**Ultra-red** 

## PRACTICE SESSIONS WORKBOOK



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## Poem Objects:

What is the sound of alternatives to incarceration?

### Introduction: How to use this Workbook

Welcome to "Practice Sessions," an introduction to militant sound research. This workbook accompanies a three-part video designed for organizers, cultural workers, and community members interested in political and collective listening.

Each part in the video series outlines steps in the sound inquiry process and then concludes with an appendix containing additional information on the principles and ideas behind militant sound research. If you are watching with others, we invite you to pause after each video to discuss the propositions and problems it raises. This workbook provides additional reference information and discussion questions. We have also included in the workbook a case study detailing a previous Ultra-red sound investigation.

Ultra-red's "Practice Sessions" videos are hosted by Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) in Hollywood, California. To view the three-part video go to: http://www.welcometolace.org/pages/view/ultra-red/

Ultra-red invite you to experiment with and adapt the ideas and protocols outlined in this video and workbook. We encourage you to contact us and share what your own collective has learned in the process. Contact Ultra-red at info@ultrared.org.

## Part I: Organizing a Research Team

**66** Para dialogar, preguntad, primero; después . . . escuchad.

For dialogue, first ask, then . . . listen. . . .

Antonio Machado Proverbios y cantares a José Ortega y Gasset, No. 41, Stanza II (1924)

#### An invitation:

- Issued to individuals and/or to a specific group or community,
- Proposes why this method is appropriate to investigate a specific theme,
- 3. Identifies where in the organizing process the inquiry occurs and its desired outcomes for the organizing.

A sound investigation requires multiple cycles of inquiry that extend over weeks or even years. The process can be used to constitute or expand a collective, or an existing collective may decide to engage in a sound investigation in order to deepen its work or investigate new concerns.

The preparations for the investigation begin with the issuing of an invitation that identifies; who is invited, why the investigation is being initiated, and the goals of the investigation.

When a critical number of those invited commit to undertaking a multi-stage inquiry, the investigative team is formed.

In Ultra-red's experience, research teams with three to sixteen members make it possible for everyone to be actively involved in the inquiry. The research team's shared commitment to a constituency and struggle makes it possible to identify a sound research process as a militant sound investigation.

Therefore, before embarking on an investigation, all team members must know how the investigation will be conducted and why.

Take the time to become acquainted with the collective listening process. Use simple listening exercises such as undertaking sound walks in places that have meaning for the collective. Another exercise could involve listening together to oral history interviews or other archival sound recordings.

Collective listening is not an end in itself. Rather, it is a tool among other tools available for the long haul of struggle.



"We Come From Your Future," Tate Britain, London, 2008.



## What is the sound of alternatives to incarceration? CASE STUDY PART ONE: an invitation

In 2011, Ultra-red member Dont Rhine was invited by the artist/curators Alexandra Juhasz and Pato Hebert to participate in the group exhibition, *PerpiTube*. The curators had invited fifteen artists to create short videos for YouTube, which would serve as both the platform and the curatorial subject of the exhibition. The exhibition was sponsored by Pitzer College in Claremont, California where Juhasz is a professor of art and media studies. Juhasz is a veteran of the AIDS activist movement, ACT UP New York. During her years in the movement she became a leading figure in the practices and theorization of activist video. In addition to being an artist, Hebert is a popular educator and organizer in the global AIDS movement.

For his contribution to the *PerpiTube* exhibition, Rhine wanted to adhere to Ultra-red's commitment to working with local community groups. Juhasz suggested he collaborate with women from the residential recovery organization, Prototypes, an organization that has engaged with members of the Pitzer College community many times over the years. Rhine was particularly interested in Prototypes because of his years of involvement with harm reduction and needle exchange in Los Angeles. He was eager for the possibility that learning from the Prototypes residents could benefit his own constituency in HIV justice.

Juhasz made the initial contact with a caseworker from Prototypes, April Wilson, and asked if she and a group of women from the organization would have an interest in a short-term collaboration. Rhine and Wilson spoke a month prior to the exhibition. He detailed the steps in Ultra-red's collectively developed practice of listening. He also described possible outcomes from such a short sound investigation.

Wilson, in turn, explained how one particular group of women in residence at Prototypes was in the process of forming a community of mutual support. That shared support was becoming a crucial component in their recovery process, building upon their reflecting on experiences of gender, racial, and class-based violence. Wilson also described how the women came into the program largely as an option provided by the courts as an alternative to incarceration.

