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Paul Gough and Katie Davies

**‘Dead air’: The acoustic of war and peace – creative interpretations of the sounds of conflict and remembrance**

What does war sound like? During the 2014 centenary of the start of the First World War the question has driven historians, archivists and artists to attempt recreations of a comprehensive sonic landscape of this Great War. There are no known authentic audio recordings of battle from the period but sound engineering has contrived to recreate the sounds of this first modern war. Focusing on the Western Front, historians have created a typology of sound by identifying the particular qualities of each weapon type that was used there. For the 2014 BBC Scotland documentary *Pipers of the Trenches* British writer and historian Michael Stedman collaborated with Paul Wilson, dubbing mixer at the Digital Design Studio, Glasgow School of Art, to create an audioscape intended to replicate a period of intense fighting during the Battle of the Somme in 1916. The result is a rather colourful, though truly cacophonous, soundscape that assaults the ears. Although individual components can be identified the chaotic collage is essentially impressionistic. It tells us something about warfare *in extremis*, but perhaps less about the actual and separate acoustics of that conflict.

It may be easier to describe the sounds of specific weapons. The 18-pounder artillery gun used by the British Army, for example, which was capable – at the height of a barrage – of firing three or four rounds a minute produced a singularly loud and sharp noise on firing, and then a second noise on the explosion of its shell (1). Combatants recalled the perpetual rumble of distant detonation during a heavy barrage. A skilled ear could identify each different gun, its calibre, the path of its shell (which might be spotted momentarily overhead like a meteorite) and the probable point of impact. In the memorable words of one historian, the firing of a small field gun gave off a crack

‘like a fat man hitting a golf ball’, a medium artillery piece sounded ‘like a giant newspaper being torn, its shell a farm cart coming down a steep hill with its brakes on’ (2). In the same poetic vein, the heavy gun has been likened to a blow on the skull, its giant metal projectile rolling in a leisurely arc across the sky, ‘for a time the listener felt he could run beside it. Then it speeded up like an express train rushing down a tunnel’ (Winter 1978: 117) Shells emitted different sounds, a near miss might whistle or roar; shells crossing dense woods or wide valleys gave off a deceptive echo; those that fell in enclosed places gave a double bang and no warning at all. As Denis Winter notes, the strain of listening for all these sounds did something to the brain, ‘A man could never be rid of them’ (Winter 1978:116). Reflecting on the sheer variety of noise, Julia Encke notes that unlike the eye the ear could never be closed. Soldiers learned how to discriminate between the various war noises in order to anticipate looming danger and increase their chances of survival. Put simply, the deadly variety and monstrous cacophony of noise at the front line ‘laid siege to the ear’ (Encke 2014).

Nor was the sound restricted to the dangerous edges of battle. At the height of the great artillery barrages on the Western Front the firing could be clearly heard on the cliffs of Beachy Head in southern England. What is reputed to be the loudest man-made explosion ever made; the immense simultaneous 19 mine explosions of over 455 tons of ammonal explosives detonated under the Messines Ridge in 1917, is said to have woken Prime Minister Lloyd George in Downing Street and been audible as far away as Dublin.

Only recently has the acoustic of military history been afforded scholarly attention. Focusing on the auditory dimensions of the First World War, historians of culture, media, and musicology have analysed how contemporary filmmakers, composers and writers created surrogate sound to both lend authenticity to ‘silent’ films, and to express attitudes of ‘sorrow, grievance and denunciation’ (Hanheide 2014).

Such interests have entered the creative domain of a number of contemporary European artists who have become drawn to the aural landscape of loss, memory and power. Less concerned with ‘the beleaguered ear’ of the front-line soldier, the artists explored in this chapter have an interest in the very opposite of the disturbing acoustic

of warfare; instead they have become fascinated by the sounds of silence, particularly those associated with the rituals of remembrance.

### 1 Jonty Semper and the sounds of silence

On Remembrance Sunday (11th November) 2001, conceptual artist Jonty Semper released a double CD album, *Kenotaphion*, which captures the empty sounds of 70 years of silences recorded at Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday ceremonies at the London Cenotaph (3).

