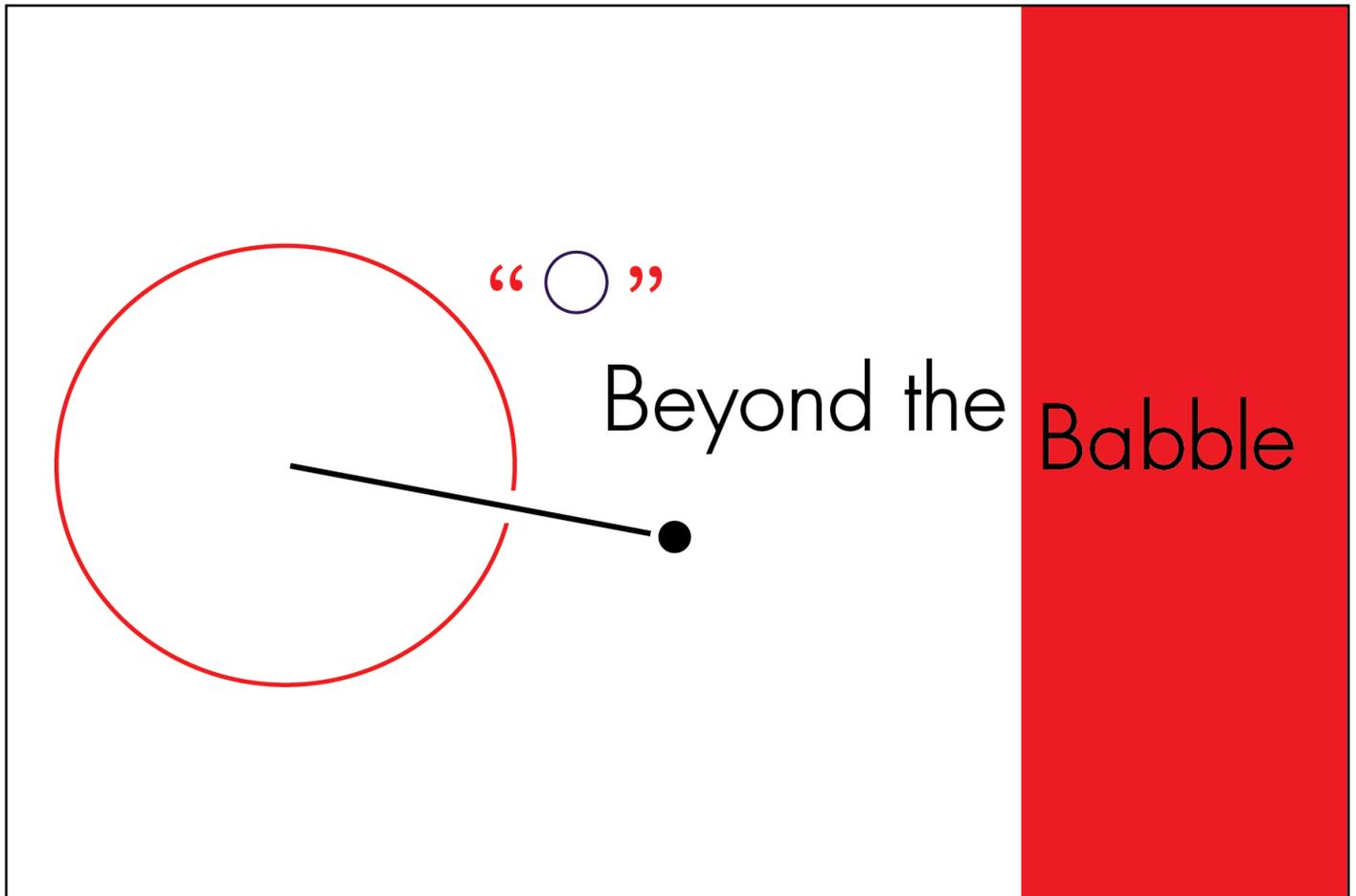


Beyond the Babble:

A conversation about the art of listening between Lucia Scazzocchio (**LS**) and Giota Alevizou (**GA**)



Beyond The Babble is an interactive and participatory audio focused installation, exploring questions of identity, belonging and the fragile nuance of power-shifts around the impact of the collective and individual voice beyond the babble of social noise.

As a '[Social Broadcaster](#)' **Lucia Scazzocchio** has been exploring how individual storytelling and voiced 'declarations' not only empower the narrator as they articulate them, but can create shared empathy and deeper understanding for the listener when heard in the right context, often providing insight into wider stories and current debates.

Dr Giota Alevizou is a digital culture scholar at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the Open University, exploring ways in which creative acts, identity and collective action intersect with the politics of and mainstream representations of austerity and the migration crisis.

GA. You describe yourself as a Social Broadcaster and community facilitator or mediator. Can you elaborate, and link to the ways in which these connects to 'Beyond the Babble' installation at Tate Exchange as part of the Who Are We project?