At the end of the conversation, Wilson agreed that the group of women she was working with could benefit from a short-term Ultrared sound inquiry. Thus, the invitation from the *PerpiTube* curators to Ultra-red turned into an invitation from Prototypes for Ultra-red to work with a group of their residents.

### A question:

- 1. Arises out of the lived experience of the community,
- 2. Links experiences to concerns and demands,
- Takes the form, "What is the sound of . . . ," which requires listening in order to elaborate on those concerns and demands.

Sustained collective listening and dialogue occurs in the context of community struggle. This context conditions the investigation and associated listening practices. Thus, the team selects a question that initiates this concrete practice of listening in community.

The question guides us to listen for what it is about our world we want to keep, what we don't want, and what we want but do not have.

For example, neighbors fighting for affordable quality housing may ask, "What is the sound of housing for all?" Another community may ask, "What is the sound of anti-racism?" or, "What is the sound of democracy?"

The question does not hold the team to finding an answer. Rather, the question helps the team act into thinking that is grounded in a sustained investigation of the conditions of the community.

Opposite page: Listening sessions organized to record oral histories. Top: "Vogue'ology Encuentro", The New School, New York, 2010 (Photo: Darla Villani); Bottom: "We Come From Your Future," Tate Britain, London, 2008.





# What is the sound of alternatives to incarceration? CASE STUDY PART TWO: a question

During his initial conversations with the Prototypes caseworker, April Wilson, Ultra-red's Dont Rhine learned that most of the women came to the facility as an alternative for serving jail-time. Wilson and he agreed to explore whether the sound investigation could take up the question, "What is the sound of an alternative to incarceration?", since this was a unifying condition of experience for the women in the group. But Wilson and Rhine also agreed to keep it open depending on how the group responded.

Rhine met the group of two-dozen women on Tuesday, 9 August in the Pitzer College gallery. The two-hour meeting provided a chance for the women to get a feel for him and his investments in working together.

To help initiate a conversation, the group watched the video, "Long Story Short," produced by the artist, Natalie Bookchin. The video was composed entirely of interviews with people talking about poverty and struggles with drug use.

After watching the video together Rhine asked the women what they heard. The women were quick to respond, giving Rhine enough feedback to fill paper covering two walls of the gallery. Then he asked the women to form three small groups and come up with proposals for how they might organize all of the responses.

After the small groups met for some time, Rhine asked the women to begin thinking about their proposals in relationship to the question, "What is the sound of alternatives to incarceration?" Thinking their proposals and the question together, all of the women came up with ideas for making recordings that responded to the question.

The meeting ended with Rhine handing over to April Wilson a digital audio recording device and some general instructions on how to use it for making their recordings. The group then had a week to record sounds of the alternative to incarceration.

appendix I.3

For twenty years, Ultra-red members have undertaken militant sound investigations alongside and within political communities. We have long-term commitments to specific constituencies and political struggles where we live.

Those long-term communities and movements where we have conducted sustained investigations include, beginning in 1994, the AIDS activist movement in Los Angeles and across North America. In 1997, we began a shared investigation with the community members in Union de Vecinos, or "united neighbors," based in East Los Angeles. Following a number of encounters in Frankfurt and Berlin, our membership expanded in 2001 to include social researchers and educators embedded in the struggles of migration and anti-racism in Germany. Beginning in 2007, Ultra-red members launched longterm inquiries in the UK with social justice groups in the Southwest, London, and Dundee. Then, in 2009, Ultra-red members built on decades of organizing in New York's house and ballroom scene to commence an inquiry into the collective struggles for racial, gender, and economic justice.

In other locations we share methods with local community groups. Ultra-red present these practices as a modest contribution to the widespread field of militant inquiry.











Images from Ultra-red s long-term investigations (pages 14–15). Top previous page: Ultra-red founded in 1994 within the HIV/AIDS justice movement in Los Angeles ("Untitled for small ensemble," Los Angeles, 2007, Photo: Nick Brown). Middle previous page: Starting in 1997, partnership with Union de Vecinos in East Los Angeles (Pico Aliso, Los Angeles, 1998). Bottom previous page: Since 2001, struggles of migration and anti-racism in Germany (soundwalk analysis at Berlin-Gecekondu, 2013). Top this page: Beginning in 2007, multiple engagements with social justice movements in the United Kingdom ("What is the sound of racism?", Exeter, England, 2007). Bottom this page, partnership with the house and ballroom scene through Vogue'ology in New York ("Brother to Brother to Sister Outsider," MoMA-PS1, New York, 2013, Photo: Arika).