Each November the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) is obliged to transmit the ritual two minutes of silence. *Kenotaphion* presents such absences. On live television this is achieved gracefully, even if a little unimaginatively. Live radio is a little more problematic. Indeed the deliberate or accidental absence of music or chatter on live radio is known as ‘dead air’.

Semper had first been struck by the incongruity of broadcasting commemorative silence when watching television coverage of the funeral of Princess Diana in September 1997. Questioning the easy (and widely prevalent) assumption that ‘the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship’ (Anderson 1983:7) he released, in collaboration with the British arts commissioning agency Locus+, a limited edition one minute long vinyl recording of that silence.

Developing this idea across generations of ritual silences, it took Semper four years to locate every surviving recording of the remembrance silences, the earliest of which is taken from a British Movie-tone newsreel from 1929. There are none for some years, including 1941 to 1944 when the ceremony was suspended, and for several of the earliest recordings Semper had to splice together fragments of scratchy newsreel, scrutinising each frame to see when exactly the crowds of mourners doffed their hats.

Semper relishes the differences in each year’s recording and expects his listeners to find these equally fascinating. Deliberately, and in the true spirit of authentic sonic art, he has retained the variable sound quality. Nothing is evened out or digitally ‘corrected’. Tracks are often full of crackle, tape hiss, and microphone fizz. ‘This’ states Semper ‘is raw history’, so the chime of Big Ben ‘... sounds faint in some years

deafening in others. In 1932, somebody near the microphone was coughing miserably; in 1969, there were protesters yelling in the background; in 1982, there was torrential rain; and in 1988, a baby cried.’ (Kennedy 2001). Rather paradoxically, some of the early newsreel recordings of the silence even have a voiceover commentary.

Each Cenotaph ceremony recording is unique; each has its own subtle characteristics, not only because of the background noise, interruptions and recording quality, but also for the different durations and intensity. As the ritual silence ebbs away, the reassuring sounds of marching, or the beat of the bass drum will soon fill the void. The empty tomb – the *Kenotaphion* of the title – is soon to be bedecked with tributes, ‘blooming like a floral aneurysm’ (Gough 2009:14) as the living pay homage and the surrogate dead march past in their endless columns.

Through such performative acts, the sensory texture of human community introduces new complexities and readings into the monumental space. Personal, emotional, collective and individual sensations tremble in the balance at this site of loss and mourning. Semper brings us deep emotional complexity by entangling the sensory fabric of the social order with monumental space. Through his unique record of memorialisation, ‘dead air’ is enlivened by its own ceremonial existence.

## 2 Katie Davies and invisible borders

Through her practice as a filmmaker and installation artist Katie Davies explores how society, territory, and political debate are controlled. In her short films she aims to realize the sensation of border as ‘an experience of artifice and human division.’ (Davies 2013:243). In 2007 she worked with the UN Armistice Commission and the US Armed Forces to film from within the Korean Demilitarised Zone. In 2009 she documented a sequence of British citizenship ceremonies. Her research explores ‘border’ within a wider debate on marginal spaces. She uses digital video montage to articulate the experience of living with shifting and porous thresholds of experience.

In her practice video montage can offer a challenge to conventional interpretations of borders, offering alternative readings of liminal and ‘in-between’ geographical and

psychological spaces. In much the same way that Semper explored an annual ritual of remembrance, Davies focuses on key ceremonies and uses digital collage to unpack an initial definition of border as a structure of power. Through her filmic methodology, she renders visible (and aural) what is most often invisible, or fugitive. In recent years she has extended this approach to the repatriation ceremonies at Wootton Bassett in southern England, creating raw material which would later become the artwork *The Separation Line* (4).

