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INTRODUCTION

The ubiquity of the temporary often gets valorized in artists and activist engagements. The passage of a few people through the lives of other people carries a lyricism that conditions much of what we call social practice. The norm of temporariness haunts nearly every attempt to codify the field of participatory art practice. It also carries over to activism with its brief narratives of intervention. In terms of learning from and listening to other social fields (e.g. social work, education, public health, sociology, ethnography, or activism), the consistently erased term remains political organizing. As demonstrated by the various (and often antagonistic) philosophies of organizing, the campaign always serves to constitute a collective. The constitutive process reaches new limits and then transforms those limits into problematics to be interrogated and tested. The campaign, even when its aims bear tremendous urgency, serves as an episode in the long walk towards building a movement. Organizing refuses to choose between meeting people’s needs in the short term and world-making. The one becomes the condition for the other.

I recount this notion of political organizing to indicate a shift in Ultra-red’s School of Echoes initiative that became apparent in 2012. Launched in 2009 as an experiment in organized listening and its protocols, School of Echoes remained bound within short-term engagements for much of the following two years (with the exception of London and New York where School of Echoes took immediate root in longterm relationships with specific political processes). What had been an exception became far more widespread in our collective as each of the teams began exploring Ultra-red’s pedagogocial procedures within our base communities.

For years Ultra-red has used the term, “base community” to designate constitutive processes that form the primary context for the political work of individual Ultra-red members. For most of us, joining Ultra-red means bringing into the network long-held accountabilities to communities, histories, and political practices. For nearly everyone in the group those relationships account for the large majority of our time and effort. Ultra-red serves as the supplement (a term I use advisedly). Many of Ultra-red’s members (but not all) have only ever participated in sound investigations that involved visiting other locations and communities in the short-term. For some of us, Ultra-red never involved listening in your own backyard. Conversely, for others, while Ultra-red’s work began in the concrete situations of our political attachments, that has not been the case for many years. Ultra-red has come to signify that thing we do when we go away.

In 2012, there was no road leading away from home. This meant that we all had to reexamine our relationship to Ultra-red and its aims. Do we withdraw from the work of sound inquiry when there is no commissioned project in the field of art? Do we rearrange our priorities and put the investigations of Ultra-red on the back-burner? For many of us, the decision has been to bring the questions of School of Echoes home and attempt to create the conditions for that work within the very sites where we conduct our politics. With a lack of institutional support comes the absence of institutional demand. I do not mean to valorize the situation but merely to describe the moment.
Each of us in Ultra-red tell the story of this collective according to his or her own experience. The story often begins at the moment when the individual member first encountered the collective and took part in an initial sound inquiry. The history of Ultra-red is a history of those encounters. Each point of contact changes the forms and even the content of our analysis as well as brings new voices and new contexts into the dialogue. One must also, when telling the story, contend with the encounters that came before. Everyone in the group has had to wrestle with the earliest chapters of Ultra-red; the attempts of former member Marco Larsen and myself to reconcile our investments in electronic music with our participation in the HIV/AIDS justice movement.

Another chapter of Ultra-red’s history is that encounter between the politics of AIDS cultural analysis and the praxis of popular education. Not everyone has adopted a popular education framework for their work in the collective. However, the prevalence of that discourse has compelled us to investigate the diverse radical pedagogical practices that course through nearly every revolutionary moment and tendency both in our lifetimes and earlier. Hence Ultra-red has for many years provided a platform for sharing research into radical education histories like those beautifully anthologized in the *Radical Education Workbook* produced by London’s Radical Education Forum. Surveying the histories of radical education we quickly observe that all of the popular education models that inspire us unfolded in the context of concrete struggles. Education contributed directly to constitutive processes of specific movements organizing around particular injustices or provocations.

In bringing the School of Echoes initiative into our individual political contexts, many of us have had to confront the limits of an arts-centered popular education approach. I say limits not in the sense of failure or impossibility. However, many of us have struggled with contradictions in an art-based approach to investigation within or related to political organizing. Political struggles often take up the education of its constituencies with the clear aim to help expand and empower the movement in the face of very real and urgent needs. Organizers may employ popular education methods to facilitate reflection, analysis, and action. Yet the time required for deliberate performative processes as well as for crafting artful objects that catalyze community reflection often comes in tension with the aims of day-to-day organizing. Here in Los Angeles, the slow process of building a coalition of partners to establish a School of Echoes has confronted the primary question, what is the change our listening aims to provoke? The question clearly has tremendous potential for transforming not just the overall School of Echoes initiative but also the very ways we conceptualize and practice the literacy of listening.

It was with this situation in mind that Ultra-red participated in the exhibition, “Absolute Democracy”. Curated by the artists Carlos Motta and Oliver Ressler for <rotor> in Graz, Austria, the exhibition sought to raise the question of democracy at the level of concrete practice. For Berlin’s Manuela Bojadžijev, Janna Graham from London, and myself from Los Angeles, the exhibition provided the space to bring forward the links in Ultra-red’s work between political listening, experiments in critical pedagogy, and how both sit within radical democracy. Having recently read Barbara Ransby’s extraordinary biography of the radical democrat, Ella Baker, I personally felt a special desire to speak to links between listening, education, and political practice.
The exhibition “Absolute Democracy” also provided Ultra-red with the opportunity to test the waters for bringing together the different iterations of School of Echoes. We sent out a call to all of the Ultra-red teams to contribute a protocol. We were interested in protocols that have been put into practice rather than a speculative score for future actions. We received protocols from Berlin, London, Los Angeles, and from New York’s Vogue’ology project. We printed each protocol on paper and mounted the posters on the walls of the café in the gallery. Mounted next to each were MP3 players and mini-video screens, making available the various media used by each team as part of its processes. Wall texts asked viewers to bring to the sounds and images a mode of engagement different from either aesthetic pleasure or judgment. The well-lit café also contained a long table covered with white paper. Stacked on the table were copies of the workbook, *Four Protocols for a School of Echoes*. The workbook compiled the protocols displayed on the walls as well as offered short explanatory texts detailing how they were used in specific investigations.

Pulling together the materials from the different iterations of School of Echoes generated a number of questions that highlighted the tensions around working translocally. The procedures used by different teams have come out of discrete processes. Each protocol assumes that what came before functions as the condition for what comes after. The protocol, in a sense, invokes a null phase for subsequent processes (the “0” that begins every one of Ultra-red’s protocol documents). These are scores for transition.

What does it mean to say that a protocol is part of School of Echoes, let alone Ultra-red? In general, people who participate in a School of Echoes process have some level of awareness of the immediate iteration in which they are involved. Ultra-red has a clear idea that we do not own that process. Nor do we have a dogmatic relationship to our own vision for how that process will unfold. The tension arises when the different Schools of Echoes are put into relation such as in the “Absolute Democracy” exhibition or in the *Four Protocols* workbook. In most instances, the people who have embodied those protocols -- and in the process contributed to their transformation -- have been unaware of each other. Even when patiently explained by our members, it rarely registers that the experiences of one group of people sit in a parallel relation to another group.
of people far away in another city or country. What happens when the group realizes they are themselves an investigation has not yet been entirely explored or understood.

