

Reflections on The Mentorship Programme (2nd edition) by Viv Corringham

This has been an enjoyable and rewarding experience for me. I had the chance to share my enthusiasm for listening and improvisation with a group of creative, open-minded artists, willing to try all my strange requests, e.g. stand at a loud, crowded street corner with your eyes closed.

In Hong Kong I used many of Pauline Oliveros' "Deep Listening" exercises and sonic meditations, which emphasise listening as a source of inspiration and joy and as a way of opening up to the world. Everybody kept a sound journal throughout the process to notice progress and change. Through sound walks we practised full body listening and explored our connection with places. This led to some interesting presentations by the group in which they demonstrated the abstract notion of "sense of place" in sonic and dramatic ways. Over the course of the four-day workshop these responses became richer and more personal.

Another focus was the role of listening in community-building. Developing a community of listeners can be very helpful, especially in difficult times. We listened to environmental sounds, to the sounds of our own bodies and thoughts, and we listened to other people's words. In pair-work I noticed an increase in everyone's attentiveness to what their partners were telling them and in their own ability to remember and report it back to the group. Singing together moved the focus from individual to group sounds and despite some initial self-consciousness everybody soon found their place, listening and improvising together sensitively. Sometimes there was playfulness and a rediscovery of that pleasure in sound-making we all had as children.

We also worked with memory and imagination. I gave the group some difficult tasks: to turn an experience of walking to the park into a vocal performance, and to make work based on a relationship with some specific place. With characteristic openness, the group responded to the challenge by creating presentations that were individual and engaging.

In Manila we continued the group listening and sound-walking sessions but expanded our focus to include local inhabitants. Drawing on my own process in my long term project "Shadow-walks," I requested that each Hong Kong artist should be taken for a walk by an inhabitant of Manila. 98B, the partnering organization, found local artists who chose familiar walks that had some meaning for them. The Hong Kong artists recorded these walks and were then asked to create short, public, work-in-progress performances based on this experience at 98B, either solo or with their walk partner.

Before our partnered walks, we had been feeling overwhelmed by traffic, pollution and noise in Manila. We noticed that we could hear little evidence of our own existence as we walked; footsteps were inaudible. We worked on finding stillness and making space for ourselves through feeling our weight on the ground and by listening beyond the loudest sounds to the more distant and quiet ones. Expanding ourselves through listening counteracted our sense of being squeezed by the stress of simply walking around.

A shared experience after our duo walks was that the local person's ease in this environment and knowledge of how to walk in the road without getting knocked down seemed to transmit itself to each of us. We absorbed some of this local street wisdom, navigated more easily and felt more comfortable. In our final group listening session we sang in a square with fountains, reflecting sounds we heard there and also creating new sounds. The group noticed the details of the soundscape and worked with a strong listening presence.

The final performances were a delight! Heidi Law had found a place of tranquility and reflected it with recordings of bells on a campus, her own version of a local song weaving through the chimes like a memory. Tung Wing-hong and his walking companion were perfectly matched; with their heads bent low over sound recordings they recreated their journey as a lively sonic conversation. Sze Ka-yan created an engaging, dripping installation that brought to mind transformation and alchemy. Berry Law gave a dynamic and energetic performance where I felt I really saw him clearly. And Lin Wah sang us through the dreams and hidden memories of the city.

Thank you to the group for joining me to make this journey together. In our brief time together you reached levels of listening, sounding and performance far beyond my expectations. And thank you to Rachel Wong, Samson Cheung Choi-sang, Yang Yeung, Alice Wong and all at soundpocket.

About Viv Corringham



Viv Corringham is a British sound artist and vocalist currently based in New York, USA. She has worked internationally since the early 1980s. She is interested in exploring people's special relationship with familiar places and how that links to personal history, memory and association. These concerns are at the heart of her ongoing project "Shadow-walks".

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