From early 2007 until late 2011, RAF Lyneham, near Wootton Bassett, received the British dead bought back from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. The draped coffins of 345 service personnel passed through the small Wiltshire town of Wootton Bassett in 167 repatriation ceremonies. These started as impromptu gatherings, coordinated by town members of the Royal British Legion. Military families started to gather to stand and pay their respects as well, and within months would be joined by crowds of respectful mourners from across the UK. During that period, Davies made 14 separate visits to the ceremonies, filming each time, gathering material for her montage that would become *The Separation line*. Reflecting on her own upbringing in a British Armed Services family, Davies later wrote how she became fascinated with the ceremonies because of what they made visible and apparent:

‘I recognized within the townsfolk that I met at Wootton Bassett, who were mostly employed by the British Armed Forces... of belonging to a military culture that somehow renders its members expatriate as they leave and enter civilian life. This distinction between military and civilian life may be slight, but its impact is significant nonetheless.’ (Davies 2013:245)

Davies was keen to capture individual instances of human interrelatedness and the multiplicity of structural ties that she recognized from both her own experience and in the closely observed sights, sound and ambience of the para-formalised ceremonies in Wiltshire. Her ambition was to study the repatriations from ‘street level’, filming alternative aspects and perspectives that were different and distinctive from current documentaries and news coverage.

Underpinning her fieldwork was a fascination with the bounded process of repetition, drawing on the work of John Welchman who defines a border as a ‘conduit of power

driven across the territory of differential traces' (Welchman 1996:168). Davies suggests that video practice can render the concept of border as a power structure into something that can be seen in many ways. Through the unblinking lens of her camera, she captures the full demography of townsfolk, visitors and the military. The work offers fascinating juxtapositions: polarized military stereotypes appear to dissolve, as the officers and other ranks stand close together, paying their respects to the dead. Probably many will return to the conflict zone within days of attending this ceremony for their fallen comrades.

At Wootton Bassett one of the many invisible borders that Davies came to recognise was that between being alive and not, where the living acknowledge mortality by participating in a ritual for those who had fallen in a battle far away. For Davies it became clear that those who came to take part both identified with their own mortality and felt a moral obligation, or sense of duty, to those who had met an untimely death. The challenge for her as a video practitioner was to make this understanding tangible, to somehow convey the sense she took from observing and being part of these crowds into something those experiencing her work could share. She sought to translate her own experiential fieldwork, the experience of the real, into an encounter with the representational.

Rather uniquely for an artwork about homage and memory, *The Separation Line* is an immersive sensorial experience — spatially, haptically, and aurally.

As an installation this is achieved in part by the way it is physically displayed, back-projected onto a four-by-two-and-a-half-metre screen which stands on the floor of an exhibition space. A soundtrack emits the left-to-right sound of the traffic and the street noise, and is played from speakers located adjacent to the screen and across the viewing space. Although it is in fact a montage of 14 different events, the film lasts the actual duration of the repatriation ceremony, some 9 minutes and 50 seconds, the time it takes a cortège to travel the length of the High Street in this small English market town. Temporally, the installation presents the repetition of this ceremony as a rising toll as each dead soldier is returned.

In a reflective essay Davies deconstructs the physical responses and behaviours of the

audiences who stand in front of the projected image. (Davies 2013). Indeed they do more than stand. Viewing the projected image on this scale elicits a particular reaction. As in the video they arrive to watch, they gather—in a line directly opposite— as if ‘receiving’ the projected High Street face-to-face with its digital participants. Both ‘sides of the street’ face one another on a human scale. Surround sound further immerses the viewers. On the near ‘side’ of the street the ‘digital participants’ mirror the ‘installation audience’ on the other side of the road. The two ceremonial audiences face one another—the filmed (the actual) and the viewer (5).

Through the performance of the ceremonies, the town became a symbol of political edict, national identity, and sovereignty. The author explains how her work transcends these symbolic machinations because those involved (both within and observing the video work) maintain positions of both performer and participant. This allows the sharing of an experience, one that is in opposition to the dividing and restructuring mechanisms of borders.

