

BRIGHTON PEOPLE'S THEATRE

BPT Sound Design Workshop Creative Tasks lead by Melanie Wilson

Hello!

Here follows full details on how to carry out the creative tasks I proposed to you in the introductory video.

What are we doing?

The goal of these tasks is about tuning into the experience of listening deeply to the world around you, and being open to inspiration. If that seems a little difficult to settle into or makes you feel restless to begin with, don't worry! Just stick with it and try to detach yourself from thinking too much.

Listening attentively to the way time unfolds is the cornerstone of making theatre, not just making sound. So we're building useful muscles.

If you're pushed for time, just choose one of the making exercises to do.

Listening Exercise I

For this you'll need a piece of paper and a pen and a window in your house that opens, that you can stand or sit comfortably beside.

Open the window and put your head out.

Spend about 3 to 5 minutes tuning in to the environment around you, listening to all the sound that come to your ear.

Once you think you've noticed every element of sound, write down all the things you can hear, responding to these questions:

If you were going to recreate the sonic landscape outside your house, what sounds would you need?

Where would each sound be placed in the picture? (left, right, centre, above, below and gradations between)

How loud would each sound be in relation to the others?

Which sounds are continuous, and which sounds are episodic?

If the sound environment outside your house were a shape, what would that be?

The more you listen, what kinds of stories begin to suggest themselves from the environment of sound outside you house?

Listening Exercise II

Great work so far!

For this exercise take paper and pen again, and choose a room in your house that you can sit in the middle of.

Tune in to the sounds you can hear, like before, for 3 - 5 minutes.

Note down the elements of sound you can hear, but this time you are working in 360 degrees, in surround sound.

Here's a new thought:

What sound could you introduce into the room that would change its emotional temperature? It could be any sound that might suggest a story, and it doesn't have to be a real world sound either.

Examples might be the sound of laughter from the flat below, or street outside

The sound of a church bell

The sound of a busy city in Brazil

The sound of an alligator or butterfly

Making Exercise I

Now we're going to create a 'performance' we can soundtrack. For this you will need: a location in your house, a collection of objects of your choosing, a piece of music or sound and a clock or stopwatch.

Here's the details:

Create a still life image somewhere in your house, using any items you would like to combine. It can be small, like on the edge of a window sill. Or larger, like a section of a room.

Think of the image you are creating as a portrait, or a stage or film set, or an installation. Every element tells a part of the story, so feel free to bring things from other parts of the house.

Now you are going to create a 'performance' of your still life that will last around 4 minutes.

Choose a piece of sound or music to 'score' this performance. It can be music that you own or find on the internet. Think about these ideas:

What story are you telling with your sound?

Does it tell the same story as the image, or does it contrast with a different feeling?

Does the music or sound begin immediately at the beginning of the 4 minutes and go throughout to the end? Or does it begin part way into the performance, or only for a short amount of time?

Once you have made these decisions, stage the performance for yourself, or invite a person in your house to be your audience. Be specific about where you place the audience members chair to watch the scene.

Use a stop watch or clock to time yourself and any music playing device you like. This source can be outside of the room if needs be.

Well done!

Now create a score or script for this performance, by writing down instructions for how to re-create it. Include: location, types of objects, music choice and operation timing. This will be given to another member of the workshop to perform, so be as clear as you can.

Making Exercise II

In this final exercise, we're going to make a 2 minute sound track, using an orchestra of sound making objects from your home.

The theme will be the experience of your life at the moment, whatever aspect of that you wish you reflect, be that calmly poetic or chaotically noisy!

Start by building your orchestra. Collect together various household objects, which could be any items that make an interesting sound when hit, chimed, shaken or manipulated

Examples could be:

- a bowl that rings when you hit it gently with a fork
- a water bottle containing water to shake
- a piece of paper or fabric
- a wine glass or two, containing water
- a bucket that makes a good thumping sound
- some rice or pasta or lentils in a sealed container
- a rubber band

Arrange the orchestra on a table top or on the floor, in a shape that makes it easy for you to access each item.

Practise with your 'instruments', identifying the kinds of sounds that feel good to you and reflect your theme. Put them in a sequence. Think of it as a piece of very weird domestic music!

Some ideas to help you:

Can you create sounds that work like an 'underscore', which make a continuous sound, so you can play others over the top?

Have you got a range of sounds that include high pitched to low?

Can you create patterns and rhythms?

Can you create 'one time event' sounds, like chimes or booms?

Can you include a moment of silence?

What's the story of your piece? Is it slow to fast, simple to complex, meditative, repetitive, comic, chaotic?

Finalise your soundtrack by practising it a few times.

Finish with an official performance, which lasts about 2 - 3 minutes. The audience can be a person that lives in your house, your cat, a photo of your family or for your glorious self.

Bravo!

Now write a score for your magnum opus in the form of instructions to another 'musician' to perform.

This might go something like:

Begin by slowly rolling the jar full of rice, keep this sound going quietly throughout.

