

Alissa Kleist / Tonya McMullan



Tonya McMullan, *Listening Time*, image by Chris O'Neill.

Tonya McMullan, *Listening Time*, part of 'City as a Gallery', Belfast.

On Thursday, 29 September I took an early train home to Belfast in order to reach a public phone box before 6pm and waited awkwardly inside the draughty, graffiti-covered booth for a faint ring, barely audible over the din of evening traffic passing close by. On the line, a woman with a tense voice introduced herself. She began reciting a self-penned poem with the hurried diction of a nervous narrator revealing something of themselves to a complete stranger. We did not converse; she spoke on her terms and, when finished, promptly hung up. The brevity of this moment and my inability to contribute left me frustrated. Later, I realised that my task was simply to listen.

Six phone booths – those slowly superannuating, uniquely public facilities – across the city repeatedly rang that day between 5pm and 6pm. All of the calls were made, just before closing time when workers begin to make their journeys home, by a team of people experiencing homelessness.

Listening Time, choreographed by artist Tonya McMullan, speaks about different types of loss: the loss of visibility, representation, and control for those experiencing homelessness; the disappearance of a device that enables unmonitored 'trespassing' between private and public realms to occur.

The project problematizes the notion of the social contract. How do we take care of those in society who need it, and how can we ensure that people's demands and expectations for meaningful exchanges are heard and met? *Listening Time* quietly posed these questions, and in doing so opened up overlooked channels of communication.

Alissa Kleist is Curator (Exhibitions) at CCA Derry~Londonderry and co-curates site-specific exhibitions, residencies and events as one of the founders and co-directors of the Belfast-based curatorial collective Household.

Tonya McMullan, *Listening Time* in partnership with Hosford House Clients, Life Skills Co-ordinator Arlene Megaw, and artist Ciara O'Malley. *Listening Time* is part of City as a Gallery, a Belfast City Council project programmed and delivered by PLACE