LS Participants are invited to record personal thoughts, stories and experiences around questions of individual and collective identity as well as collective action. Over the course of the exhibition each recording is integrated into a living and growing sound installation. When heard all together these voices are an unidentifiable babble, however by tuning into a specific channel, each individual voice can be properly integrated, cutting through the noise, and generating its own impact as part of a collective.

GA Certainly the questions will be open, but they can link to existing research and debates inviting participants to record personal thoughts and assumptions, stories and experiences, declarations and commitments or questions around individual and collective identity: Who am I? Who are we? How Can I act?

LS It could be something along the lines of 'How do you identify yourself? What influences your identity? How and why has this changed? Then, who do you identify with? and what do you do in terms of acting for what you believe in?

GA Can you describe how these participants experience expressing themselves across these issues with examples from your previous projects?

LS By inviting people to reveal personal journeys and stories you get to understand how they got to certain conclusions or situations, where they're at in their thoughts; why a certain place is important and how they've adapted, or what they have become in order to fit in or not and what has become important or why; and in order to come to that point, you have to get to the more personal story ... it's more a process of revealing through a conversation ...and as they talk, they're almost working it out - they may not have really thought like that until they are in

this sort of conversation; so it's the asking little questions to get people to reflect. It's almost becomes a monologue, it's like thinking out loud...

GA You mention that this is about inviting and getting people to reflect deeper about certain things, moving away from the 'superficiality' of voice in places like say, twitter In a sense it's an opportunity to express themselves in confessional and autobiographical narratives in a different format, without having to worry about issues of exposure, breaches of privacy and surveillance that have become more prevalent these days...

LS Yes, exactly. So the other part of these installations /interviews is juxtaposing the individual and collective and how they can work together; when the individual story can become part of a collective story This is not relevant in the interview per se, but that's where we are getting to in the process.

GA And yes, that element of process is important; I see it in the way you've described it, that individual interviews are part of a process of a [collective] co-interrogation, a performative autobiography; the collective is encountering common voices, which I think is an interesting aspect. I am wondering, what do your subjects feel about the process – a process that I feel is quite emancipatory...

LS It's quite interesting, because it's very similar to therapy. Neither I nor participants come to the conversation with that in mind, (and I make it clear that I am not a trained therapist) but often it becomes that because you've got somebody interested in you, someone who's actively listening to you, and there's something that happens; so the more someone is interested, the more you want to reveal and so – it's often very emotional; In the last project [Something to Declare](#) about half of the people that participated, had an emotional moment, some held back tears. Once people have the opportunity to be listened to, they open up and let go... Yet there's this revelatory moment, where you 'can hear something click', people find it exceptionally rewarding, this the process of being listened to/heard...



GA Is the fact that the conversation is recorded for a 'sonic' installation important in that part of revelation – especially because it can be anonymous – or also part of a radio broadcast. And how do people feel about the output? Is it more the output or the process then?

LS A lot of people after an interview have said they enjoyed the process and learned a lot about themselves through these self narratives ... But a lot goes into the editing people come back to me and say That they felt that when they were speaking, they were all muddled up and confused and they were surprised how clear they sounded. So in the edit I find the thread and find the essence in what they are saying to produce a clear story And so people are surprised at how eloquent they come across in the final piece. Some people respond to the broadcast and repost it and share and are very proud, or use it to promote what they are doing; Others do nothing about it, in some ways they are working out who they are, and I am synthesising who they are at that moment...

GA Could *Beyond the Babble* be used as an installation to raise awareness about the importance of different stories or as a 'meditative exercise' to media literacy? How does your role as a social broadcaster then relate to this? And how is it different from say, a social media facilitator?

LS The 'social' in social broadcasting doesn't refer to the 'social' of social media; it's about the individual story and it aims to help us understand the wider social context through this story. So the social, focuses on the idea of a voice within society, rather than a sharable piece of content; that's an important distinction. Social media is good in terms of surface content and immediacy; you see a picture and you like it or share it, but often you don't go beyond that. So I am trying to go beyond that. It's very hard to go deep and these conversations are about giving a bit more context – understanding the journey and experience of what someone has been through, what they are doing and who they are . You know when someone enjoys cooking – silly example I know – but you are not going to find out about the memory of a smell that inspired them without having an intimate process and going a little bit deeper, and I think that the audio interview is a very effective and efficient way to get to that. With a video interview, you need a long time [and training] to feel comfortable (in front of the camera) and people are often very self-conscious, or obsessed about how they look, or whether they are portrayed the way they want; with audio you get passed all of that; it's interesting because you see that even when people are very practiced at interviews [like celebrities] they take much longer to get passed that practiced façade and you get to a wall ... but people who are not used to it, often get

passed that very quickly – people are very willing to reveal and open up when you show an interest in them.

GA Let's talk about other aspects of your work... In parts of my [research](#), notions of cultural and digital citizenship often connect with different articulations of memory and attachment, particularly around the ways in which people communicate aspirations or claim rights to a place and or when they are performing creative rights to 'make place' ... In your previous projects, you also have worked with a variety of publics and especially people in local communities. What does place and belonging mean to the participants in your previous installations? And how is affinity to place and living together expressed through oral declarations? Have there been any particular themes?