### Discussion Ouestions for Part I:

- 1. Where is your group in the process of its own struggle?
  - a. Has it begun to collectivize its concerns, demands, and aspirations?
  - b. Has it accomplished its first campaign or cycle of inquiry?
  - c. Has it been involved in activism or organized for a long time or over multiple generations and is in need of reassessing its current relationship to past demands, ideals, or terms of inquiry?
  - d. Or, is it testing the groundwork for solidarity or partnership with other groups?
- 2. What is the relationship between the sound investigation team and specific community in struggle?
- 3. Do team members come from the affected community or from a different class or background?
- 4. How is does example in the case study affirm and how does it contradict the conditions for a militant sound investigation as described in the video?
- 5. What does the term "militant" mean?

Close to the ground, testing ideas in practice and listening closely to the grass roots for new questions that require new paradigms. As a result, new unforeseen contradictions have challenged rather than discouraged me, and I have never felt burned out.

Grace Lee Boggs
Living For Change: An Autobiography (1998)

## II.1 step three. a recording

Once the investigation team has identified a question, each member of the team must determine where and when to make a sound recording. This may be at a specific event or location or in the form of oral history interviews with individuals and groups.

Team members practice using the recording apparatus. Everyone should know how to hold the recorder, how to turn it on and off, charge it or change the batteries, and how to activate the recording and playback feature. Making practice recordings demonstrates how the input volume control affects the quality of the recording.

Like a photographer who relies on viewfinders, a sound investigator uses headphones to guide the use of the recorder. Headphones permit the investigator and the recorder to become partners in the listening process.

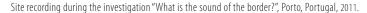
Familiarize yourself with your recording device and take time to experiment with its features before you head off to make your planned recordings.

- 1. Switch recorder on and off
- 2. Start, pause and stop recording
- 3. Adjust recording levels
- 4. Use an external microphone
- 5. Playback recordings
- 6. Read the power level

To prepare for interviews, write out the questions and practice interviewing each other to find the clearest wording and right tone. Learn to improvise with follow-up questions while not losing the plot of the interview.

When making a recording, investigators function like the recorder, hearing all sounds as important. Every sound is, in fact, multiple sounds in a complex relation. Hearing how sounds interact is as useful to the inquiry as identifying the causes of sounds.

When interviewing someone, the investigator hears how the person speaks as well as what the person says. Realizing that we are as much a part of the environment as the wind or those who pass by or the humming of the air conditioner helps us listen without judgment.





# What is the sound of alternatives to incarceration? CASE STUDY PART THREE: a recording

In the week following their first meeting with Dont Rhine from Ultrared, the two-dozen women from Prototypes collected a wide variety of audio recordings in response to the question, "What is the sound of alternatives to incarceration?" The caseworker, April Wilson, provided support to the women helping them think through and realize their ideas for the recordings. Wilson also made a recording in response to the question.

This was not the first time the women had made audio recordings. In the week prior to their first meeting with Rhine, the women had made an initial round of recording. Based on her prior communication with Rhine, Wilson had suggested that the women make recordings of their experiences in Prototypes as an alternative to serving jail-time.

Without having experienced the initial process of collective reflection, the task of making audio recordings seemed abstract and arbitrary. But the women did their best using a small handheld Dictaphone device. However, the device used proprietary encryption software that lowered the quality of the audio and rendered the recordings inaudible.

Nonetheless, the initial experiment with recording gave the women confidence the second time when using the digital audio recorder provided by Rhine.

For the second round of recordings, the women developed concrete ideas. Some of the women imagined scenes from their lives, that they then acted out with the help of another resident. Others made recordings that were much more impressionistic of experiences and feelings that they wanted to communicate. While others sought to capture sounds that might communicate something inspirational or critical.

Wilson took great care to work with each resident individually to record a sound of an alternative to incarceration. All of the women had enormous fun imagining, performing, and collecting sounds. Militant sound investigations hold that struggle is organized around contradictions, such as claims that equal opportunity exists in the midst of systemic inequality. Since sound registers time, context and action, it roots contradictions in place, history, and experience. Thus, by listening to and reflecting on sound objects, an investigation is able to engage both the abstract articulations of contradictions and their concrete manifestations, their material form.