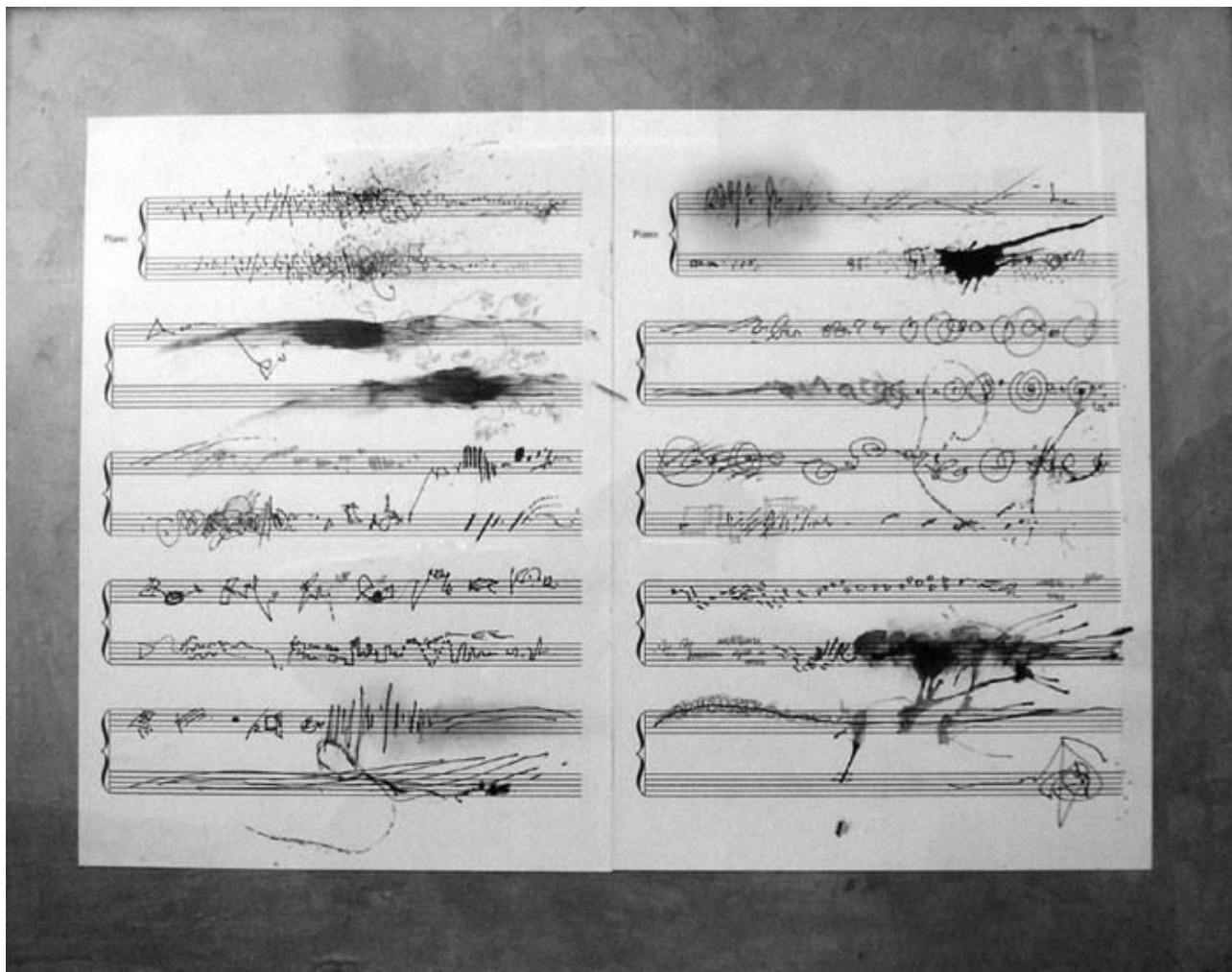
At 30 secs bang on the bucket twice with a wooden spoon then immediately crumple up the paper

At 40 seconds, begin to run a wet finger around the rim of the wine glass, setting up a whine.

Keep going.

*At 55 seconds, pick up the keys and shake them, slowly at first then getting faster.
etc etc.*

Or you might choose to draw your instructions in the form of a visual score, like this one!:



What now?

Once you've completed the tasks, email your instruction script/scores for the Making Exercises (or a photo of the page if you've handwritten or drawn it) to Elena at Brighton People's Theatre. She will pass them onto a fellow workshop member, and get back to you with your own score to re-create:

elena@brightonpeoplestheatre.org

We can catch up about all of this in our Zoom call on Monday 27th April, if anything is unclear, or just to chat.

We can share our experiences of re-creating each other's work on Wednesday 29th April. Keep your listening Exercise notes to hand for that.

Any more?

If you're interested in finding out about my projects, there are details on my website: melaniewilson.org.uk

Here are some links to specific things that might inspire you in your tasks (but not necessary):

A chapter of headphones piece called 'Women of Record', which took the listener on a route around Knole House in Sevenoaks:

<https://soundcloud.com/melanie-j-wilson/women-of-record-record-five>

A piece of music made for a performance by artist Sophia Clist, made mostly from the sound of her hands making the paper sculpture:

<https://soundcloud.com/melanie-j-wilson/hands-full>

An early headphones piece, for which the participant laid in bed with their eyes bandaged, placed in the mind of a patient blinded in an accident:

<https://soundcloud.com/melanie-j-wilson/the-view-from-here>

Who else?

Here are some artists and sound designers making interesting work:

Circumstance

<http://wearecircumstance.com/>

'The Encounter', Complicite

<http://www.complicite.org/productions/TheEncounter>

Susan Phillipsz

<http://www.tanyabonakdargallery.com/artists/susan-philipsz/series-installations>

Janet Cardiff

<http://www.cardiffmiller.com/artworks/walks/index.html>

Ben & Max Ringham

<https://www.benandmax.co.uk/>

Darkfield

<http://www.darkfield.org/>

Silvia Mercuriali

<https://www.silviamercuriali.com/>