

INTERVIEW WITH TIM PARKINSON ABOUT HIS PIECE IN /2009/, OCTOBER 2009

please could you describe what impression you got from the recording you listened to, what draw you attention. also in what circumstances you listened to it.

I made notes in my notebook. So here I will just write them out for you. The notes that seem relevant to your question.

1st listening: Irritation. Who it might be. Recognise Julia's voice. Boredom. (More to do with the mood I was in while packing to leave London. It wasn't a good time to listen to it but I was curious. Just so that you know, I didn't stay bored and irritated all week! It was just the first time listening. Probably more irritation with myself for stupidly trying to listen to something while trying to work out what to pack for the week.)

(2nd listening on the train.)

Birds, fragments of radio, gong sounds, bits of field recording, cafe noises, music, silence is nice, voices. Waiting for things to happen. Interruptions. Hardly any repetition. Single line of presentation. Clusters of activity. Gentle delivery, all intimate like night time radio feeling.

3rd listening 11.30 Monday. (In the flat.) Rain. Seeming deliberate starts and stops.

4th listening 3.00 Tuesday. (In Q-02) Doesn't sound like rain. Forgetting who it is. See the images, enter the world. Mystery of why it is the way it is. Mystery of the composition.

5th listening 3pm Wednesday. (In Q-02)

6th listening 2.45 Thursday. (In Q-02)

7th listening 3.05 Friday (In Q-02)

what changed in your perception by listening it repetitously, and did you already work on your piece in the meantime or only afterwards?

I just got to know the recording more and more. Becoming more familiar with it. I remember in the 3rd listening realising I was asking myself what I feel all the time. Then I must have relaxed about that. I think the recording just became a kind of companion in the week. A parallel pre-existing creation. Yes I was working on the piece from Monday I suppose. By Thursday I was more independent from the previous recording. Certainly by Friday. By then I was listening to it almost like just part of a routine, like just waving at a friend passing by, rather than stopping to have a conversation.

have you asked yourself if you liked the piece, judged it somehow? and have you imagined/were you curious whom it might be by?

I don't know if I asked myself whether I liked it? There is always a

comparison to my own set of values/choices (I mean, whether I would do it that way or another way for example), (which happens with everything I suppose, like reading a newspaper, to separate oneself from this thing which is interpenetrating one's brain.)

And it's not really a matter of whether I like it or not, more of how close I feel to it. And that's very difficult to quantify.

Yes of course I was curious who it might be, but it wasn't important. I think I much prefer not knowing. (Had an interesting conversation about this in Spain last month with Ruth Berberán and Michel Doneda and Angharad, about listening to music when you don't know who it is.) So I was happy not to know. My recognition of who it might be was a natural surprise to me. I mean if you see someone you know, you can't help it!

when you say 'asking myself all the time what i feel all the time', was that because of this specific project, or is that rather a general habit?

I think it was more because of this specific project. Of having to respond and create "a response". More like I was trying to activate that procedure, at that time, rather than letting it happen naturally, which it then did. In case I felt nothing, and had no response! A strange thing to have to observe about oneself, "what is my response to this?" Normally I don't think that quite so consciously, or have to think about it. Normally one has a natural response to anything, but I am not normally waiting by the door to pounce on it and use it!

i understand it's difficult to quantify closeness, but i'm anyway curious: is it rather yes or rather no that you felt close to what you heard?

I think more yes. I was curious. I didn't feel strongly about it one way or another, but it allowed my curiosity to enter, and yes I was sympathetic to much of what I heard.

when you now think back to the piece, which details seem to have remained in your memory?

A lot has stayed in my memory. Speech, rain, street sounds, cafe sounds, decaying gong sounds, the silences, a baby, a little ostinato of some fragment of speech, the big talking finale where someone (!?) talks about wanting to work with the police on a possible piece about stealing, the way that there's more field recordings at the beginning of the piece, they disappear by the end, so the piece becomes more intimate as it goes on. The quietness, gentility, modesty.

and then i'm curious about the reaction: how did that happen?

Well that's really difficult to say other than of course it is a reaction to the circumstance as well, with whatever instruments I had or happened to find, so I was limited by that. Things were in the piece that I decided not to do. I considered using

voices, but decided not to use them. There was polyphony in the piece, I decided not to have any because it already exists, around and in our heads. I wanted to minimise any sense of composition for myself, which is probably unavoidable, but it's a quality I like. Questions of whether I contradict expectations/presumptions or follow them. But then that's becoming more general now...

if you don't mind i'd like to know more about the end of what you write: why did you want to minimise the sense of composition?