To prepare sound objects, researchers log the sound events in recordings and draw out the multiple themes, which may be stated in words or in the ambiguity of sounds or in combinations and layers of sound. Recordings are cut and, if useful, digitally processed to create new contours and new combinations that draw on the logged elements and themes.

A generative sound object poses problems more than it describes or reflects reality. Processing the recordings can retain enough of the source material so that listeners connect to their own experience but not so much that it simply repre-sents that experience. Some forms of editing and digital processing can, however, over-emphasize the hand of the researcher. In this instance, listening becomes about judgments of the composition's artistic quality.

The proof is always in the listening.

# What is the sound of alternatives to incarceration? CASE STUDY PART FOUR: a sound object

A day before the listening session, April Wilson returned the digital audio recorder to Rhine. It contained twenty-two short audio recordings made by individuals in the group. Rhine took notes from his own listening analysis of the material; reflecting on each sound's identifiable sources, its sonorous qualities, possible subjective associations, and what each recording might mean socially. From these notes, he identified a number of themes that cut across the twenty-two recordings. These themes allowed him to combine some of the sounds into single compositions.

When Ultra-red members work with audio recorded materials to create sound objects for organized listening, they take great care to what extent they manipulate the original sound. Alternatively, they may edit the recording to conceal or reveal the compression of time. Perhaps they will apply only a modest equalization to "naturalize" the high and low-end frequencies of the recording. The resulting sound object does little to call attention to its own constructedness—even though all sound objects are constructed as long as the apparatus mediates the experience of listening.

For other sound objects, the researcher may use signal processing, "unnaturally" emphasizing certain frequencies and de-emphasizing others. She may radically cut a sound, arrange a sound's placement or movement across the stereophonic field, stretch or condense the duration of a sound, looping a sound, or a combination of any of these. In the context of the listening session with Prototypes, Rhine used mostly subtle interventions into the original audio recordings. He felt that even the most restrained edit and faint equalization would defamiliarize the listening experience because of his decision to combine the sounds, resulting in a dozen sound objects out of the twenty-two original recordings.

With one sound object in particular (sound object #5), Rhine opted to create a contradiction within the material itself. That contradiction involved juxtaposing three different audio recordings; the slamming of a door, a women's voice demanding respect from an abuser, and the rattling of a chain-linked fence. The elements were arranged to suggest a narrative. He also used such devices as the reversal of a delay (creating a dramatic crescendo with a sharp cut-off), and repetition of part of the vocal recording. The object proved to be the most obviously constructed but also the most dramatic. With this object, Rhine wanted to test how the group would respond knowing that some of the women would recognize their source material but in surprising juxtapositions.

appendix II.3

Every sound exists in time and space. And since time and space are the building blocks of human activity and struggle, sound is a venue where perception meets action. It is where the body politic encounters the material.

Ultra-red are guided in our investigations by practices of political listening found in the fields of organizing and specific forms of political education. Theories of sound, perception, aesthetics, listening, and politics inform this work. Here are two key reference points for our work.

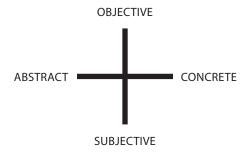
The French sound theorist Pierre Schaeffer rejected the binaristic separation between active listening and passive hearing.



Pierre Schaeffer (1910-1995), French music theorist, composer, inventor, and founder of the Groupe de Recherche Musicales. He coined the term *musique concrète* in 1948 first to describe a genre of music based on pre-recorded sounds. Later the term designated a research approach that prioritized listening in the concrete over composing in the abstract.

Below, the commonplace binary between hearing and listening that Schaeffer rejects as too simplistic to describe the complex interaction of listening modes or practices.

Hearing (Passive Reception) Listening (Active Reception)



Inspired by phenomenology, Schaeffer theorized a more dynamic exchange within the field of sound organized along two continuums: concrete and abstract, and subjective and objective (see above).

Delineated within the intersection of these dialectics, Schaeffer proposed four intersecting and constitutive practices (see next page).

- 1. Listening identifies sounds by the real-world events that cause them.
- 2. Perceiving reduces sound to its sonorous qualities as we bodily experience them, such as tone-color, pitch, volume, and the spatial placement of sound.

