

# Listening to the In-Between

- Episode III: Thinking with our Ears -

## SFX Album Deep Listening, track 1, 'Lear'

**JOEP** Hello everyone, a warm welcome to the third and final episode of *Listening to the In-Between*. In this podcast series by Radio ArtEZ we explore various aspects of Deep Listening, a practice developed by the American composer, musician, writer and humanitarian Pauline Oliveros.

In the last minute you have been listening to an excerpt from 'Lear', the first track of Oliveros's seminal album *Deep Listening*, that she recorded in 1989 with Stuart Dempster and Panaiotis.

I am your host, Joep Cristenhusz, musicologist, music journalist, tutor at the ArtEZ Honours Lab, and researcher for the ArtEZ professorship Theory in the Arts. In this podcast series, I myself and Sharon Stewart highlight different aspects of Oliveros's Deep Listening practice. We do so by providing backgrounds, practical listening exercises, and by exploring theoretical notions connected to Deep Listening.

For those who have missed the previous episodes (by the way, both are still available via the link in the show notes) I'll give a quick recap:

In the first podcast, *Introducing Pauline Oliveros and Deep Listening*, I interviewed London-based researcher Ed McKeon who offered an introduction to the lifework of Oliveros. I also spoke with Colombian sound artist Ximena Alarcón, who talked about her recent work and research, as well as about her close connection to Deep Listening.

In the second episode, *Sensing Traces of Power(lessness)*, Deep Listener Sharon Stewart further connected the idea of an embodied listening practice with the theme of power and powerlessness by working through the creation of new text scores with Laurens Kruger, a second-year student in the ArtEZ DBKV programme in Zwolle, and Martine van Lubeek, a recent Bachelor-graduate of the ArtEZ BEAR programme in Arnhem.

In this third and final instalment, *Thinking with our Ears*, I once again welcome Ed McKeon and Ximena Alarcón as my guests. Together we will consider Oliveros's Deep Listening practice from several theoretical perspectives, thereby taking into account that theory and practice are always closely intertwined in Oliveros's work.

In fact, a recurring motif in this episode is that in Deep Listening, conventional binaries like theory-practice, but also self-other, active-passive and subject-environment start to dissolve. In other words, that Deep Listening actually happens in a fluid *in-between* space, to explicitly refer to the title of this series.

## SFX Album Deep Listening, track 1, 'Lear'

**JOEP** As a starting point for our investigations we will first focus on the *Extreme Slow Walk*, an important Deep Listening exercise developed by Oliveros that was collectively performed at the live event that ArtEZ Studium Generale, in collaboration with ArtEZ's Master Interior Architecture Corpo-real, hosted in Zwolle on the 5th of October 2022.

Maybe you attended the event yourself, in which case you already are

familiar with the work. For those who didn't, I will quickly sketch its background. Later on in this episode, you'll have the chance to do the walk yourself in a short guided session.

In short, the *Extreme Slow Walk* is a text score that Oliveros wrote in the mid-1970s and that became a regular part of her Deep Listening practice and workshops. As mentioned in the first episode of *Listening to the In-Between*, a decisive aspect in the genesis of the work were Oliveros's collaborations with Elaine Summers, an American dancer, choreographer and yoga practitioner who in the 1960s developed a moving practice which she called Kinetic Awareness.

Summers's influence becomes apparent from the fact that the *Extreme Slow Walk* focuses strongly on moving consciously. In the context of Deep Listening this might seem to be somewhat atypical at first, if only because the exercise appears to be not so much about listening at all.

And yet, for Oliveros there are compelling connections to be found between walking and listening. To her, both are acts that we usually take for granted, but that when performed consciously, can provide us with rich embodied knowledge about, among other things, the nature of attention and concentration, our relation to our environment and our experience of self.

Oliveros herself explicitly (as well as poetically) made the connection in her *Sonic Meditations*, the backgrounds of which were sketched out in the first episode of *Listening to the In-Between*. Particularly illustrative is meditation number 5, a text score titled 'Native', that consists of only one sentence.

**SHARON** "Take a walk at night. Walk so silently that the bottoms of your feet become ears."

**JOEP** In this episode we will take this interconnectedness of walking and listening as a point of departure for our theoretical contemplations of Deep Listening.