Because composition sounds very boring when it becomes predominant, which it often can when the musical material is somehow minimal or small. Music without Composition, it's an interesting thing to try to imagine, don't you think? If I remember rightly, Alvin Lucier talks about it a bit here <http://www.newmusicbox.org/article.nmbx?id=4054>

and can you explain more about contradicting/following expectations and presumptions? it can be interesting when it becomes more general..

I don't think I can. It's very subjective and specific to whatever work is going on. I suppose if I have ABCD the expectation is to say E, but do I want to do that or contradict that? Would it be more interesting in the context to say ABCDA or ABCDX or ABCDD...? Then these set up other expectations. Is it ABCDABCD or ABCDAE, or is it ABCDXYZ or ABCDDDD... Or like ordering a pizza, do you have what you know you'll like or do you try something new? Or much as you want to try something new maybe today you really just want something comforting so you choose what you know you'll like? Or, you always have a certain pizza so you ought to try another one today? Just micro-decisions of the moment.

how did you choose your material?

Mainly working with the melodica, and with the situation. I knew it would be a situation where I didn't have any instruments, which basically means percussion, but I like the sound of notes as well, and anyway I had this new melodica I wanted to try out and I could at least bring that with me. And I know you mentioned about your piano, but I think I wanted to work in the flat with whatever limitations that proposed. And I didn't have a computer to work on, but anyway I prefer acoustic sound, there's plenty of that around anyway. The limitations of reality, of a living situation, within a certain period of time.

did you make your piece with the idea of being part of a chain, or just you and the preceding piece, or didn't it matter at all?

I think just me and the preceding piece. That's all I knew. I had a vague recollection of some of the names on the list you sent ages ago, but I've lost that list so I don't know for sure who else is involved. Except that I had a few guesses as to who was immediately before and after me. So awareness of being in a chain, but I don't know if that affected me or the piece in any way. Except that I knew it had to be no

longer than 7 minutes long, and that was a constraint. Other than that, no. Just the same concerns as when writing any other piece, I think.

and did you have any idea or wish as to how the piece should be received, 'understood'?

I don't think so. I'm not aware that I think about that at all when I'm working on something. How can I possibly know what anyone else might think, or react? People I don't know, their associations, their history of experiences, how they feel, or how they listen. Of course, I suppose it's very nice when somebody makes a comment and it's close to what I was thinking. But I like any comments, it's an audience's way of expressing themselves back, of reflecting themselves back at the art experience, positioning themselves in relation to it. People say surprising interesting things I never thought about, which tells me about themselves. I have no control over that, nor do I want it at all.

do you think it is at all possible to have a misunderstanding on a creative or artistic level?

I suppose so, yes. Do you mean a listener misunderstanding an art work? Possibly. I don't know if "misunderstanding" is a word I would use. Have I ever misunderstood an art work? Maybe. (It's taking me a long time to answer this question!) Misunderstanding meaning that the audience has not correctly understood something proposed by the art? I have certainly had experiences where I have not understood something at all. Or where I have enjoyed something for the wrong reasons, liked qualities that were unintended by the artist. One can simply not understand it, certainly. But then in a way that is just another form of comprehending something! Or having a natural reaction. I mean, I have not understood something and felt just nothing, and I have also not understood something and felt very excited and amazed. I very much like the quote from Rauschenberg; "Understanding is a form of blindness."

Or do you mean an artist misunderstanding what he is trying to do? Yes, definitely. But where is the objective anyway when the artist is working? It is there, but where is it?

what do you think yourself that the principal qualities of your piece are?

Another very difficult question! For me, I hope it has a directness. Clarity. Obviousness, which is a type of clarity. Very difficult question. In a way I would prefer not to write too much about it so that I can convey to you how difficult I find the question. Newness for me is important, hearing something I've never heard before, but that's very very subjective and personal, I can't say that's an objective quality, and it's an enormous subject for personal debate. I can't ultimately say, perhaps because it comes from another way of thinking than what I'm trying to do here... Here I'm trying to explain in words, and there I'm just being.

this was it, thank you so much for your patience!

Ps:

I was thinking this morning that it's very difficult to answer your last question; Before working I can think of qualities that I would like a piece to have. (It's more clear when listening to somebody else's piece which has qualities that I definitely don't want.) But when working I don't usually have to describe to myself in words what qualities I want it to have, I just make it that way. Then afterwards I think I am still not distant enough from it to be able to describe it, and I feel like I look on it like anyone else, since now I am outside the piece, an audience. Anyway, it's good to have to think about this sometimes, and it's also more interesting for me when I don't have a clear answer. There's still more things to do.