From concrete to abstract, we open Schaeffer's program for experimental music to an analysis of every-day life. So, in militant sound inquiry,

- 3. Hearing focuses on subjective associations such as the memories a sound triggers.
- 4. And, comprehending occurs when we critically analyze sound in relation to social meanings.

#### **OBJECTIVE**

# 4. Comprehend [Comprender Es.]

### 1. Listen [Écouter Fr. / Escuchar Es.]

### Example:

"I hear a sound that signifies the 70% that Los Angeles spends in its city budget on public safety. The police tell us that they bring safety. But organizing the community is how we have created safety in our neighborhood."

### Example:

"I hear a sound caused by a Los Angeles Police squad car siren."

## 3. Hear [Entendre Fr. / Entender Es.]

## 2. Perceive [*Ouïr* Fr. / *Oír* Es.]

### Example:

"I hear a sound that I associate with my first encounter with the police. I was afraid they would take my brother from us. Today I hear and see the police in my neighborhood more than ever."

### Example:

"I hear a sound that I perceive to fluctuate in pitch between high to low. The sound ricochets off the buildings and causes me terrible pain the closer it approaches."

### **SUBJECTIVE**

The four practices of listening schematized by Pierre Schaeffer. Ultra-red's modifications center around the abstract modes. For Schaeffer, abstract listening served music as an end in itself. See Michel Chion, *Guide to Sound Objects*, for a detailed introduction to Schaeffer's ideas.

Paulo Freire (1921-1997), Brazillian philosopher and educator. Renowned for his approach to teaching as forming critical consciousness, Freire has influenced numerous political and pedagogical practices including popular education, participatory action research, and organizing rooted in the historical protagonism of the poor.



Moving on, we come to the second reference point in Ultra-red's militant sound inquiry. The Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire also roots his theory of radical education in the relation between abstract and concrete, and objective and subjective.

In Freire's education for critical consciousness, people start from their lived experience. Coming together in a group, they abstract, recount, discuss those experiences together. In the process of reflecting they then analyze their stories in order to understand the world as socially produced and, therefore, changeable. The dialectical relation between subjective and objective reminds us that by critically analyzing and acting upon the objective world we also transform subjectivity.

The praxis of political listening at the center of militant sound inquiry shifts between silent and active engagement. By attending to dissonance and by foregrounding the other against the background of the self, political listening drives the dialectical exchange between self and the world.

#### **OBJECTIVE**

### Critical Analysis

### Example:

"We critically examine our stories and begin to arrive at an analysis of how the police work and their true function in our neighborhoods, while simultaneously rents go up and more businesses move in where we cannot afford to shop. Is this gentrification?"

### Social Structure / Social Action

### Example #1:

"We live in a social system that contradictorily claims freedom and yet incarcerates more people than any country while our city spends 70% on public safety."

## Example #2:

"We test our analysis by reducing dependency on the police. Does the city reduce funding for police?"

#### Collective Reflection

#### Example:

"We come together to listen and abstract our experiences into stories. We hear the similarities and differencees in our accounts of police violence. We realize that our experiences of the police are not wholly individual but shared."

### Lived Experience

### Example:

"We experience as part of everyday life in the barrio, how the police never come when we need them. They only appear to arrest our young people and jail our neighbors who try to make a living as street vendors."

### **SUBJECTIVE**

Schematic of the popular education process. Notice the two examples in the "Social Structure" quadrant. The first describes the conditions of experience. The second describes a social action taken to test an analysis catalyzing the next cycle of the popular education process.

### Discussion Questions for Part II:

- 1. What are the practices of listening that already exist in the communities of struggle with which you are familiar? How are those practices performed individually or collectively?
- 2. What are some of the obstacles that make it difficult for individuals in a community of struggle to listen to each other?
- 3. In Ultra-red's experience, an investigation team may choose to use objects other than audio recordings, such as video, photographs, drawings, poetry, gestures or tableaux. How are such objects still operating within a sound investigation?
- 4. If a generative sound object poses problems more than it describes or reflects reality, how is that useful?
- 5. How might the same audio materials be used differently to create sound objects that privilege one listening practice over others? Why would that consideration be useful?

on their terms, not ours. [. . .]

Before we ever got around to saying what we had to say, we listened.

And in the process we built up both their trust in us and their confidence in themselves.