Is there a time when it is either productive or counter-productive to manifest a relationship across and between the different Schools of Echoes? Who benefits from that dialogue? Who sets the terms of the conversation and who participates? This is where the exhibition and workbook could only exist at the level of describing what we have done and not analyzing it for future actions, despite our original intent to focus on protocols tested in collective action. The exhibition itself remained very much at the level of speculation. Until those futures, we offer this report as an account of Ultra-red’s activities, aspirations, disappointments, and discoveries for the year 2012.

Written by Dont Rhine

AVAILABLE CURRICULUM

Those who are interested in digital copies of Ultra-red’s first three sound investigation workbooks can use the following links to download PDF versions.

The Dundee investigation team also released in 2012 the long-awaited album, Collected Spaces (First Listen). The vinyl LP comes with a limited edition 7” single, and printed protocols that both document the Dundee inquiry as well as invite listeners to conduct their own research. The album comes in a gorgeous full-color gatefold sleeve featuring artwork by our amazing collaborators at Art Angel and Tin Room. Copies of the album can be ordered through our Berlin-based distributor.
“What is the sound of the crisis?”
Ruptures began to reverberate in the local environment as the Arab Spring, the Occupy movement, and the M15 anti-austerity mobilizations in Portugal and Spain appeared on the global stage. We heard a mixed chorus of voices organizing protests across Berlin. We began to witness the sounds and sights of the crisis. In the wake of such shifts in the political landscape, we began to ask ourselves, what subjective positions do we occupy within these social changes? And how might those positions condition the formation of an investigation that had so far focused on the conjunctures of racism? These reflections led Manuela Bojadzijev and Ceren Türkmen to revise the initial Ultra-red investigation, even to transform our investigation team. Against this backdrop, a new question emerged: What is the sound of the crisis? The Berlin-based members of Ultra-red embarked on this project to understand how the crisis affects our everyday lives.

“The crisis is coming home,” has become a particularly ominous refrain of late. Officially, starting with 2008, for more than half a decade Europe has lived in crisis. In a paradoxical way Germany figures as the only exception in this general downward trend. But Germany has seen a downward trend in wages, reduction of social benefits, a reorganisation of its health insurance system, bail outs, moves to seal off the borders at the margins of the European Union, and new racist formations. At the same time urban segregation continues to mount while rents go up along with the prices of real estate. These are only the most obvious markers in the “fields of crisis”.

A slow and merciless drying-up has affected people’s lives for more than a decade already. The message is ambivalent. The public discourse related to governance on the crisis supports politics that follow Thatcher’s dictum “There is no alternative.” At the same time we hear politicians and experts repeatedly asserting in the media, “The crisis has not (yet) arrived in Germany.”

For Ultra-red’s Manuela Bojadzijev and Ceren Türkmen to listen to the diverse sounds of crisis we had to become many. In 2012 an opportunity arose to embark on a new project due to Manuela’s teaching engagement at the Institute of European Ethnology at Berlin’s Humboldt University. We developed a yearlong seminar on researching the crisis. A collaboration with visual anthropologist Michael Westrich allowed us to expand our auditory practice. Together with Michael and twenty graduate students we investigated the sounds and sights of the crisis. This, we were aware, was an impossible question with a largely speculative function.

Working individually or in pairs, the Humboldt students developed sixteen investigations. Their research took them to locales as diverse as the expressions of the crisis; in Portugal, at Europe’s borders in Cyprus, in finance education in New York, in Berlin’s public transport, and in prisons. At the writing of this report, these investigations continue and we will report on them in next year’s report.

One of the student’s investigation took place on a translocal level in Athens, Rome, Barcelona, Madrid, Ljubljana, and Berlin. Kelly Mulvaney researched into the conditions of transnational organizing in Europe. Kelly drew extensively upon her own political networks and a personal long-term engagement with Europe’s crisis protests. The latter included her experience in Frankfurt’s Blockupy. Mounted in May of 2012, Blockupy deliberately resonated with the global Occupy movement, mobilizing people from across Europe in Germany’s Global Finance
City. These experiences and networks supplied Kelly with a political commitment, knowledge of the field, and of key movements to serve as the basis for her own investigation. Working by herself, and later accompanied with a friend, Kelly went from one city to the next organizing collective listening sessions with diverse groups of people involved in organizing mass protests in the Eurozone. These listening sessions provided a space for activists to reflect on the sounds of transnational organizing in Europe.

One other enquiry conducted by a student echoes Ultra-red’s initial research into the sounds of anti-racism in Berlin. Turning to the social struggles against austerity, Sabrina Apicella has researched the consequences of that resistance for anti-racism. Can we hear anti-racist sounds within those social struggles? To initiate her Berlin-based investigation, Sabrina organized open-air listening sessions, or “sound stations” at anti-racist festivals. Attendees to the festivals were encouraged to take a seat at a table and respond to a series of short sound recordings. Sabrina had collected the recordings herself; aural snapshots that captured anti-racist sounds in the mundane landscape of night buses and followed organizing practices in the city.

Both Sabrina’s fieldwork and our own has resulted in a special focus on the Berlin neighborhood of Kreuzberg. Since the 1970s, Kreuzberg has been home to diverse social, cultural, and political Left groups and practices. Today the area remains popular for migrants and the non-migrant popular classes. Within the current capitalist procedures of gentrification, Kreuzberg has become home for creative young people from all over the world and a home for those migrants fleeing Europe’s crisis-marked periphery. In the meantime developers have transformed large sections into upscale neighborhoods and a tourist destination. Watching the transformation of Kreuzberg and other neighborhoods take place at an accelerating speed, we find ourselves continuously discussing the changes with friends, neighbors, and strangers. Rising housing costs have forced the poor, especially migrants, to move away.

In September 2012 Ultra-red was able to provisionally bring together the investigations occurring in Berlin with the ongoing projects in New York, London and Los Angeles. The introduction to this annual report provides readers with some of our reflections on this encounter in the exhibition “Absolute Democracy” mounted at the art space <rotor> in Graz, Austria. We want to mention here some of the developments that took place outside of the exhibition during the week in Graz. While Janna Graham from London, Dont Rhine from Los Angeles, and Manuela converged in this Southern Austrian city we had an opportunity to learn about the local efforts of the Communist Party of Austria to organize tenants in the city. In the process of establishing a particular knowledge and engagement on public and private housing for more than a decade, the Party had successfully transformed themselves into a reliable social service provider for locals in need of legal, social, and other housing support. Remarkably this engagement brought them a vote of nearly 20% in November’s local elections. During our stay we met with several local artists, curators and political activists and discussed possible options of communicating and exchanging such local...
experiences around the crisis of the urban. Should such an invitation ever make sense for our friends in Graz, Ultra-red will gladly make ourselves available.

