? members we acknowledged the common frustration that the work that circulates publicly evidences at most only a fraction of the extraordinary richness of the workshops that informed their creation. Would it perhaps help to think differently about these works? Might we, perhaps, use these objects to announce precise analyses of specific struggles or events rather than attempting to have them always put the viewer "in process"? We look forward to taking up this question in the context of Ultra-red's work over the months to come.

Mexico City Session

¿Cuál es el sonido de la educación radical hoy?
What is the sound of radical education today?

(Written by Janna Graham)

An international dimension was added to Ultra-red's investigation into the terms, histories and strategies of radical education through our participation in the exhibition Abstract Possible, curated by Maria Lind at Museo Rufino Tamayo in Mexico City. The context of the exhibition enabled three members of Ultra-red: Elizabeth Blaney, Leonardo Vilchis and Janna Graham to travel to Mexico City to interview a variety of educators regarding their pedagogical work. The project also made it possible for us to work with members of La Lleca, an arts and prisoner's justice collective who have engaged in many pedagogical projects with incarcerated people in Mexico City. With La Lleca, Ultra-red members visited autonomous communities for whom the ideas of popular education and engagements with the ideas of Paulo Freire form the basis of the community as a whole. During our time in Mexico City, we also met with groups forming radical education initiatives in alleys, cafes, as part of feminist reading circles and in prisons.

Near the conclusion of our visit we convened an encuentro / listening sessions at the museum. The three of us from Ultra-red played a selection of sounds related to our work in radical education in London and Los Angeles. We augmented these sounds with new field recordings we had made during visits to radical education sites in La Ciudad. Transcripts from these visits and from the Encuentro will form a second part of the Radical Education Workbook that is mentioned in the previous report about the work in London with the Radical Education Forum. The part of the Workbook we developed during our trip in May will be dedicated to histories and practices of radical education in Mexico. These sections are currently being translated so that entries may appear in both Spanish and English.
From 19th to 26th February 2011, Ultra-red members Elliot Perkins and Chris Jones embarked upon a preliminary investigation in collaboration with Marco Santos from Rural Racism Project in Southwest England and Cristina Ribas, an artist and educator from Rio de Janeiro. The four traveled to Porto in Portugal to work on the Ultra-red project Qual É O Som Da Fronteira No Porto? (What Is The Sound of The Border In Porto?) at the Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Serralves. Ultra-red took up a one-week investigation of this question as our contribution to the exhibition Às Artes, Cidadãos! (To Art, Citizens!), a large sprawling display of the supposed point of crossover where art meets politics and does its dirty work.

As is often the case, the intense amount of preliminary fieldwork of constituency building (done via phone and email) for any one-off short event in a place you don't know for an institution you don't know leaves you with more hopes than in the end will manifest as realities. In the month prior to arriving in Porto, our team of four contacted dozens of migrant groups and associations, refugee support groups, No Border and anti-deportation struggles, political activists from social centres and squats, as well as a few artists in Porto. Yet, despite all of that networking, very few of those who told us they would attend actually came to the week-long workshop of investigating border regimes in Porto. By and large, the people who did attend were those who had the time to come everyday. Consequently, those who contacted Serralves to register for the project were young artists, students or people who worked part-time jobs.

Immediately, despite the presence of some folks from the Turkish Association and others originally from Cabo Verde, a shift occurred early on from the first Listening Session. Because of who was in the room, the collective orientation moved away from a direct experience with migration and borders. We also found...
ourselves moving away from solidarity with those who experiences these regimes. Instead, the focus turned to a more abstract mapping of migrants in the city mixed in with themes of poverty, gentrification and urban regeneration. Later in the week a notion of the art institute itself as a border was also brought into the work by a few of the participants.

Jumping between listening and reflection, and with limited time for making recordings in the downtown of Porto, four investigation teams finally emerged out of the group of participants. These teams directed their energy towards presenting a kind of part-listening session, part-installation on the last Saturday's public event. Making use of the entire ground floor of the Art Déco Casa de Serralves, located in the midst of the Fundação Serralves estate, Ultra-red designed the event to utilize a variety of entrances, side rooms, halls and hidden spaces. Occupying the expansive layout of the 1940s Bourgeois mansion enabled each investigative team to perform their sound work within a constructed environment.

On approaching the house, a P.A. system could be heard asking 'Do you have anything to declare?' The question was then followed by different answers. Upon reaching the front entrance to the space, visitors realised that the sounds filling the rooms were live. A barrier signifying a closed border guarded the entryway to the main hall. Each participant had to choose either a Nothing To Declare or Something to Declare entrance and address this into the microphone. Once the audience had passed through the border control they assembled as a group in the large hall, set up to resemble an airport-style waiting room with rows of chairs. Eventually, an announcer's voice began to issue instructions following a series of protocols that had been composed during the workshop of the previous week. These protocols led the participants to physically move through each of the sound pieces situated through the Casa de Serralves. After attending each sound piece, the announcer instructed the audience to return to the rows of chairs.