LS Isolation and urban environment ... Memory and nostalgia... You have to differentiate between nostalgia and real memory; I have done a lot of projects around the East End – a recent one was around the Afro-Caribbean community living in and around the Isle of Dogs [Backyard - Reflections of Home and Belonging](#) It's a very small community, but the whole project was about this identity within the East End; it was interesting because even across four generations, there was a similar sort of nostalgia about a distant sense of community and how people used to know their neighbours and how everyone used to be in and out of each other's others houses ... I got the same sense of nostalgia from an 80 year old and an 18 year old – how they missed this sense of community that they had when they were growing up and that it's not there any more; sometimes these glossy nostalgic feelings get in the way of memory... But there were of course also the unpleasant memories of racism and discrimination ...] and how it affects a person and how they dealt with that ... there's the recounting of facts and stories and then there's the affect /effect of nostalgia.

GA It is really interesting what you are saying, because the element of affective, emotional nostalgia goes beyond, and often against factual memories, or indeed factual evidence;

this particularly interesting in the recent rise of populism, I think and in current campaigns against Hate, Common Values which can go either way.

LS I've thought about this a lot – and it relates to how you are trying to give context to something; I will have the individual stories as separate stories and then I will create the 'audioscape' as a distinctive piece – a lot of the stories will be interwoven to become one piece – as a collective group – they only become a story because they are grouped together based on a common thread, although individually listening to each story is also important. They create something quite different when they are interwoven. For example in *Backyard -Reflections of Home and Belonging* – each person has a story and on the website, you can hear them individually, but collectively as an audio piece, they give a more complete sense of four generations, of a community, of a place; it's about a very specific experience of a group of people living in the East End but not just specifically there ... you also get the context and meaning of black identity through different moments in history in the UK (from the 50s to now) and also what it means to be a Londoner and a Eastender as well as part of specific community within the EastEnd...You wouldn't get that from the individual stories, you get that when they are all together.

GA This is an interesting story about stories of identity and belonging; It's the interwoven layers of the different stories that matter in generating this form of affective knowledge I guess ... how would that work if they were intersected with each other?

LS In a sense that's what I do with these audioscapes; it's about using the different sounds to punctuate what they are saying; it is becoming more of an artistic piece rather than straightforward oral history (or series of interviews); so the sounds, the music and the sound effects are all there to help us understand and tune into the story and to feel something– to give it emotion. It's not just about listening to straightforward interviews. ... a story is revealed.



GA And I guess that takes social broadcasting within and beyond social media; I see it having the potential to augment affective narratives and situate oral history in Britain within a new genre of sonic art. I think this could be an innovation. How do you feel about that? What are you aiming to communicate artistically and as a media professional?

LS In the same way that a cinematographer will use beautiful settings to tell a story better in film, or a writer will use descriptive words – it's a medium. Sound is my artistic medium and I am a storyteller and I am telling real stories – it's not fiction; and the audioscaping side of things is my creativity – it's my fiction. I'm using these tools to tell a story in the most emotive way, to get the audience interested, to get them engaged. Someone may film a landscape out of their window, but if you add music and a voiceover it becomes a different story...It's these layers of creativity that I am interested in adding to punctuate the emotions and also making something interesting – you are more likely to remember it this way.

GA Is it the blending of your identity as a journalist, broadcaster and 'artist'? and would this type of work be something like an oral history archive or a sonic documentary?

LS It's funny because I've never really thought of myself as an artist, but why not? What I've done so far is more journalistic, but this audioscaping work is more artistic and abstract. I am interested in people and what

they have to say. Everyone has something interesting to say and I want to enable them to say it better ... I am interested in stories of belonging and identity. So the idea of the collective is interesting (to me), because I like putting things in groups and giving context to the stories and addressing them in the oral, sonic context ...

The difference is that news or journalistic work has a temporal significance, I'm listening to a personal story and putting it in context so that you can think

for yourself. What's important through what I am doing (audioscaping) is that I am revealing what they've revealed to me, what is important to them – almost like a flashlight; but it is very subtle and open to interpretation.... Yes it's an oral/sonic documentary, but I am not trying to make a point or convey a particular message it's the voice (or voices) of the participant(s) that do this and sometimes this is very much for the participant(s); its the people involved who sometimes gain more from the process; other times it's the broadcast as an outcome that is more important as a means to tell and 'broadcast' an individual or a collective story.

The participatory audio piece *Beyond the Babble* will be on the 5th floor of the of the Switch House at Tate Modern as Part of the Who Are We? Tate Exchange Programme 14th-19th March.

If you would like to take part contact Lucia at beyondthebabble@cultivators.com

You can learn more about Lucia and explore her previous projects at www.socialbroadcasts.co.uk

You can learn more about Giota's and her work at <http://fass.open.ac.uk/people/pa2859>