Such conversations remained in our ears when Dont Rhine and Manuela Bojadzijev returned to Berlin for a one-week workshop with the student-researchers in the crisis projects. The workshop also benefited from participation by members of Ultra-red’s London base that had come down to Berlin for part of the week. Through intensive discussion, repeated listening, organised walks through Mitte, and eating together we organized our thoughts for investigations based on sound and video. The week gave us plenty of time to listen and watch the materials collected by the researchers. Since the University was largely shuttered for the week, we were able to take full advantage of the empty hallways and classrooms. On Thursday, we moved the workshop across town to Kreuzberg where we met in a community-based music school that our collaborator on the crisis project, Jeremy Woodruff generously made available for us. It was during this session that the group of Berlin and London researchers experimented with new collaborative analytical tools being developed by Ultra-red. The session proved an enormous success and generated enormously useful critical responses to both the content of the analytical process and the process itself. Reports of these experiments have traveled widely throughout Ultra-red’s teams with hopes to further extend the experiments in the coming year.

Meanwhile in Berlin urban organizing continued throughout 2012. The mass displacement of residents has started to find a vocal expression loud enough to organize the silence. This instance of resistance became a focus of Sabrina’s as well as our own inquiry. In May 2012 tenants living in housing adjacent to the Kottbusser Tor metro station in Kreuzberg squatted a public square. The protestors adopted the name Kotti & Co.—Kotti, short for Kottbusser. The “and company” indicates an intention to become many. Soon after the protest camp began, Berlin witnessed numerous demonstrations involving a variety of groups opposed to gentrification and promoting the struggle to reclaim the city. Demonstrators convened in locations throughout Berlin, speaking out in various voices and languages. As the protest groups moved through the city, a contingent of undocumented refugees converged with a demonstration against the displacement of residents in the predominately migrant neighborhood of Neukölln. The groups eventually united with the Kotti & Co demonstration up the road from Neukölln. Protests similar to this one took place in the city on a regular basis. In amazing ways these actions have echoed the student’s movement in Montreal and have made it possible for protestors to enter into a dialogue with neighbors, activists, academics, politicians, and even tourists. Such actions have built the foundations for a public forum to discuss the future of social housing in Berlin.

Listening to the Kotti & Co. campaign those of us in Ultra-red Berlin have begun to hear how the crisis encounters racism. We can hear how the anti-racism struggle might depart from its own internal crisis and enter into a new grammar of anti-racist and urban protest. It is this sound that resonates with us for what we will explore in the future.
“What is the sound of radical education?”
In the wake of a year of local and global insurgencies against imposed ‘austerity’ measures and indeed the quietude that followed, Ultra-red London members began 2012 consumed by work on the course “Auditions” in the MA in Aural and Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths University. Usually taught by friend and comrade Kodwo Eshun, Ultra-red members were asked to lead the class while Kodwo enjoyed a sabbatical. Both wary and interested in the effects of introducing the School of Echoes into a formal education setting, the preceding September Ultra-red members Janna Graham and Elliot Perkins, with the help of Robert Sember, re-formed the London School of Echoes initiative for the first time since the Cardew Sessions held in 2009. We issued an invitation for students to join the class and contribute to creating a partial curriculum related to questions of listening. The invitation went out to both fee-paying students as well as activists outside of Goldsmiths.

The curriculum began with a reading of Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed and progressed into a series of recordings made on the campus of the University. By chance, these recordings took place on Open Day, the day in which the University sells its programmes to a new group of students. In sharp contrast to past years, this Open Day took place under a cloud of particularly anxious feelings among the students. The following year was to be the first in which undergraduates would pay 9000 GBP in fees. This amount marked a 300 percent increase in tuition from the previous year. Students in our group posed questions such as, What is the sound of the limit of the classroom? What is the sound of hierarchy? What is the sound of hidden transaction? Their questions linked the sounds heard by university workers – from cleaners to professors – to the soundscape perceived by would-be attendees and their attendant parents.

This very localized and particular moment marked an important one in relation to the larger movements of anti-austerity in the UK. The conflicts unleashed by the government’s plans to roll back the social welfare state had recently taken to the streets, the galleries and museums, as well as squatted tax shelter properties and banks. Anti-austerity had become a matter for private and individual consideration. In the education sector alone, high school students found themselves deciding whether they were willing to carry a debt burden (many were not). University professors had to determine if they could stand to work in universities of exclusion. Courtrooms became dramatic scenes where young insurgents negotiated their own survival in the aftermath of arrests. Collectives who had formed in the frenzy of it all had now to imagine how to organise themselves in preparation for the long and slow fight to come.

In the first couple weeks of the term, we moved the location of the “Auditions” class to the Centre for Possible Studies. Set up in 2009 as project space in the Edgware Road neighbourhood hosted by the Serpentine Gallery, the Centre had become home to numerous artist’s projects, neighbourhood initiatives, as well as a meeting space for groups. The Centre has also served as home to “Re-Assembly,” Ultra-red’s ongoing project at St. Marylebone High School, an all girls school in the Edgware Road area.

Once the Goldsmiths course installed itself in the Centre for Possible Studies, the pre-written curriculum ended. The class quickly opened up to development around collective questions, stakes and interests. In this gesture, the ongoing difficulty of organising experimental curricula in the evaluative and increasingly consumer-based spaces of higher education, revealed itself. Once the curriculum came
under student control, a number of crises surfaced. For one, students had varying levels of interest in such an exercise. While it became possible to produce a curriculum, more substantive concerns dominated the group. It became increasingly important that we work together to give an honest account of the anxieties induced by the process of opening up the educational environment. Groups took on the teaching of different classes in relation to readings and practices of listening. As a group we also took account of issues and anxieties related to collective practice. Collectively we addressed how we might deal with the desire to be taught or ‘fed’ information.

We also confronted the contradiction between the openness of the curriculum and the authority of evaluation processes imposed by the university.

As the weeks progressed, three loosely affiliated groups in the class emerged. The first group of students remained primarily concerned with the evaluative demands of their course work, jobs, and responses to other forms of living precarity. Feeling the weight of so many demands in their lives, these students did not engage in any extra-curricular projects out of this process.

The second group of students developed a collaborative curatorial initiative titled, At the Centre of Listening. Working towards the objective of a public event, the students invited local artists and theorists to respond to topics. The students selected the themes from the readings in the “Auditions” class and elsewhere in their University programme. The topics developed by the students included, “Veracity of Memory: Performing Field Recordings,” “Spatialities: Sonic Envelopes,” and “Xeno’s Paradox: Temporality.” These themes were then realized through three events held at the Centre for Possible Studies as part of the At the Centre of Listening programme.

Concurrent with the events described above, a third group of researchers elected to pursue a different mode of inquiry. This small group had become galvanized around concerns related to the subterranean and increasingly individualized conflicts permeating the collective process in the class. In an effort to address those tensions directly, the researchers posed the question: What is the sound of the conflict you can’t hear? The group, which included Chris Molinski, Madge, Grace Kyne-Lilley, formulated itself by issuing the following statement.