John Lewis
Walking with the Wind:
A Memoir of the Movement (1998)

### III.1 step five. a listening session

**B**y this point, the investigation has followed a question relevant to the constituency and struggle to which the investigative team is accountable.

The team has made audio recordings of sounds with concrete significance to the constituency. These recordings have been composed into a series of sound objects intended to catalyze collective listening, which occurs at a listening session.

In preparation for a listening session, the investigative team first determines who needs to be present. How the sound investigation connects to the constituency's larger political organizing work will determine whether the listening procedure involves a small number of community members or a larger convening of the constituency and its allies. Everyone who attends is considered a researcher. There is no audience.

The session is facilitated using a protocol composed by the investigative team. Protocols generally involve the following sequence of actions: First, the investigative team members welcome those in attendance, state the aims of the investigation, and describe how the event will unfold. The team then plays the sound objects one at a time. The objects are played without introduction to avoid narrowing the listening to a search for evidence of that information.

After each sound object is played, the facilitator asks, "What did you hear?" and invites those present to respond in writing, by speaking their responses, or by both writing and speaking. Team members record every response onto flipchart paper as faithfully as possible, even if the responses are redundant.

/ PROTOCOLS FOR A LISTENING SESSION / have been composed by Ultrared for organizing collective listening to pre-recorded sounds. The protocols seek to put the recording and its listeners into process by privileging the ear that hears over the sound recording itself. For this listening session the participants included women from the substance abuse support organization, Prototypes. [Claremont, 60 min, 16. 08. 2011]

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- Introduction Explain the listening session procedure and its purpose. Suggest various listening modalities beyond identifying sound sources such as perceiving concrete aspects of sounds, hearing subjective associations and comprehending the social meaning of sounds. Verify that audience members consent to being videotaped.
- 2 Listen Play a series of twelve sound objects, approximately one minute in length. Introduce each object only by a number, one through twelve. The sound objects have been composed from twenty-two audio recordings made by individual participants in response to the question, "What is the sound of alternatives to incarceration?" This is the first time the participants have heard all of the audio recordings.
- 3 "What did you hear?" Immediately after playing each sound object, invite participants to approach the table and respond to the question, "What did you hear?" by speaking into the microphone and/or writing their responses on the paper covering the table. Annuance "Time" after one minute.
- 4 Repeat steps #2 and #3 for each sound recording.
- 5 Discussion Open the room up for a discussion about the experience after listening to all twelve sound objects.



Listening session set up for "On The Edgware Road", Centre for Possible Studies, London, 2012.

# What is the sound of alternatives to incarceration? CASE STUDY PART FIVE: a listening session

The women from Prototypes returned to the Pitzer College gallery on Tuesday, 16 August. In the center of the room was a long table covered with white paper on which sat two microphones and markers. Two-dozen chairs were arranged in a large circle with a few chairs set to the side for members of the group who did not want to appear on camera. Rhine sat at one end of the table with his laptop computer, speakers, and a microphone. Video cameras were placed around the gallery to videotape the event.

After the women took their seats, Rhine explained the protocols for the listening session (see previous page). After giving a brief description of the different ways we listen, the procedure began. (Poem objects composed from responses to the twelve sound objects appear at the end of this workbook.)

Ultra-red has conducted dozens of listening sessions over the years. This event yielded a number of unique responses. As can be seen on the video (www.youtube.com/watch?v=plXiXVOBec4), many of the women res-ponded to the sound objects before hearing the entire recording. This became a key topic in the later discussion. The women began to analyze how they struggle to listen; feeling anxious about being silent long enough to hear another person rather rushing to assert their opinions. This produced a number of remarkable observations and generated a sophisticated discussion on the links between gender oppression (e.g. not being listened to as women), the relationship between survival and addiction, and the connection between solidarity and listening.

The event also opened up a new space in the womens' collective process. The listening procedure and the subsequent conversation generated a number new themes to what the group had developed the week before. The new themes included the struggles between the individual, knowing how and when to ask for help, listening to others when asking for help, and struggling with institutions that reproduce oppressive silence.

Some women spoke directly to the experience of hearing their sounds in a new way. As one put it; "I tend to be very strong-headed. I think there's only one way and that's my way. I tend to be the same way with how I hear things. But in this process, I found myself really listening to how other people were hearing things. And they heard things differently from me. And that was really great. I've never really thought about that before — not like this. I learned a lot." Finally, the women also agreed that Pink Floyd was the greatest rock band ever.