Recalling the act of walking, I will first set out on a kind of 'two-legged' exploration of Oliveros's practice with Ed McKeon. We will start with a closer investigation of Ed's personal experiences of performing the *Extreme Slow Walk*, after which we will relate his recollections to the broader practice of Deep Listening. During our reflective 'stroll', if you like, the aforementioned notion of in-betweenness will serve as a recurring signpost. Slowly trodding along we will uncover an in-between space where theory and practice appear to be closely entangled, and contrary modes of movement and awareness seem to be happening all at once.

In the second part of the episode, I will then further elaborate on the notion of the In-Between with Ximena Alarcón. Firstly by connecting the concept to the interconnectedness of outer and inner soundscapes, a relation that is central to her sonic work, in which she focuses on what she calls 'sonic migrations'. Secondly, Ximena also connects the idea of in-betweenness to the migratory experience as such, and to the concept of a 'multiplicitous subject' as theorised by philosopher Mariana Ortega.

**SFX** Album Deep Listening, track 1, 'Lear'

**JOEP** To get a first-hand experience of the *Extreme Slow Walk*, we encourage you to perform the exercise for yourself. In the following instances Ed will concisely deliver its instructions, after which you might want to stop the recording for a while to write down your findings.

**ED** "Moving as slowly as possible, step forward with the heel to the ground first, let the weight of the body shift along the outside edge of the foot to the small toe and across to the large toe. As the weight of the body fully aligns with that foot then begin the transition of shifting to the other foot. Small steps are recommended as balance may be challenged. Maintain good posture, with shoulders relaxed and head erect. Use your breathing. The challenge for this exercise is that no matter how slow you are walking, you can always go much slower."

**JOEP** Done? Great. Now let's listen to some of the personal findings of Ed, who has been reflecting on the *Extreme Slow Walk* ever since he experienced it in a 2017 workshop in Athens that was led by Oliveros's life partner, the writer, poet, director and performer IONE.

**ED** What struck me back then, and what I still find remarkable, is that what appears as the most unexceptional of actions offers such riches for practical contemplation. Walking is something we usually take for granted, an ingrained habit that only demands attention when it goes wrong, when we injure a muscle, or fall awkwardly. But by stripping back the action of movement to the minimum pace we can achieve, Oliveros defamiliarizes everyday walking and invites us to a thoughtful exercise in the experience of time, in the experience of our consciousness and in relating to our surroundings.

**JOEP** As Ed writes in his article *Moving Through Time*, which is available on the APRIA website (link in the show notes), the *Extreme Slow Walk* can thus be thought of as a way of, I quote: "thinking on our feet". As such, the work viscerally embodies the aforementioned entanglement of theory and practice. It constitutes a concrete realisation of embodied knowledge, or a kind of "physical mode of philosophical action", as Ed writes.

I asked him if the same could be said of Oliveros's Deep Listening practice as a whole. In other words: if the *Extreme Slow Walk* can be thought of as a way of "thinking on our feet", doesn't Deep Listening constitute a way of "thinking with our ears"?

**ED** Very much so... I would say Pauline's work is theory in practice. We have to remember that theory comes from theoros, which is spectator, it's a visual paradigm, where you have thinker and theory and world, and there is a separation, and then there is a bridging mediation of mechanism between those two. Deep Listening is part of... is not the only but it's a body of practice which invites us to think through doing.

**JOEP** Now let's re-focus our attention on the *Extreme Slow Walk*, to explore another in-between space from there, a space in which multiple modes of movement and awareness are happening all at once.

We begin by recalling the experience of doing the exercise. What was

actually happening there in terms of bodily sensations? Did you feel the tension in the muscles in your legs and feet change from step to step? And what about your arms and back, or your sense of balance?

To an important extent the *Extreme Slow Walk* is exactly about achieving this heightened bodily awareness. Oliveros herself pointed this out in a commentary on the exercise:

**SHARON** "The purpose of the exercise is to challenge your normal pattern or rhythm of walking so that you can learn to reconnect with very subtle energies in the body as the weight shifts from side to side in an extremely slow walk. You may discover the point-to-point connections of movement and/or the merging into the experience of flow."