Davies has observed (as have others) that a sensory mirroring takes place as the ceremony plays out with the installation audience in position. Facing the digital participants on the roadside, the installation audience in the gallery – responding, perhaps, and reflecting upon the faces, the voices, and the collection of individuals presented – they unconsciously take on the postures, and seem to also reflect the feelings, of those they observe.

The mirroring of body language across the street, a shift between standing to attention and at ease, the wringing of hands behind the back, and most notably the rocking from the heels to the balls of the feet and eventual lifting up straight on the toes were all postulated, communicated by the civilians who were attending (Davies 2013: 246).

The viewers of the film have assumed a position of performer and participant, as part of an embodied sensuous performance. Physical attributes are communicated by the civilians on the kerbside and mirrored in the sensory response of the installation audience. As such it reveals a fascinating sensorial dialogue as each set of participants reflects upon past experiences brought into their own present.

As a moment of twinned vicarious participation, *The Separation Line* projects its gallery audience spatially, aurally and psychologically into the midst of the repatriation ceremonies; the very positioning of the projection screen with its 'street level' position requires the viewer to become witness to this collective experience, an experience that brings a distant overseas war home by rendering it undeniably present.

Sound plays a crucial part in this too, though at first encounter it appears rather tangential to the exacting and unyielding language of the camerawork. In Davies' piece, there is a very strict visual protocol to the editing. Not only is the film's duration dictated by the actual length of the ceremony along the High Street, there are no wide angle views, no single shot down the street, nor any alternative perspective to that of the participants' immediate view. It is frontal and full-facing, both frustrating and fascinating, but there is no doubting its emotional power.

As a piece that deals with borders; visible and invisible, tangible and intangible, the film attempts to render visible the ceremonial borders experienced by its subjects. As a montage of many different ceremonies, parallels are proposed between the cortège passing repeatedly and the flow of moving images capturing the event at the edge of the filmic frame, acting as a border between two corresponding and fixed realities.

*The Separation Line* makes a reflection upon mortality by placing the audience in the same position as the town's participants, involving them, by virtue of a *faux* proximity and the sensory impact of surround sound, in a recreational installation that is ultimately representational of the event. Through these sensorial touches, the work alters the audience's position from passive to active and from viewer to participant (Davies 2013:253). This fascination with borders, with edges and the 'hidden differentials' between zones helps emphasise that it is not the video image itself that makes the border visible, but rather the experience of the border as a liminal sensation which the installation, and the audience reaction, makes palpable and perceptible. For Jacques Rancière this shared experience is at the heart of what constitutes '[A] theatre without spectators, where those in attendance learn from, as opposed to being seduced, by images: where they become active participants as opposed to passive voyeurs.' (Rancière 2009:4)

However, in *The Separation Line* there is a confronting narrative culmination, a *denouement* that relies not on visual spectacle but on its absence. As the hearse approaches and is almost in shot (at precisely 6 minutes 7 seconds), the screen is black for 40 seconds and the audience is denied its filmic realization. Rather than the evocative, but visually clichéd, shot of a passing hearse we are confronted instead only with sound, with absence, and perhaps denial. Plunged unexpectedly into darkness, the silence of a few seconds before is filled with the mechanical passage of the vehicle: approach, presence and retreat. The audience crosses another border – blinded – we are immersed in the dreaded nothingness of a life lost, as the vehicle’s engine clatter fades in its passing to be merged with the tolling of a church bell before the sombre crowd reappears (6).

After much experimentation and deliberation Davies reached this important decision to rely only on a soundtrack. She writes: ‘As they hear the hearse pass, the phenomenon of experience remains, precisely because the body as the spectacle of the ceremony has not been pacified or fetishized by my own authorial translation.’ (Davies 2013:254).

In this attempt to capture the very sound of absence, Davies draws on Lefebvre’s observation that ‘the element of repression ... and the element of exaltation [can] hardly be disentangled; or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the representative element was metamorphosed into exaltation.’ (Lefebvre 1991:220),

The black screen, a filmic pause, represents the commemorative moment of marking time itself through stopping, performing stillness and most significantly performing silence. The ultimate horror of conflict is transformed into a state of dignity, gracefulness and splendour where the acoustics of war and peace collide.