The dynamics of voicing, hearing, listening and not being heard that prompted this question of course preceded this moment in neo-liberal processes of re-shaping political subjectivities over the last thirty years or more. In the United Kingdom, voicing, hearing and listening are part of the apparatus of control that so often asks for our opinions, asks to ‘hear’ our thoughts,
and offers to ‘give’ us a voice while at the same time ensuring that these listening forms do little to penetrate the realities we live in. ‘We’d love to hear your thoughts’, ‘Our ears are open’ are not uncommon to hear, for example, in the gentrification of neighbourhoods or in the name of incorporating poor people into behavioural norms under the term ‘social cohesion’.

Other would-be conflicts, such as those experienced by young workers are inaudible because of the embarrassment at the money they have spent on their education only to work repeatedly for no or little pay, chasing miniscule fees, and at odds with the tactics of their trade unions. In other cases the sound of the conflicts we can’t hear are not inaudible at all, but blocked, such as in the case of the recent raids against migrants which did not even register in mainstream media. Other times the sounds take place at the sides of our own processes of organising, where we try to find the bravery to name acts of sexism and racism amongst ourselves.

Still other conflicts cannot be heard simply because people refuse the routines of speaking and listening in public discourse altogether. ‘To them I don’t say a word’ said W.E.B Du Bois. Avoiding the terms of conflict is also a kind of resistance against the shock and response to new policies wrapped around old imperialist wars against the poor and the non-European.

What is the sound of the conflict you can’t hear? is then less a general question and [more] one that is directed at the ‘yous’ that each of us in the investigation team knows, a you in a situation that is or could be organized towards a to-be-constituted ‘we’. It is a question posed to a non-anonymous you that each of us takes to our colleagues in the struggles of young cultural workers, anti-gentrification activists, migrants, and the rights of women in work, only to bring it back as a point to share experiences across movements. The passage from you to we is in this way a passage from individual anxiety to processes of collective listening. Answering the question we hope, also helps us to mark a passage from hearing – the routines of physically taking in sounds and their associated pseudo-democratic forms - to listening as a process of troubling consensus and finding the ways in which conflict can articulate itself most effectively.

In addition to the above statement, the three also collaborated directly with Janna and Elliot to launch a website based on their question, What is the sound of the conflict you cannot hear? The website features a series of protocols for critical listening that the same group (also including Janna and Elliot) performed as an intervention at the At the Centre for Listening events of their fellow students. The protocols were performed again by the group at Documenta13. In September, Madge, Grace, and Elliot traveled to Berlin to participated in a weeklong workshop convened by Ultra-red’s Berlin team. Members of the Sound of the Conflict group remain in loose contact.

Needless to say this was a challenging learning experience for everyone involved. We still feel that many lessons remain to be processed.

Beyond the work in formal education, Ultra-red members Chris Jones - recently returned from Brazil with the beautiful baby Hannah - and Janna Graham continued to work with the Radical Education Forum to collectively edit and publish the first edition of the “Radical Education Workbook.” Developed through two years of workshops related to histories of radical education and their resonance with present education struggles, the Radical Education Forum launched the workbook at London’s Anarchist Bookfair in October. We sold the workbook at a reasonable price. The workbook features a striking red cover and is printed in a large scale format designed by Jackson Lam
to call attention to the absence of radical pedagogy materials in London’s anarchist bookstores. The workbook proved to be a hit at the fair. We received many purchases and advanced orders. People can also pick up a copy of this first iteration at Freedom Books in London. Free PDF versions are also available online. The same page also provides an email address for those interested in ordering print-on-demand copies. Readers of Ultra-red’s annual reports will remember that we first began work on the “Radical Education Workbook” back in 2010 as part of Ultra-red’s participation in the exhibition, “Best Laid Plans” curated by Cylena Simonds at the Drawing Room in East London. Over the many months that the workbook developed Ultra-red members effectively merged into the Radical Education Forum to develop the workshops, texts and, more recently, a presentation format that uses the workbook at a base for instigating additional conversations with school, university, and informal educators.

The year 2012 also saw the continuation of Ultra-red’s four year residency at St. Marylebone School, an all-girls school in the Edgware Road neighbourhood of London. Beginning in 2009, the Centre for Possible Studies has facilitated Ultra-red’s investigations with the school’s faculty and students. Through the residency Ultra-red members Robert Sember and Chris Jones have developed inquiries with students related to questions of power and citizenship both in the school community and in the accompanying neighbourhood. In summer 2012, Chris led a ten-day project with students related to questions of gentrification and urban re-development. Using field and video recordings, the students visited a protest occupation at the Heygate Estate in South London as well as conducted sound walks examining the ongoing gentrification processes in the area. In April 2013 this project will intensify and culminate in installations and performances held at St. Marylebone School and in the surrounding area.
“What have you heard are the urgent needs in your community?”
Los Angeles

Written by Walt Senterfitt based on documentation by Katherine Bray

The effort to focus and to frame the question and scope of investigation for the Los Angeles School of Echoes project has both excitingly and frustratingly engaged the L.A. organizing team throughout 2012. The questions and participants have thus changed considerably over the year.

Coming out of a sort of “homecoming” and reconnection around our local work over 2011, the initial core team of Dont, Elizabeth, Leonardo, and Pablo envisioned a popular education process based geographically and conceptually in the struggles of poor and working class neighborhoods in two areas of L.A. County (the years of organizing by Unión de Vecinos in Boyle Heights and the City of Maywood) as well as of poor and working class high-school age youth seeking a meaningful education in the context of a collapsed public education system (supported by Woodcraft Rangers).

Popular education (particularly as expressed in the experiences of Paolo Freire and the Liberation Theology movements in Central and South America), has been a distinctive foundation for the organizing work of Leonardo and Elizabeth in Unión de Vecinos and has to a somewhat lesser extent influenced the work of Pablo in Woodcraft Rangers and Dont in community responses to the AIDS crisis. How popular education contributes to organizing was compellingly described in an interview with Elizabeth published early this year in the Journal of Aesthetics and Protest - Ultra-red, “Popular Education in the Organizing of Unión de Vecinos.” To help provide an introduction to our own histories and to give an image of popular education in action, we have encouraged those interested in SOELA to read the text.

Our initial proposed question for investigation was “What is the sound of democracy?” Our first conception of the form (see the 2011 L.A. report) was that residents involved in Unión neighborhood committees or W.R. youth clubs could participate in oral history recording sessions or other forms of documentation and representation. These sessions could then give constituents the forum to address questions of democracy based on their lived experiences with concrete struggles.

