

Week 8

Gwyn Anna and Jo

Aarhus, Denmark

Sound and music

We knew this week on sound would come and somehow it would be a kind of cornerstone for our collaborative thinking.

In the last hour together, we titled the research as:

The Misperception of Sound.

We all hear and relate to sound differently.

In the first moments we used blindfolds to sensitise ourselves to sound. Blindfolds are a “rest for the eyes”. At points the whole body becomes an “ear”. In the moments after, there was overload and the noticing of the hum / racket of sound, sound pollution...some terrible, just terrible elevator music, bad covers of songs, low level hum of speakers and strip lighting, coffee machines, traffic, young men revving their motor and massive drills doing something, whilst I try to eat lunch.

And somehow these noises are normal, acceptable.

What is acceptable sound?

A room full of D/deaf people can be rather noisy, chatter, clatter, laughter, escaped vocal sounds of urgency or the banging about for attention.

Yes, there's an assumption D/deaf spaces are quiet. And yet when D/deaf people are in hearing spaces, for some there's a self-consciousness of the noises they unknowingly produce or burden of conditioned etiquette that can limit behaviour, sense of belonging or presence.

Reclaiming sound

Challenging our relationship with our voice

Permission to make sounds

Between us there is a desire to pursue a project that gathers D/deaf people, holding a space where sounds, voices and movement can be released and expressed without fear or judgment. The D/deaf Choir was not something we could achieve in this one week although some of the exercises we tried would perhaps be useful in a future process with D/deaf collaborators, And importantly, to be aware and absolutely steer away from associations with speech therapy, there is challenge and trauma that can limit expression and sometimes presence in a predominantly hearing world.

Anna loves music, and I can feel the difference of what her experience of music is compared with my own. Our week felt like we were exploring how people receive and experience sound differently.

Conversations on silence

Qualities of silence, awkward silence, visual silence, waiting silence, silences of anticipation or nervousness, the shared silence of ease with a person...

Anna mentioned that her relationship with sound had changed from being a fixed thing to becoming "fluid". Over our last 6 months, through movement and the creation of safe spaces, our collective inhibitions have drifted and it brings me joy to experience all of us hearing and non hearing people vocalising wildly together.

Try this one.

the sounds of facial expressions,

In pairs, facing one another

Make a facial expression, subtle or not, then make the sound that goes with this expression, call and response

This can be very quick, instinctive and immediate.

So we're somewhere in an audio-visual, sound, long-form interpretation.

Anna spent the most of Thursday with her back to the speaker, there were various added interpretations, BSL, danced, embodied, notated, drawn, vibrated, conducted, written...

Sound is evocative, the imagination cannot help but fill the gaps, our brains are curious and are striving to form image, narrative or relationship.

Choice and filtering

As a hearing person, for the most, I get to choose. I can choose that a conversation is something I don't want to get involved with, or filter out stuff after deciding it's not something I want to hear. Anna tells me choice is not always an option, the patten of conversation between work modes, the extra bits of organising that happens and only some of the information is relayed.

We recorded sounds of communication and attempted communication, some of the sounds are barely audible some are harsh, loud outbursts that a hearing person might want to temper the volume and make this more acceptable, yet Anna liked these sounds so we kept them in. And somehow my bias or censoring of sound has been challenged, why shouldn't these sounds be part of life, the sound of inclusion.

In our final three minute edit we captured something.

It's infectious,

I find it difficult to listen to it without smiling. The recording is of suppressed laughter, laughter when you're not supposed to be laughing, laughing with your mouth closed, whispered patten, gossiping in BSL.

We called it

The Sound of Smiling.

Written by Jo Fong with thanks to Anna Seymour