### 3 Francis Alÿs and the geometry of sound

*A journey implies a destination, so many miles to be consumed, while a walk is its own measure, complete at every point along the way.*

(Francis Alÿs 2005) (7)

Francis Alÿs is a Belgian artist whose international work occupies the intersection between art, architecture, performance and social practice. Whereas Davies' filmic practice is predicated on a fixed tripod position located perpendicular to her chosen motif, Alÿs puts a premise on movement and collaboration. Walking, and the intense observation of the socio-cultural and socio-economic conditions of politically charged places through which he wanders, is at the centre of his practice, as is collaboration. The realisation of many of his artworks requires the active participation of many, sometimes hundreds, of participants, players and stakeholders. For his best-known work *When Faith Moves Mountains* (Alÿs, 2002) he recruited 500 volunteers in the Ventanilla District outside Lima to work together to move a huge sand dune by just ten centimetres. Regarded variously as a wry comment on the heroic futility of collective effort, or a social allegory offering bleak comment on the dire Peruvian economic situation, the resulting fifteen-minute film installation has been shown globally to critical acclaim.

But it is one of his suite of London-based works that interests us here. The sensorial is central to each, in particular the roles of sound, touch and the 'control and command' of space. *Railings* (Alÿs 2004) is a video of the artist walking clockwise around central London's Fitzroy Square on a crisp winter day, tapping and trailing a wooden drumstick across metal railings. Alÿs creates a percussive, occasionally bell-like noise to the bemusement of the occasional passer-by who stumbles upon this playful intervention in the capital city. In the film *Nightwatch* (2005) Bandit, a wild fox, was set loose at night in the National Portrait Gallery, his movements recorded by the gallery's surveillance cameras. A year earlier Alÿs similarly 'let loose' a troop of British soldiers in London, each Guardsman having been issued a set of instructions designed to determined their dispersal and eventual re-unification. It is this artwork, *Guards*, we shall consider in some detail.

Alÿs originally intended this conceptual project for a group of musicians who would be distributed across a city on a quiet Sunday morning. 'We were hoping', he later recalled, 'that they would try to make bird calls and that once they met there would have been a battle of melodies which would eventually end up in a growing noise produced by the instruments calling each other.' However, he found the outcome disappointing. It was, he felt, too similar to his previous piece filmed in Venice, *Do It*

(1999), where two musicians each carrying half a tuba wander the city looking for one another so they might ‘achieve harmonic unification’ (8).

Instead Alÿs, having already made (or planned) his two film pieces about London’s trademark railings and urban foxes, looked to another emblem of the city, the red-uniformed military guardsman as the city’s distinctive cipher for his new venture.

The image of a guardsman standing sentinel outside the palaces of Imperial London is, to many, one of the most visible material signifiers of the capital. Ceremoniously attired in imposing bearskin hat, pristine scarlet tunic and maintaining an unflinching verticality, the guard is the apotheosis of military control and moral order. His is the body Imperial. But it is also the body impractical and theatrical, compromising ceremonial rectitude and a strict regimen of tightly-orchestrated movements. Immaculately attired, the sensorial impression of the guardsman is rooted in his vivid colour, overbearing height and physicality, and the unassailable sense of power and authority he exudes. When seen and heard *en masse*, in serried geometric blocks of a parading troop, the senses are assailed by a matrix of non-visual materialities – the synchronized crunch of heavy boot on tarmac, the barked almost unintelligible commands. And there is also a haptic materiality – the texture of bearskin; the polished gold buttons; the metallic tinkle of medals, the rhythmic pull of serge cloth over limbs. Such material impressions became part of Alÿs’s palette when contriving his newest artwork for London.