The organizing team early on expanded beyond the four Ultra-red L.A. members to include Walt Senterfitt. In addition to a fifty-five-year history of social justice organizing across a variety of movements, Walt also brings to the process his own nascent project to create a social justice caucus within the L.A. County Department of Public Health and the health justice community. The organizing team also included Leon Mostovoy, an artist and youth program consultant with Woodcraft Rangers. Leon has a long history of art and activism experiences going back to documenting ACT UP demonstrations in New York and facilitating art workshops with street youth at the Clean Needles Now storefront in Hollywood during the 1990s. Also joining the team was Katherine Bray, a graduate student at USC pursing a joint degree in urban planning and art and curatorial practices in the public sphere. Having studied as an undergraduate at Tulane University and witnessing the efforts of artists in post-Katrina New Orleans, Katherine had a keen interest in the tensions between socially engaged art and community development. Katherine’s special role has been to serve as the SOELA documentarian, though it has richly expanded over the year as her astute questions and observations has productively challenged all of us along the way. Her notes and photographs form a core part of the record of our process.
Over the first nine months of the year, this team met regularly to plan and imagine how our combined experiences and aspirations might touch the ground. It has been nearly ten years since the Los Angeles members of Ultra-red developed a sustained inquiry in our own backyard. Initially, we envisioned inviting artists, art students, and other allies of the poor and working class from across L.A. to engage with the neighborhood groups associated with Unión de Vecinos and Woodcraft Rangers. We imagined that such a cohort could begin working as listeners and observers of the ongoing processes but with the hope of eventually developing collaborative inquiries and representations of their own. One motto we prominently featured in our early invitations was, “the community is the classroom.” This goal raised the at least implicit further question: What does solidarity look like in the context of autonomous organizations of the poor, and across realities of class, language, race, and privilege divides?

Given Ultra-red’s context as an art group, the team originally reached out to art students in art schools, specifically, Otis College of Art and Design and CalArts. Presentations by Dont and Leonardo to a community practice class at Otis, comprised mostly of working class students of color, evoked considerable interest by these students for collaborative learning and art practice in self-organizing communities. Dont and Pablo had meetings in May with the community staff of both Otis and CalArts to explore concrete ways SOELA projects might intersect with current institutional programs facilitating student-community engagement and whether the art colleges would be willing to support student involvement through credit, stipends, etc.

In parallel to meeting with outside institutions, the SOELA team had internal planning meetings to articulate what sites, projects, and needs among the core partner organizations were “SOE ready.” We took stock of which sites could accommodate the engagement of students and artists and could be described in accessible terms. Leonardo, for instance, at a June 25 meeting framed the activities that Unión de Vecinos could offer to students and solidarizing artists. He described a possible first phase as a cyclical process including: 1) research and documentation for campaigns and of organizational history, 2) accompaniment or “walking with” organizers in their work building and supporting neighborhood committees, and 3) training or bidirectional learning alongside members, staff and interns particularly around ways to learn and discuss together and to bring experience back to the research phase.

A July meeting at Woodcraft Rangers brought together our own team and representatives from the two art colleges. Increasingly after this meeting, it became clear that using the existing structures of the art schools offered little chance for a workable arrangement. The schools had existing relationships in the communities as well as an established conception of community engagement and practice for students and did not readily see much added benefit from working with us. Also, our grounding in community political struggle and popular education did not resonate. Interest among students, on the other hand, remained. Yet despite that interest the burden of adding a major additional time commitment, especially the travel distances and economic straits of many students, seem difficult to overcome.

At the same time, Leonardo and Elizabeth at Unión and Pablo and Leon at W.R. were finding it difficult to figure out how to talk about the SOELA project with their base community constituencies in ways that brought it alive and elicited active interest.

In light of these challenges, the team re-evaluated our aims while we prepared for our first open public presentations of the SOELA project. In late August a group of us presented at a public forum convened by the Journal of Aesthetics and Protest at the Pieter Studio in Cypress Park. Soon after, on September 8, the group did outreach tabling and held a modest
workshop as part of the annual Anarchist Book Fair in Barnsdall Park in East Hollywood. In both of these events we struggled with what has been a continuing tension throughout the process so far. We need to describe the project clearly enough so as to make it feel approachable. At the same time, we need to make equally clear that the initiative remains very much open for input and shaping/ownership by those who participate. Participant feedback at the Pieter event (and to some extent every time we present the project) varied. Some in our audience expressed confusion about how to place SOELA into people’s own experience, especially for something called a “school.” Others observed that we seemed to talk more about the structure and process than about the reasons or social and political aims of the process. What are you trying to achieve? What are you passionate about, what are you fighting for?

In many respects we recognized this tension as potentially productive. We decided to return to the elicitation of questions for possible investigation as the basic protocol. In the subsequent public meetings a central framing arose from our dialogues: “What have you heard are the most urgent issues in your community?” We also decided to be quite explicit, albeit varied, in our political intention. Each time we carefully explained our grounding in radical grassroots struggles for social justice. With this in mind we held our first outreach event with the explicit purpose of talking about School of Echoes as new project for researching the links between cultural action, popular education, and political organizing. The first such event took place at Concord Space, a live-work space organized by a collective of recent graduates from CalArts. Our invitation read in part:

**School Of Echoes Los Angeles is an experimental popular education research laboratory, developed out of a collaboration between organizers, artists, and educators. Drawing on the history of radical Freedom Schools and popular education, School of Echoes provides an active space for artists, organizers, activists, social workers, and concerned neighbors to enter into active solidarity with the poorest neighborhoods, and support knowledge between struggles in the Los Angeles County.**

**Anyone committed to social justice is welcome [...]**

**School Of Echoes Los Angeles brings together community-based organizations working with the poorest neighborhoods in Los Angeles County. Some of these organizations are part of a growing movement to establish a city and countywide movement of poor people building their own social, political, and economic democracy from the ground up.**

The Teach-In protocol began by introducing the historical and international context of School of Echoes. Members of our team spoke briefly about the local base-building constituencies among the inviting partners. We then passed out post-it notes for each participant to record one or more responses to the
question, “What do our communities urgently need?” We invited everyone to speak and briefly explain what they had written as they posted their notes on the wall. A team member facilitated a group process of making links and identifying common or overlapping themes. The large group of more than thirty-five participants broke out into smaller self-selected groups for further discussion around each of the identified grouped themes or clusters: accessibility (public space, language, disability, building bridges with our neighbors); education; safety, criminalization and state police repression (cops, prisons, immigration); housing; jobs and economic insecurity; health and health care. After thirty-minutes, we asked the groups to report back, setting the context for a general discussion. The conversation eventually turned to an assessment of the night’s protocol and interest in continuing to explore or help build SOELA.

Though most participants in the Concord event left with as many questions and as much confusion about the project as they came with, the discussions proved incredibly rich. Nearly everyone stayed past the scheduled end of the event, joining smaller vibrant discussions or making plans to continue discussion with one or another fellow participant. One participant noted in the final round of sharing: “We’re inspired by the energy in the room. Having a chance to come together and learn from each other is rare.”

