

From the Sittingbourne Rail Station, I cross the street. I pass the Tesco parking lot. I look at the GPS on my phone. A smart phone, smarter than me when it comes to direction. A right turn through a small alley, onto the High Street.

Has it started? How will I know?

As is surely intended by the artist, I search for Robert Jarvis's [Streetwaves](#) installation with my ears. I know that sounds will emanate from the windows of seventeen shops along the High Street. I don't know which shops or what sounds. A minor vibration of rather pleasurable paranoia accompanies my search. Is that bird song spontaneous or recorded? How far can the audio landscape of this very English shopping street be trusted? Later I mention this quality of suspicion to Jarvis, who suggests that a nighttime horror film version of the project might be possible. Heavy breathing, a pair of slow but steady footsteps played in such a way as to seem always just behind you. The idea of an audio haunted street is delicious and terrifying, and also confirms my sense that a major appeal of this kind of sound installation is its ambition to transform public space with private associations.

Eventually, I hear a low drone that is just enough over the line of composed to convince me that I am now 'in it', or maybe more precisely, to verify that I have been in it for some time. I begin to notice the small speakers attached to the windows of some shops. (One of the nice things about the [blog](#) Jarvis maintained during the development of *Streetwaves* is that he has shared some of the technical methods and equipment he utilised to realise the project). I wander slowly to the end of the street, enjoying the sense of non-commercial purpose the installation lends to my drift. At the bottom of the street, I turn around and begin to seek out the sounds more actively. I wait in front of a clothing shop called Trendy, noticing the tell-tale speaker on the glass, and am rewarded with a cascade of coat hangers. A choir greets me a few doors down, and church bells, playing just far enough away from the Methodist church, provide a mild and agreeable sensation of physical disorientation.

I speak with Jarvis right after I complete this second stretch of exploration. He has watched me wait near the speakers, and proposes that a better way to experience the piece is to ignore the speakers and let the sounds come when they do. The idea seems to be that the composed and recorded sounds can then mingle with the native sounds of the street, so that each stroll contains a different score. I like this idea, though it feels strange to be told that I've done something wrong.

This thought leads me to consider audience and engagement. There are, at least, two sets of participants in *Streetwaves*. There are the people in the streets, either casual passersby, or people like me who have previous knowledge of the project. It is satisfying to see the slightly puzzled expressions on the faces of people suddenly recognising that the buzzing of barbershop clippers isn't quite right, or isn't in quite the right place. The sounds are close enough to their origins in the shops that this recognition is not disruptive. *Streetwaves* is a peaceable intervention, the waves are of a sunny and serene shore, not a stormy sea.

The other set of participants are the people inside – the shopkeepers who agreed to work with Jarvis to produce the 'sonic gardens', as he refers to them. I like to consider this relationship between commerce and drifting, and the way the relationship of exchange has been abstracted into its audio components. The relationship between artist and shopkeepers feels quite cozy. There is a question that lingers in my mind generally about the mechanics of community-based art practice. Who has done what for whom? Is Jarvis a service provider, facilitating the production of culture among a local community? Are the shop environments materials for playful artistic manipulation? If these questions aren't directly answered by *Streetwaves*, they do seem to have been gently staged and considered.