**JOEP** On a deeper level, in stripping your movements back to a bare minimum, and doing them as slowly as possible, *The Walk* is also about becoming aware of the contrary ways of moving that take place simultaneously in your body. Note that, on the one hand, Oliveros is writing about 'the point-to-point connection of movement', which you might think of as a kind of focused walking, a sense of linear movement. But on the other hand she also refers to 'the experience of flow', so a sense of just being moved, rather than being the interior agent that is instructing the body how to move..

**ED** What you immediately begin to find is that... it's two movements happening simultaneously. A step, it seems, is not singular but the balancing action of two movements. Each leg passes through different rates of movement alternating cycles of tension and relaxation. But we don't use just one leg at a time; each is in motion such that, whilst one leg is more 'controlled', the other is more 'relaxed', then vice versa.

So, it's these dual processes, never just one thing, and then another, and then another, like a string of beads, and each one is in line... no, there are two processes that are happening simultaneously.

**JOEP** It's interesting to note how our sonic awareness might respond to a similar simultaneity of opposing forces. To quote a much used expression by Ed: Deep Listening might be just as much a "two-eared process", as walking is a "two-legged" act.

To fully appreciate this notion of listening as a two-eared process, it is helpful to differentiate between different kinds of sonic perception. After all, just as walking can be divided into cycles of tension and relaxation, sonic awareness on closer inspection entails opposing modes of audition.

The French philosopher Roland Barthes, for instance, made a strict distinction between 'hearing' and 'listening', a position that is accurately explained in the book *The Order of Sounds, A Sonorous Archipelago* by French sonic theorist Francois Bonnet. According to Barthes, Bonnet writes, hearing is a physiological phenomenon, a kind of raw perception, whilst listening is an intentional psychological act. Furthermore, in opposing the 'phenomenon' of hearing to the 'act' of listening, Barthes characterizes hearing as 'passive', and listening as 'active'.

This intuition of a division between passive hearing and active listening has proved to be a persistent one. In fact Oliveros sometimes seems to be

making the same distinction. For example, in her book *Deep Listening, a Composer's Sound Practice* (2005) she writes:

**SHARON** "I differentiate to hear and to listen. To hear is the physical means that enables perception, to listen is to give attention to what is perceived, both acoustically and psychologically."

**JOEP** And yet, as Ed is ready to point out, Oliveros's approach to listening is less binary than the quote above might suggest at first glance:

**ED** So, on a very simple level there's that kind of distinction. But... there's this something that has layers and dimensions to it, I would say. It's something that cuts across the way that we tend to distinguish between conscious and unconscious processes. And between what we might think of as active or as passive modes of being as well. So these kinds of binaries become much more fluid, and much more blurred through the kinds of modes of Deep Listening that Pauline developed.

**JOEP** A beautiful elaboration on the blurring of conscious and unconscious, or active and passive ways of listening, can be found in Oliveros's essay *Software for People* (1979). In the text she describes how she discovered different modes of sonic awareness by her early experiments with recording technology. In one such experiment she would put a microphone in her window to record the soundscape of her environment. When she replayed the tape, she realised that although she had been listening very carefully while recording, she had not heard all the sounds that were on the tape. For her, this clearly pointed out how focused and selectively we tend to listen, while the microphone discriminated sounds very differently, in a much more open way.

**SHARON** "From that moment, I determined that I must expand my awareness of the entire sounds field. I gave myself the seemingly impossible task of listening to everything all the time. The attempt to listen to everything all the time taught me that it was possible to give equal attention to all that entered the sound field. This kind of attention is diffuse, open, and non-judgemental as compared to focused, selective attention, which is narrow, clear, and discriminatory but limited in capacity. I discovered it was possible to utilise both modes of attention simultaneously - to remain aware of all that could be heard, while focusing in on specific sounds."

**SFX** Album *Deep Listening*, track 1, 'Lear'

**JOEP** The previous quote from Oliveros's *Software for People* primarily focused on how, through Deep Listening, one can become aware of this perceptive limbo-state, in which different ways of listening can happen at the same time. As such, it was focused on the self, that is: on the processes that are unfolding within the perceiving mind.