We invited those who wished to continue to come to a second exploratory and planning teach-in in early December. It should be noted that our host’s request that we provide food for those attending turned out to be a great idea. We have made sure to offer food in each subsequent gathering! One exciting outcome of this process has been the addition of a new member to the organizing team. Veronique d’Entremont attended both the Pieter Studio and Concord Space events. An artist-educator originally from Boston, Veronique has been eager to find a collaborative context since completing her MFA at UCLA. We all feel quite fortunate to have found each other.

We held the second Concord-style teach-in December 7 at the Maywood office of Unión de Vecinos. Attendance was much smaller than at Concord and largely non-overlapping. This fact underscores the challenges of building a unified project across not only L.A.’s geographical vastness and poor public transit but also the divisions in consciousness and material conditions. Adding to the challenges, Leonardo observed, “Maywood is not sexy,” in the way that struggles in South L.A. or downtown Skid Row might be. However, the fact that another group of individuals came to the Maywood gathering in response to our invitations and stayed to the end of the night’s protocol encouraged us all. Even more encouraging was the richness of the conversation.

The protocol used in Maywood was generally similar to that for the first teach-in except that we did not break out into smaller groups. Having a different group composition meant that different urgent needs were identified. Grouped themes included a focus on the needs of youth (e.g. a failed public education system; mass incarceration and the “school-to-jail” track which sweeps young kids into “the system’ at an early age; and little training for what few jobs exist); criminalization of everyday life, survival,
and harm reduction in poor communities; need for neighborhood community centers; networking and personal support as organizers; inclusion/accessibility; economic insecurity and the need for alternative economic models. We ended by making a commitment to reconvene with another open-planning meeting in January 2013 in Maywood.

What have we learned thus far in our organizing process and what questions and contradictions are we struggling with as we enter 2013? Dialogue during and after the Concord Space teach-in surprised us in a way that forced us to re-think our initial SOELA proposal. Many participants arrived already engaged with sites of struggle. Some of these initiatives clearly embody principles of popular education. These folks had little interest in School of Echoes as a way of connecting. Rather, they already had community organizations or a popular education process in the way that we had envisioned. Several people came to the event wanting to find ways of interrelating their own autonomous but potentially interconnected struggles and contexts to that of others. We learned of efforts parallel to SOELA seeking to create spaces for conscious historical and experiential educational practice in order to critically reflect and analyze for further action. These discoveries promised the opportunity for a larger enterprise in movement building in L.A. It also evoked new questions in our own process. To whom do the protocols and process belong? How and by whom will the boundaries of SOELA be determined? These questions have found or required no definite resolution as yet. But as problematics, they do compel us to be carefully transparent and inclusive.

A second significant shift, articulated most clearly at the Maywood teach-in, speaks to our own subjectivity in Ultra-red and the larger organizing team. Having to confront the same questions that we are asking of the participant has begun to transform us. We have participated in the public recruitment/listening events not only as facilitators but also as participants alongside everyone else in the protocols. The sessions continually force us to think more clearly about our own urgent needs as individual organizers and as representatives of various concrete struggles. We are struggling to openly confront and usefully articulate the political frustrations we each face in our organizations and base-community-building efforts. During the Maywood teach-in, Leonardo spoke to this fact simply and movingly: “Despite all our struggles and some real victories, for the very poor things are not changing, things are not improving. In reaching out to build School of Echoes, we have found that people are already involved in projects across L.A., and most of them feel the same way. Change is not coming. Things are not working. We need to change how we work.” Later in the teach-in, keying off some of the articulated urgent needs around failed education, the crisis among youth and general economic insecurity, Leonardo posed that we urgently need to envision a whole different economic system and strategy for how to get there. That “big picture” view resonated around the room.

The L.A. team hopes that this dialogue over fundamental political questions, to which we certainly invite others, will continue to develop into some useful specific investigations. We also hope the process will generally help contextualize other, more local and particular investigations as SOELA takes shape. The first meeting of 2013, denoted “School of Echoes: Session One” involved still fewer and again mostly new participants. But somewhat surprisingly, the gathering resulted in a very specific set of commitments to do and report preliminary investigations in several different L.A. neighborhoods before coming together for Session Two in mid-February. Members have also announced at least two affinity groups in formation. More of these affinity groups will certainly be encouraged. We look forward to sharing the results of these beginnings and the continuing development of Ultra-red/SOELA’s processes at the end of 2013.
“What is the sound of freedom?”
A few years ago I was invited to teach in the Theater Department at Ohio University, which is located in Athens, a small town in the Appalachian hills. Ohio University is a “state school,” which means that it receives a significant portion of its funding from the Ohio state government. I arrived in Athens when budget cuts resulting from the so-called “financial crisis” were being implemented. The cuts included large reductions in student financial aid. Many of the students I spoke with doubted that their parents could make up the difference in tuition and living costs. They faced the difficult decision of either increasing their debt burden by taking out additional education loans, trying to earn the money by taking low-wage, part-time jobs, which were few and far between, or dropping out of university altogether.

The uncertain futures faced by everyone at the university brought into crisis the ideology of class ascendancy through education, which often justifies student debt accumulation during the good times. A contingent of students from poor and working class families talked about having always understood class mobility to be a kind of pyramid scheme. Speaking to their fellow-classmates and us faculty, this contingent of students challenged us to rethink what was actually at stake in the “class”-room. For these students the financial crisis was/is simply another chapter in a permanent state of crisis justified by wars and fear of the poor, of immigrants, and of people of color.

Generally, a teacher is required to do no more than help produce an analysis. Even that can be going too far. The challenge of the situation at Ohio University was figuring out how to organize against the conditions of the institution that consistently reproduced the class conditions that separated pedagogy from radical action. Toward this end, we set aside most of the prepared syllabus and began to investigate how the crisis affected our lives and the lives of others in the region. Through this work we also began to familiarize ourselves with histories of radical struggles in the area. The concept of freedom emerged as crucial to everything we examined. We read accounts of the Underground Railroad, which hid escaped slaves from bounty hunters and helped them move through Appalachia and north to safety. We visited Robinson’s Cave where miners held the first organizing meetings of the United Mineworkers of America. Freedom was collectively claimed in these and every other case and offered a crucial alternative to the existential and consumer-based notions of freedom that dominates the classroom.

As part of its research, the class discovered that a private company operating under land grants from the Federal government to exploit and manage the Northwest Territories founded Ohio University in 1804. Learning this history generated a particularly searing observation when it became clear that, as one student observed, Ohio University had the expressed function of bringing capitalism to the region. For example, in its early years the university exercised its rights of private ownership over the lands it had been granted in its charter. Claiming ownership systematically dispossessed indigenous communities of their homes and livelihood. The deep-set poverty in Appalachia finds its roots in such actions.

What does it mean, we asked, that education continues to serve the interest of capital? How do the ideologies of expanding individual freedom through education support the mirage of free markets in the context of global capitalist monopolies? How do these ideas of freedom inform the rights and obligation of citizenship that subsume individual desires to national projects?

