

Forest Murmurs* Treatment

Most people will agree that it is fascinating to overhear other people's conversations. Tantalising snippets of personal information, little insights into the lives of complete strangers. It has been referred to as "found poetry" and has long been an inspiration to writers. It creates fragmentary visions of other people's lives and because we do not know the person, our brains are stimulated to fill in the gaps, to build up a fantasy about what is going on in that person's life. It's something everybody does. Indeed, living in a city it's hard to avoid it.

I am interested in exploring the ways in which our imagination can be stimulated by inadvertently overheard conversations. I want to create a visual representation of the myriad of peripheral thought processes, the creative internal reactions to the detritus of everyday life. Thoughts so numerous and trivial that to be anything more than partially aware of them would be impossible. Thoughts that nonetheless form the fabric of our lives.

The film I want to make will describe my own imaginative response to overheard conversations recorded in Epping Forest. I have chosen this location because as an area of wilderness surrounded by urban development it is used for many different purposes and is visited by a large cross-section of society. It is a semi-rural idyll for city dwellers, a beauty spot, a picnic area, a hunting ground for birdwatchers and mushroom pickers alike and a rendezvous for biker gangs. But Epping Forest also has a more sinister reputation as a dumping ground for the victims of gangland murders. So, intermingled with the carefree outdoor fun is an underlying hint of danger that keeps the senses primed and the imagination stimulated.

In a previous film I went for a walk with a video camera, this time I will take a DAT recorder instead. The starting point will be to construct a sound collage from segments of recorded conversations. Once removed from their original context and juxtaposed, these cryptic 'sound-bites' will take on a different meaning, achieving a greater significance that will cause the brain to make bizarre connections, to invent a nonsensical narrative, the meaning of which will be totally open to the interpretation of the listener. The visual part of the film will consist of firstly of hand held live-action and pixellated super8 footage; extreme close-ups and obliquely angled fleeting shots of the forest. This footage will provide a visual backdrop and help to create a sense of location. The live-action will be telecined and digitally combined with electronically generated figurative and abstract mark making and printed and handwritten text relating closely to the soundtrack. These elements will convey the listener's mental response to what is being said.

By presenting these voice activated cerebral flights of fancy as a constantly evolving thumbnail sketch interwoven with live-action footage, I hope to take the audience on a non-linear internal and external journey, an unconventional portrait of Epping Forest coupled with a subjective study of the largely overlooked workings of the mind as it deals with the tidal wave of verbal ephemera we encounter each day of our lives.

Jonathan Hodgson 6.12.2004

**Working title taken from a line in Allen Bennett's play "A Bed Amongst the Lentils". NB I am a fan of Bennet's work, particularly his acute observation of the human condition but beyond that there is no relevance whatsoever to the content of the film. "Forest Murmurs was, in fact, the title given to a flower arrangement.*