Of course, this is just one part of the story. Listening is emphatically relational, which means that it can only happen in the in-between space where self and environment meet. Considered this way, it is no coincidence that listening can produce a strong awareness of place. This awareness can be spatial, for instance how we understand our position within our surroundings through our ears. It can also be temporal: as when certain sounds, the bells of an old church for instance, produce an acute awareness of the history of a location. It can even be ecological

in nature. As became apparent in the Radio ArteEZ podcast *Sounding Places, Listening Places*, listening can be a powerful way of connecting to the more-than-human relationships that make up our environment. You'll find the link in the show notes.

For Francois Bonnet, the French sonic theorist that I referred to earlier, this relational quality of listening has everything to do with the nature of the medium in which listening happens: sound. In his book *The Order of Sounds, A Sonorous Archipelago* (2016), he writes about what he calls the 'schizological approach' to sound. In using the prefix 'schizo', which is derived from the Greek skhizein (meaning 'to split' of 'to separate'), he implies that sound is not a single phenomenon, but an event that is always divided across space and time.

In short Bonnet theorises that the sonic event always presupposes a multiplicity as it manifests itself in-between various factors. He distinguishes at least three: firstly the source (a vibrating body), secondly the medium in which sound waves propagate, and thirdly the receptor (the listening ear and the perceiving brain). The core of Bonnet's argument is that sound cannot be reduced to one of these individual aspects. On the contrary, he writes: "It is this simultaneous multiplicity of its appearing that makes for the richness and the mystery of sound. Rather than a nature of sound, there is a range of sound." End of quote.

If we take a moment to think through the consequences of what Bonnet is pointing at here, it follows that in sonic terms it becomes problematic to sustain a worldview that is made up of strictly bounded oppositions. Rather, sound suggests - again - a more fluid reality where concepts like self and other, body and environment, and inner and outer world exist in a continuum, and are allowed to permeate each other.

That may sound a bit abstract, so let's think of a concrete example. Imagine yourself listening to your favourite piece of music. While the sounds of it may originate outside of you, at the cones of your speakers or headphones, its vibrations clearly keep on resonating inside your body and mind. You may feel them seeking out the resonance frequencies of the bones of your skull. Or you may notice how the same vibrations merge with your inner soundscape where they stir up feelings or sonic memories.

To return our attention to Deep Listening, it is precisely this sonic interaction between the outer and inner world that has always been a vital part of Pauline Oliveros's practice. It is not without reason that she developed strategies for what she called 'inner listening'. Moreover, Oliveros's life partner, the author, playwright, director and psychotherapist IONE, explored the inner world of sound and dreams. In fact, as my second guest, the Colombian sound artist and academic researcher Ximena Alarcón explains, this focus on inner listening was an important reason for her to become a certified Deep Listener herself after meeting Pauline.

**XIMENA** I met her in 2008. She was invited by Ron Herrema to De Montfort University for a week... basically it was a week of teaching workshops and masterclasses. And I had the big fortune to be there, I was working there, and I also had the privilege of helping in practical things ... taking Pauline wherever she wanted to be in the city. You know these practical things, so we had lots of time of conversation apart from the formal workshops and the masterclass.

In my case, in 2003 to 2007, while doing my PhD I never came across her work. I was kind of influenced more by the acoustic ecology school of R. Murray Schafer and Barry Truax. And what was very interesting is that immediately when she started asking me what I did, I started to change my perception of sound.

She brought for me the inner listening, which was something that I already had in my ethnographic work with commuters. Because when I asked about sound, people were telling me about their inner self. But I didn't have a practice, or a theory that was supporting that at that time. So she started to bring all of that. Sound and listening, not only sound as an exterior physical phenomenon, but sound as a listening phenomenon, which goes... is physical, but is also vibrating in my memory. Sound is a thick event, but when it goes out of our perception, it doesn't end, it continues as a vibration. So this physicality of sound, even if it is something that we as humans cannot perceive, is vibrating in our cells, is vibrating in my memory, is vibrating. This is why we have these memories ... this is why we have these feelings: it's warm, it's emotional, it's so complex.

**JOEP** As mentioned in the first episode of *Listening to the In-Between*, Ximena was born in Bogota where she originally studied social communication, after which she moved to Europe where she now works as a sound artist and academic researcher. Given the fact that she herself has an immigration background, it is not surprising that her work focuses on listening in a migratory context, or what she calls 'Sonic Migrations'.