While teaching in Ohio, I was also helping organize the
Vogue’ology project in New York City with members of the House|Ballroom community. As Michael Roberson, a member of the Vogue’ology collective frequently observes, the Ballroom scene, with its long history of struggle against class, gender, and sexual oppression, “has something to say about freedom.” The discussion of freedom in the context of the scene has resulted in difficult conversations about racial and gender discrimination within the community. We have also had to consider the homophobia, sexism, and transphobia within the United States civil rights movement. Those ideologies continue to erase the accomplishments of the Ballroom scene from the Black and Latino radical histories. Thus, the issue of freedom for the Ballroom scene became immediately tied to projects of liberation or emancipation.

In early 2012, I taught the class “The Sound of Freedom” at The New School in New York, which again considered the relationship between freedom and pedagogy. Unlike the class at Ohio University, the most pressing concern for The New School students centered around how to reconcile individual and collective freedoms. As aspiring artists, many of the students held deep investments in art as a venue for self-realization and expression or as the site of “the new.” On the other hand, they felt inspired by The New School’s concern with social analysis and social change. We began our work together with the comforting proposition that art could accommodate diversity. Over time, our examination of class and racial discrimination, however, eroded this liberalism and demanded a much more rigorous accounting of the terms by which freedom gets defined and claimed.

As I planned for The New School class, Arika the Edinburgh-based arts organization and Ultra-red ally, invited us to collaborate on a program of events for the Whitney Museum of American Art. The curators of the 2012 Whitney Biennial had invited Arika to organize a festival of experimental sound performances similar to the ones organized in Scotland over the past decade. Noting how the Whitney Biennial advertises itself as a survey of U.S. art, Arika decided to take the idea of a survey seriously. They adopted an investigative approach to the formulation of the program. The focus of the survey would be contemporary practices of listening within the United States. Ultra-red’s School of Echoes project, which is concerned with the development and testing of protocols of collective listening, was among the projects Arika wished to include in their own survey.

In formulating the sessions for the Whitney, Los Angeles member Don’t Rhine and myself focused on the Ultra-red investigations currently underway in New York City. We invited our collaborators in those inquiries to join us. We were also mindful of other recent events in the city, particularly the widespread impact of Occupy Wall Street. The issue of freedom had become a productive concern in all these cases and so we asked, “How might we listen to the sound of freedom in this moment?” Members of the Ballroom constituency and participants in the Sound of Freedom course at The New School helped organize and realize the sessions. We also invited the Brooklyn-based artist and activist, Laurie Prendergast to join Don’t and I to form the Ultra-red team for the project. Laurie has worked on gender and sexual rights for many years, including with the Ballroom scene.
Ultra-red convened five three-hour-long sessions at the Whitney, held over five consecutive days. Each session served as a response to the same question, “What is the sound of freedom?” The sessions included the performance of a listening protocol composed in response to this question. (Note: download protocols here). Ultra-red composed and facilitated the protocols for the final session. We also extended invitations to a number of other artists and community organizers committed to anti-racist struggles to compose and facilitate protocols for the other four days. Composer, creative musician, and teacher George E. Lewis composed the protocol for the first day. George is a member of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), an artists’ collective established in Chicago in 1965. He recently published the definitive history of this collective. Michael Roberson Garçon, a member of the Vogue’ology collective and founding father of the Ballroom scene’s House of Garcon, composed the protocol to be performed on day two. The playwright and educator Nancy Nevarez composed the third day’s protocol, which she co-facilitated with her partner Sam Sanchez. Both Nancy and Sam have worked as long-term community organizers within the Puerto Rican and African American communities in Harlem, the South Bronx, and neighborhoods in Brooklyn. They are also prominent members of the Puerto Rican independence movement. On the fourth day we performed a protocol composed by the poet and scholar, Fred Moten. Fred’s book, In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition, has had a profound influence on the investigations under way in New York City. Finally, the Ultra-red protocol was performed during the fifth and final session.

We divided each session into three parts. First, the author-facilitator introduced her or his protocol to the investigative group that had gathered for that day’s sessions. We all gathered around a large rectangular table placed at one end of the Whitney Museum’s fourth floor gallery/performance space. Food and beverages were available as people gathered each day and throughout the session. The group then moved to the center of the space to perform that day’s protocol. The space had been configured ahead of time according to the author-facilitator’s instructions. The performance of the protocol lasted for approximately an hour. Following a break, we returned to the large table for a discussion in which we reflected on the experience of performing the protocol and what had emerged regarding the sound of freedom.

The investigative team for each session consisted primarily of people involved in the local Ultra-red investigations. Ultra-red and the collaborating artists also invited friends and colleagues to participate. Those friends, in turn, invited people they believed would contribute meaningfully to the process. We asked everyone to sign-up ahead of time so that we could arrange museum passes and ensure that we did not exceed the maximum number of seats we could place around the table. The number of participants fluctuated across the five sessions. Participation was especially large when the day’s facilitator mobilized their own constituency members to attend.

All of the “Sound of Freedom” activities took place in a gallery open to museum visitors. A constantly changing stream of observers moved through the space. Some of the visitors joined the investigative team for a time. The majority, however, observed from a distance. To encourage visitors to observe the investigation, we always ensured that a number of open chairs were available close to the area in which the investigative team gathered. During the discussion period that concluded each session, the area where we had performed the protocol became the space for observers to sit. The discussion was amplified via speakers placed in this area along with a video projection showing a live-feed of the table where we gathered nearby.

To help orient members of both the investigative team as well as museum visitors, large, printed versions of each protocol were mounted to a wall behind the
What is the Sound of Freedom?”, a five-day investigation by Ultra-red presented during the experimental music program, A Survey is a Process of Listening, curated by Arika as part of the performance program of the 2012 Whitney Biennial. Top Left: “Listening to transgress: An Inquiry into sonic intuition,” composed and facilitated by George E. Lewis (pictured), Wednesday, 2 May 2012; Middle Left: “Protocols for listening in prophetic hope,” composed and facilitated by Michael Roberson Garçon (standing) and members of the Vogue’ology collective, Thursday, 3 May 2012; Bottom Left: “Protocols for listening to the sound of freedom,” composed and facilitated by Nancy Nevárez and Samuel Sanchez, Friday, 4 May 2012; Top Right: “Hand up to your ear,” composed and facilitated by Fred Moten (center), Saturday, 5 May 2012; Middle Right: “Protocols for freedom,” composed and facilitated by Ultra-red, Sunday, 6 May 2012. Photographs by Arika.
table at which we began and concluded each session. All participants and gallery visitors were also provided with a printed workbook, “Protocols for the Sound of Freedom.” The workbook compiled the protocols, a brief statement by Ultra-red concerning the project as a whole, and information on the different artist-facilitators. Each day, while the group performed the protocol, two volunteers from that day’s investigative team functioned as ushers. They positioned themselves at the entrance to the gallery/performance space and distributed copies of the workbook to visitors and offered additional information. Sometimes the ushers entered into discussions with visitors concerning what they were witnessing and the project as a whole. The ushers noted visitors’ reaction and were asked to share what they had heard during the final discussion period.