The structure and singular narrative of *Guards* is simply told: we are located in the City of London, or more specifically the financial quarter, the ‘Square Mile’, the seat of financial power and authority, its perimeter marked by discreet sculptures of dragons and other mythical beasts. The sunlit streets are quiet, even deserted; it is possibly a Sunday morning. Various camera positions at street-level catch an occasional passer-by, strutting pigeons, the chiming of a cathedral bell. We then cut to a long alley where a guardsman strolls. The dissonance is palpable for we see what appears to be an authentic guardsman dressed as if for a parade, but who looks rather nonchalant, even forlorn; his weapon held loosely at his side as he strolls along the empty city pavement. We cut to another street and another guardsman. It could perhaps be the same one filmed from a different viewpoint. He stares rather wistfully

into the window of a fashion store. Then we see a third who rests his weapon across his knees as he perches on a street bench. Cameras mimicking CCTV locations pan and tilt to follow each of these solitary soldiers. Next, a camera captures two guardsmen in the same frame; as they approach each other, straighten up, mark time, shoulder arms and together stride off; they are now a pair with purpose, though exactly that purpose is not revealed. There is no background music, no barked military commands, no dialogue, only the rhythmic beat of boots marching in step.

Just as the solitary soldiers had become a pair, so the two guardsmen then become three. Fragment by fragment, scene by scene from the Barbican to Mansion House, from the formal Guildhall to a crooked medieval alley, we realise that there are many other individual guardsmen seeking each other out, as they form small squares of two by two, or rectangles of two by three.

Cameras frame them from the rooftops, from the street, and then at pavement-level. Four guards become six; six doubles to twelve. The deserted streets now echo to the crunching of their exact step; there are few other sounds, a sprinkle of cars, and the occasional bemused bystander, most of whom simply ignore the unusual presence of armed and ceremonially uniformed soldiers marching with purpose through their neighbourhood.

Besides the striking visual impression of these bold blocks of scarlet amidst the grey urban domain, the film has also a powerful sonic sensation; the synchronised, percussive force of stamping boot is cleverly edited so that it creates cumulative waves of crisp crunching, rapped out with an insistent, irresistible tempo.

Indeed Alÿs describes the film in terms of sound composition, recounting how it ‘became a more minimal and serial piece – serial in terms of music and minimal because what they were doing was re-forming or re-building this perfect square of eight by eight soldiers. So there was this growing element of the sound of the steps, which had more to do with Steve Reich, and the construction of this very rigid structure *a la* Carl Andre at the same time.’ (Robecchi 2005).

As an immersive visual and aural narrative *Guards* offers a memorable sensory experience, perhaps at its most dramatic when shot from a birds' eye view. The red phalanx in its required and unified form becomes 8 rows by 8 columns – 64 soldiers. Without breaking step, the Company marches across road junctions, ignores traffic markings, marches against the flow of one-way streets, swerves around parked cars and marches up steps 'as if it were the most natural thing in the world', it is as one bemused critic wrote 'a gorgeously costumed army of robots'. Alÿs's directorial touch is light. The film cuts rhythmically from aerial viewpoint to kerbside shots; there are no individual portraits, no cutaways; each man is absorbed into the militarised geometry. Even in the compressed architectural space of the city it is the uniforms' colour, the purposeful velocity of the marching square, and the synchronous lockstep that predominates.

However, there seems no obvious point to the marching, no clear purpose to their authority and collective momentum. This confusion is sustained until the very end of the film; as the square of soldiers stomps through the square mile, it abruptly breaks into a slow march – an indication of a break in the narrative, but also proof of the innate control of this highly disciplined force. And then, just as suddenly, the troop resumes full power and marches off towards a bridge, where they suddenly break rank, their velocity dissipated as they stroll onto the pavement, tear off their heavy furry hats and mop sweated brows, chat to each other and, in an extended long shot, wander into the distance in a ragged line. In Alÿs's words, transformed by 'breaking from anonymous military mass to individual agents.'

The final credits indicate Alÿs created the project over many years; achieving a matrix of complex permissions, working with the co-operation of the Ministry of Defence, the British Army and the City of London Police, achieved in collaboration with 7 Company of the Coldstream Guards and the not-for-profit London-based arts organization, ArtAngel.