### III.2 step six. an analysis

Once all the sound objects have been played and responded to, the facilitator invites participants to organize the written responses into categories, themes, contradictions, or questions. This activity is decidedly pedagogical, for it inspires participants share personal recollections and historical and other contextual information.

Whereas the sound objects functioned as codifications of bodies of knowledge and conceptual frameworks, the organizing of terms produces a collective literacy and analysis about the issues under investigation. It also provokes the constituency's ongoing desire for knowledge in the form of questions to guide the next round of the sound investigation.

In time, a new set of field recordings is made, followed by another collective listening session. These listening sessions can supplement archival research, interviews with official experts, the reading and discussion of key literature, meetings with members of allied struggles, and affinity-style actions of civil disobedience and disruption.

# What is the sound of alternatives to incarceration? CASE STUDY PART SIX: an analysis

Two months after the listening session with residents from Prototypes, Ultra-red's Dont Rhine visited with the women one more time. It was the final event of the *PerpiTube* project. But it was the first opportunity for the women to watch the YouTube video.

During the open conversation that followed, Alexandra Juhasz, one of the curators of *PerpiTube*, asked the women to talk about what, if any, impact their brief collaboration with Ultra-red had on them. One women responded, "The performance really made me aware of what it means to listen. I don't think about listening the same way anymore. As a result of doing this, I have been much more sensitive to the other women in our program; listening to what they say and being open to them."

Another said: "I have never been to a college or on the campus of a college before. Being here I thought, I can do this. I have a right to be here. And you didn't treat us like junkies. You were interested in what we had to say. I haven't experienced that very often."

"I told my 18-year old son about this." Began a third woman. "My son watches YouTube often and he saw our video. He said to me, 'Mom, I've never seen you do anything like that before and I was so proud of you, watching you and listening to you in that setting.'" She then added, "It was the first time my son ever said he was proud of me."

One of the Prototypes residents asked Rhine what he thought were alternatives to incarceration. He spoke of his AIDS activism and what he saw as the need for alternatives to incarceration as part of the fight for HIV justice. The women emphasized the need to address the issues of housing, poverty, and recovery together. It was an analysis that had come out of their lived experience and as the result of collectivizing their knowledge.

But what would become of that process once the women left the Prototypes facility and returned to their communities? In later reports to his comrades in the HIV justice movement, Rhine wondered how much of the tension expressed by the women between individual recovery and mutual support is in fact a manifestation of the structural limits of the institution that stops short of organizing collective self-determination and political agency out in the community after the women leave the residency?

In lieu of this particular investigation continuing, the YouTube video and the protocols developed and tested for the inquiry have since been taken up by other groups, including groups of people in recovery, around the United States and beyond.

### III.3 appendix

Social practice — A general field in which the world is produced, reproduced, and developed within, through, and in tension with ideology and its practices.

Tools — Social practices of listening become tools for struggle when they are used to transform relations.

Protocols — Protocols facilitate the use of intentional listening as a tool for transformation.

Listening protocols facilitate, through the mediating practice of collective listening, a group's transition from one stage of the organizing process to another. Thus, protocols are tools that facilitate the intentional political work of the community and must be distinguished from the community's existing social practices of listening.

A community will always have in place social practices of listening. These may range from religious gatherings, civic events, and collective celebrations, to calls for public silence in the wake of violence and suffering.

The protocols sound researchers compose to guide collective listening may appropriate a community's social practices of listening but with the aim of transforming rather than reproducing the relations in and beyond the community.

Over the years, Ultra-red has experimented with a variety of protocols for organized listening. These protocols include sound walks, listening sessions, oral histories, and processes for developing a research question. We did not invent any of these protocols but have merely appropriated them from the fields of music, popular education, and ethnography, among others.

A protocol can be as simple as asking the question: "What did you hear?" More complex protocols may call for arranging the room in a particular way, or will guide the movement of bodies, or significantly slow down the call-and-response of dialogue. Regardless of their form, it is important to remember that listening events occupy just one moment in the militant sound investigation. They are tools within the long labor of solidarity. With time, these tools of intentional listening may inspire new social practices within the community.



Listening session set-up for "First Encuentro," KYTN, Dundee, Scotland, 2010.