Ultra-red was interested in what we would learn about collective listening from the performance of the different protocols. We wanted to find out what terms would emerge from these sessions that might guide ongoing investigations of freedom. It was important, therefore, that we accumulation a record of actions and reflections across the five days. The large poster versions of the protocols mounted to the wall closest to the table at which we gathered each day provided an initial indication that the five sessions were part of a single, overarching investigation. This area also became the repository for written and video documentation accumulated over the five days.

Particularly important to the investigation were the contributions of the small number of participants who attended all five sessions and those who attended at least two sessions. The number of repeat participants over the five days represented a significant enough number of individuals to enable us to keep in focus questions regarding the modes of collective listening produced by the different protocols. We also developed an awareness of how the protocols differently illuminated the issue of freedom. If relevant to the concluding discussion, those who had attended prior sessions compared the different protocols and referenced questions and analyses produced during the discussions that concluded each session. They could also reference the video and written documentation of the sessions.

Ultra-red learned a great deal by asking others to compose protocols. As Dont observed in a dispatch he wrote at the time, we quickly realized we had not fully appreciated the challenges our guest composers would face in both compositing and facilitating their own protocols. The construction of an investigation presents very different challenges from the creation of an object, whether it be a sound composition or a text. We seemed to have forgotten the very long education we ourselves had gone through to develop, often at Leonardo’s urging, to “trust in the process.” Facilitation requires that one listen through or beyond the protocol and not only for it or to it. Just as the composer of a score is not always the best person to perform that score so the composer of a protocol may benefit from participating in a process facilitated by others. For a future investigation of this nature, it will be interesting to have Ultra-red facilitate all of the protocols or to have the artist-organizers we invite facilitate each other’s protocols.

Connected to the issue of facilitation is the constitution of the investigative team. Although we had a number of people who attended multiple and even all five sessions, the accumulation of learning across the sessions remained significantly constrained by the fact that the investigative team as a whole did not engage in all five investigations. An investigation has a method. While necessary, this is not sufficient. An investigation must also have an objective. This objective acquires purpose if taken up by a constituency with an investment or stake in the outcome. This was clearly the case when the investigative team for the second day’s protocol, facilitated by Michael Roberson Garçon, included many members of the Ballroom community. The issue of freedom clearly connected to the experiences
and concerns of the Ballroom constituency. The participation of Ballroom members in the session brought great depth and purpose to the session. Unfortunately, since most of those who attended this session, including Michael, did not attend the other sessions, they could not contribute to or benefit from the examination of different modes of listening. We look forward to being able to organize a multi-part investigation similar to the Whitney sessions in which a single constituency participates in every session.

I also should not that some of our investigators had a real struggle getting past the immediate context of the investigation. The fact that Ultra-red had been brought into the Whitney most definitely lent weight to our invitation to participants. In the past, previous Whitney Biennials situated laboratory projects offsite. In the context of the Biennial, every gesture is read as a completed representation that exists as a thing in itself rather than as serving a function within a process. This is particularly true with performance, a major theme of the 2012 Biennial. It is understandable that everyone struggled with the protocols of the Museum. Those protocols included everything from gaining entry to the Museum itself, to limitations on the kind of refreshments we could serve and where and when they could be consumed. Dialectically, a struggle with the Museum’s protocols also made it possible for us to achieve a level of collectivity even in the brief three hours we had together.

The question of freedom resonated within the space and within the terms of the institution in complex ways. As a result, we began to think of context in a new way. Usually we think of context as either a container that holds a process or, in Corneliuss Cardew’s sense, as that which both affects and is affected by an action. However, by the fifth day, we formulated our understanding of context as the intersection of or conflict produced by encounters between different protocols. Thus the ushers for each session found themselves outside of both the protocol of the Whitney Museum (a protocol that is hegemonic in its invisibility and naturalness) and the protocol of our investigation. Rather, the ushers negotiated the conflict arising out of the contact between those protocols. As productive as this was, we also became aware of a tendency for the usher’s reports to dominate our final conversations. That was especially the case if the usher had surrendered to an anxiety about making sure all of the visitors felt included. We constantly had to ask, to which protocol are we, in the end, responsible? We returned, therefore, to concerns that have emerged in many Ultra-red investigations over the years—can a museum or institutional art space function as an investigative space? Is it ever useful to conduct investigations as open performances to a public resolved in its interpellation in such spaces? The complexity of the methods and the legibility of the terms of an inquiry require sustained, collective engagement. Museums generally work against both of these qualities.

The Whitney session arose out of investigations into freedom. The question, “What is the sound of Freedom?” remains relevant to the ongoing Ultra-red projects in New York. I will again be teaching at The New School and freedom is an explicit concern in this work. The Vogue’ology work also continues. We have devoted this year to processes that will enable us to develop a proposal for a Ballroom Freedom School. It is an idea that draws on the long history of radical pedagogy within anti-racist and anti-imperial struggles in the U.S. and elsewhere. It is also indebted to the work all of us in Ultra-red have done over the years to formulate procedures for collective listening as a mode of organizing. Janna’s unwavering fight to open and sustain the Center for Possible Studies has inspired the vision for a similar space for our work in New York. I will also have an opportunity to return to Ohio University this year and will gather, once again, with many of the students I worked with when I was last there. I will report to them on the Whitney and other investigations and will hear what freedom has come to mean for them.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We end this year’s Annual Report offering our collective thanks to all those whose support and/or partnership made the work of Ultra-red possible in 2012. We organize the acknowledgements according to Ultra-red team and then conclude with additional names of those who have generally supported the collective at some point in the past year.


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SELECTED PROJECTS BY ULTRA-RED IN 2012


08.12 “An Archive of Silence,” mixed-media in the group exhibition, Sounds Like Silence, Hartware Medien Kunstverein, Dortmund, Germany, Curators: Inke Arns and Dieter Daniels.

09.12 “Protocols for the Sound of Alternatives to Incarceration,” mixed-media installation in the group exhibition, Opening the Black Box: The Charge is Torture, Sullivan Galleries SAIC, Chicago, Curators: Laurie Palmer and Sarah Ross.

09.12 “Four Protocols for a School of Echoes,” mixed-media installation in the group

"An Archive of Silence," Sounds Like Silence, HMKV at Dortmunder University, Dortmund, Germany. Photograph by HMKV.
exhibition, *Absolute Democracy*, <rotor> association for contemporary art, Graz, Austria, Curators: Carlos Motta and Oliver Ressler.

12.12 *Collected Spaces (First Listen)*, with Art Angel and Tin Roof, vinyl LP + Limited Edition 7” single (Public Record).


RESIDENCIES

2011-12 Artist In Residence visiting instructors for Janna Graham and Elliot Perkins, Goldsmiths University, London.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