Like many of Alÿs's creations *Guards* has a deceptively simple quality, yet it addresses many concerns: how order might be established from disparate elements, how discipline and beauty can be co-created by the interplay of structure and randomness. In letting loose a fox in the National Portrait Gallery we gaze upon its

nervous roamings, just as the solitary guardsmen are left free to wander the backstreets of central London. Both images disturb: the lone soldier because, as a uniform(ed) body, he is always representative of another, larger, potentially aggressive, even repressive, body. As animal, the fox reminds us of our own 'wild' body and its ambiguous relationship to institutions.

Furthermore, *Guards* acknowledges that landscape is invariably a function of war. Underneath the tarmac of the marching guardsmen are the stones of ancient Roman roads laid during the subjugation of Britain. Perhaps more so than their weaponry, roads were the greatest achievement of the Roman Empire's military technology and remain as a shadow over London, an ancient echo of a history of conflict across the dead air of faded remembrance.

### Conclusion

Rather than worry the appalling details of history, these three artists are each interested in the very opposite of the disturbing acoustic of warfare and its human screams and sighs, addressing instead the sounds of war and peace, examining the drama of conflict through ritual, remembrance, and silence, and in so doing exploring the unseen borders around political edict, national identity, and sovereignty.

Historians such as Stedman make an important contribution to our understanding of war through recreation of its horrific soundtrack: others have begun to examine the complicated acoustic geography of conflict. Starting with the most slavish exploration of the very sounds of remembrance (the Two Minutes of reverential silence of some 70 years), this chapter slowly takes us to more abstract reminiscences of the 'dead air' of broadcast silences, to the repatriation of British soldiers from another foreign battlefield via a sensorial experience triggered by spontaneous homage and the paying of deep respect. Through a powerful immersive installation we have seen how the viewer becomes performer; how 'dead air' is re-visualised as an eternal blackness, and experience the crowded emptiness of a procession of military coffins, bearing those who will take no more breath. In exploring the final artwork, *Guards*, we have seen how past and present appear to march together with an unstoppable syncopated and sensorial power through silent streets. Like Jonty and Davies, he asserts the many

materialities of conflict and its aftermath, whether the crackling silence of official remembering or the vicarious spatial and haptic experience of observing the return of the dead.

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## Notes

- (1) Stedman and Wilson also worked with BBC UK to present soundscapes online through its iwonder website, where the replicated sounds of a range of weaponry and the cacophony of the Great War can be explored. See: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/zwg72hv#orb-banner>
- (2) These phrases are taken from Denis Winter's *Death's Men*. pp 116–117; however, a number of Winter's similes draw from George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*, specifically p 83.
- (3) See: <http://www.discogs.com/Jonty-Semper-Kenotaphion/release/1029561>
- (4) Available at: <http://bordervisions.weebly.com/chapter-15-katie-davies-on-her-work-the-separation-line-2011.html>
- (5) The work was shown in two major exhibitions linked to the centenary of the start of the First World War: *The Sensory War 1914-2014*. Manchester Art Gallery, 11 October 2014 to 22 February 2015, and *Shock and Awe: Contemporary Artists at War and Peace*. Royal West of England Academy, Bristol, 19 July to 17 September 2014.
- (6) This dramatic treatment is even engaging on the small screen.
- (7) An oft-quoted statement attributed to Francis Alÿs, *Seven Walks, an exhibition* commissioned by Artangel. 28 September to 20 November 2005, (21 Portman

Square, London and the National Portrait Gallery, London. *The Seven Walks* (2005) project, which intervened into the city's daily patterns and rituals, was a collaboration with the UK commission agency, Artangel. For seven years Alÿs walked the streets of London. Each walk was enacted in a different part of London with the subsequent films, paintings and drawings comprising his first major exhibition in the UK.

(8) See Alÿs, 'Modern Art Notes', at

<http://blogs.artinfo.com/modernartnotes/2011/06/when-faith-moves-mountains-at-moma/>

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