#### Discussion Ouestions for Part III:

- 1. If an organized listening event has no audience, then
  - a. What is the role of the person attending who may not be from the local community or have familiarity with the struggle itself?
  - b. If people hear the sound objects differently based on their experience with the struggle then what is the usefulness of having outsiders present for the listening session?
- 2. How might different locations and times for the listening session impact the outcome? For example, how might a listening session in an unfamiliar location (e.g. the gallery described in the case study) produce useful outcomes different from a familiar location?
- 3. Why is a protocol important in a collective inquiry and not makes things up as the group goes along?
- 4. What protocols already exist in the communities of struggle with which you are familiar? How were those protocols invented and how have they been revised?
- 5. In your experience, what is the relationship between intention and improvisation in political struggle?

Previous page; images of Ultra-red listening sessions. Top: "Silent | Listen," Banff, Canada, 2005 (Photo: Walter Phillips Gallery). Middle: Raven Row Listening Session, London, 2009 (Photo: Raven Row). Bottom: "Sound of Freedom," New York, 2012 (Photo: Arika).

# Poem Objects:

# What is the sound of alternatives to incarceration?

The following poem objects were composed verbatim from responses to twleve sound objects presented during a listening session for residents of the Prototypes recovering house.

## Sound object #1:

Pink Floyd time lived time experi enced time line clocks ticking time clocks ticking alarms wind chimes like spirits

### Sound object #2:

burning fire copying machine paper tearing paper shuffling count sounds on keyboards education a mess pages turning some thing being built some one working hard

## Sound object #3:

authority and law justice a second chance at new life success tears and happiness some one getting their life back together a court case some one's on the right track an alternative to prison hope and appreciation freedom and relief achievement hard work and dedication pays off independence

## Sound object #4:

reaching out for myself it's being scared sadness and powerless some one trying to reach out to family and friends acceptance some one trying to find support some body missing their family sadness a nine one one call

## Sound object #5:

anger life and death anger hate racism some body that was hurt some body being endangered captivity anger and closing the back door rage closing the back door chains cell doors opening some body being afraid and then some body over coming that fear some one upset a nice drive and then at the end it turning ugly

## Sound object #6:

struggle hard work and determin ation strength perseverement struggle determination accomplish ing some thing and cheering motivation empowerment and en couragement struggle with will power praise and encouragement effort some body that's not willing to give up accomplishment dedication and praise straining and completion

## Sound object #7:

a clock ticking with time punching tickets going into Disney land tick ing a clock ticking like some one's going to a ticket booth a light bulb being turned on and off time cards getting punched a repetitiveness

## Sound object #8:

chanting and praying spirituality and chanting praise faith religion religion hope faith and serenity belief surrender and believing in a higher power spirituality praise praise and serenity

## Sound object #9:

wind chimes happy music hope life bells and love tranquility and peace a breezy day on the front porch happiness freedom childhood joy wind chimes joy the Multiman freedom and relaxation harmony wind chimes meditation a Santa Claus

## Sound object #10:

sociological aspects life and suffering memories truth and addiction a motivated speaker in carceration sincerity past guilt and resentments being washed away my life and the ways to get it better the beginning of a description of alcoholism and drug addiction hope pain scary truth hurt past memories regret addiction

## Sound object #11:

chaos conversation dining in a busy deli arguments raucous at a restaurant society family functions and gatherings happiness peo ple eating together in peace everyday life family and friends joining together being happy for holiday spirits a public place joyfulness people meeting together gathering community social and communication

#### Sound object #12:

silence tranquility peace mute and deaf a concert cheering change sum of the opening at a concert every day life quietness to excitement money shouting a fund raiser antici pation and achievement money and celebration partying cheering and cash fun the world moving on silent patience pain of happiness and relief an introduction to some thing big shopping and Pink Floyd people working together



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#### VIDEO PRODUCTION

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Nine workbooks, 2010—2014 by Ultra-red

Nº. 1 — Ballroom Archive Project 2010

Nº. 2 - Five Protocols for Organized Listening 2011

Nº. 3 — Dundee 2011

Nº. 4 — Protocols for the Sound of Freedom 2012

No. 5 — Four Protocols for a School of Echoes 2012

No. 6 - Radical Education Workbook 2012

**Nº. 7** — **Re:Assembly** 2013

Nº. 8 — The Co of Kotti & Co 2013

Nº. 9 - Practice Sessions 2014

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