The four teams from the workshop had selected different themes for their sound compositions. Group One worked on the question of culture as a kind of border that discriminates between different groups of people. The team had arranged two sound pieces in their room. The first was amplified over a P.A. system, while the second could be heard through headphones accompanied by the directions, 'DO NOT LISTEN'. The sounds were of recordings made in and around Serralves. Closing the door on 60+ people and letting them listen to five minutes of audio around the question of culture as a border proved particularly tense but fascinating. In another room with very little light, Group Two had assembled a constricted space made from stacks of furniture piled in a heap. They played back their sound recordings from the market Bolhão, which has been a particular site rich in questions and contradictions regarding urban renewal. The site was also deeply contested because of recent artistic interventions that have taken place. There had been a lot of disagreement within the workshop group around questions of authenticity and representation, as well as how the market has been used by progressive and reactionary political campaigns alike. The much smaller Group Three presented a dub track they had worked on in direct response to the ‘What Is The Sound Of The Border?’ question. The track used recordings Group Three had collected in the city to underline an interrogative narration from Marco. Entry to this room was made via a small door inserted in a vast 30 foot high wall of flipchart papers that had been written on during the weeklong workshop. Finally, Ultra-red contributed our own room to the installation. Our room was a non-public side room used by the cleaning and security staff at the Casa de Serralves to make coffee on their breaks. In this small intimate space we played the track we had composed from visits to Porto’s Detention Centre and other sites connected with migration and the border. Leaving this room, participants found themselves back outside the border they had encountered when they first entered the house. We were interested in how this clandestine route through the house smuggled the audience back across the border (maybe!).

During the concluding question and answer session, workshop participants answered questions from the audience. An instructive dynamic played out as certain audience members insisted that members of Ultra-red answer their questions. Despite these demands, the workshop members continued to speak for the project themselves. At one point, a workshop participant turned the tables and asked a question of the audience; shouldn’t everyone who worked on the project be considered "the artist" and not just those in Ultra-red? In a collaboration with community, who gets to speak for the intentions of the work?
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As we conclude this year’s Annual Report we come to the point where we offer our collective thanks to all the individuals, groups and organizations whose contributions in 2011 made the work of Ultra-red possible. We begin by thanking those individuals who directly collaborated with Ultra-red members over the course of the year. Each person brought to our efforts treasures of wisdom, creativity, patience, and enthusiasm. They helped to ground our work in specific contexts, contributing to our lives new ideas and fresh ears: Hermione Frank (Berlin), Michael Roberson Garcon (New York), Pony Zion Garcon (New York), Anne Lenz (Berlin), Laura Paetau (Berlin), Derek Ramsay (Dundee), Cristina Ribas (Rio de Janeiro), Marco Santos (Bridgewater, U.K.), Walt Senterfitt (Los Angeles), Rosie Summerton (Dundee), Derrick Penda'vis Xtravaganza (New York). Thanks go to Fernando Fuentes and Lorena Mendez, Adrian, Luis and everyone else at La Lleca (Mexico).


SELECTED PROJECTS BY ULTRA-RED IN 2011


08.11 MAYWOOD SOUND WALK, with Union de Vecinos, Maywood, CA.

08.11 A CONTESTED IDYLL, with Rural Racism Project, The Devon Music Collective, and Cool Recovery, The Lighthouse, Torquay, U.K.

08.11 LISTENING SESSION, with Prototypes, Pitzer College, Claremont, CA, Curator: Alex Juhasz and Pato Hebert.

07.11 WHAT IS THE SCANDAL IN BELL? teach-in, LACE, Hollywood.

06.11 LISTENING SESSION, Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, Los Angeles.

06.11 LISTENING SESSION, Hammer Art Museum, University of California, Los Angeles.

05.11 "Five Protocols for Organized Listening," COLA FELLOWSHIP EXHIBITION, Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, Los Angeles.

05.11 "What is the sound of radical education today?" workshop and listening session, ABSTRACT POSSIBLE, Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico City, Curator: Maria Lind.

05.11 WHAT IS THE SOUND OF RADICAL EDUCATION? teach-in, Outpost for Contemporary Art in Eagle Rock, Los Angeles, Curator: Public Address.


RESIDENCIES

2010-11 Artist In Residency for Chris Jones and Elliot Perkins, Arika, Glasgow / Dundee, Scotland.

Spr.11 Artist In Residency for Robert Sember, Serpentine Gallery, London.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