In recent years, Ximena has developed INTIMAL, a software environment for telematic improvisation, that she describes as 'a physical-virtual embodied system for relational listening that explores the body as an interface that keeps memory of place, in the context of human migration'. By using both improvisation and Deep Listening techniques, INTIMAL allows participants in different parts of the world to reconnect their inner soundscapes to their actual acoustic environments, both their own physical environment and elsewhere.

Now let's listen to a short example. In the following minutes you will hear an excerpt from the *INTIMAL Long Distance Improvisation performance*, that took place on May 7th, 2019, between nine Colombian and Latin American migrant women residing in the cities of Oslo - Barcelona - London. During the improvisation they used, among others, the interface *MEMENTO*, which is a software navigator through an oral archive of recollections and testimonies by migratory women. After a year of sharing dreams and listening to their migrations they expressed their migratory journeys, and also they responded to oral memory from Colombian Women in Diaspora whom they don't know.

### **SFX Example INTIMAL improvisation**

**JOEP** As becomes apparent from this example, in which the recollections of immigrant women are used as material for sonic improvisations, the notion of acoustic memory is of great importance for Ximena. Her work acknowledges the fact that these memories are fundamental to our experience of identity and self. We all carry sonic memories of earlier stages in our life with us. In fact those recollections help us to ground in our environment, they help to produce a sense of familiarity. For migrants however, having lived parts of their lives in different parts of

the world, the rift between the soundscape of their former home and the soundscape of their new surroundings is often so sharp that they turn out to be irreconcilable. Ximena explained this beautifully in the first episode of *Listening to the In-Between*, so let's briefly return to the excerpt in question.

**XIMENA** If you have lived for some time in another geography, and if you move from one geography to another, to live there ... it is a big change, for the body and for the mind ... just the geographical experience, but also the cultural experience. You need to settle, so you need to bring about all the coordinates that you had before, all the references that you had before, and make them here. But that never happens fully, that is my experience of migration. There is something of the body that wants to go back, and you keep remembering the other.

Migrants refer to this as a limbo, an emotional limbo. You are neither there, you are neither here.

**JOEP** When I asked Ximena if she could give concrete examples of this migrational limbo from her own experience, she stressed the importance of language. Particularly the sound of different languages and how these acoustic properties hugely influence her sense of self.

**XIMENA** Voice and language are very important there. The in-between is this space in which sometimes neither English, nor Spanish which is my native language, and neither the half languages that I am not fully fluent in, but I also can speak a bit. Latin languages and in my later migration also Norwegian... How all of these shape something in me.

When I am speaking in English, I have a different sense of ... a different emotional sense of myself. So, there is an identity there, an inner identity ... And when I listen to myself *in Espanol por ejemplo*, in this moment I just feel the ... *siento mi cuerpo se relajar* ... I just feel my body relax. Probably you can see it [laughs]. So voice and language are very key for migration. It is probably because voice makes the reference of the self for yourself and for others.

After living for a while in England, I had the opportunity to go briefly to Barcelona to a conference, and I was in a hotel room, and I listened a lot to Spanish, well Catalan too, but mostly Spanish.

And I started to speak to myself in Spanish, alone. And I was so surprised: who is that voice? The way that I am speaking in Spanish is my memory of who I was in Spanish, when I was speaking Spanish 100% of the time. Or is it the voice of one of my sisters, who speaks very similar. And what are the idioms that I am speaking? So yes, in-betweenness is felt a lot in language.

**JOEP** In her article *Networked Migrations: Listening to and Performing the In-Between Space* (2014), link in the show notes, Ximena provides a theoretical contextualization of this notion of the migratory limbo. In doing so she refers to, among others, the late Palestinian-American professor of literature Edward Said, who famously suggested that people living in exile have a vision that is 'contrapuntal', showing 'an awareness of simultaneous dimensions'.

Additionally, Ximena refers to Mariana Ortega, a professor of Philosophy and Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies. In her work Ortega theorizes in-betweenness through the concept of what she calls 'multiplicitous



subjectivity', in other words the notion of a self that veers between two or more cultural identities, views, understandings and values. A self also that continually negotiates between the external world of its new surroundings and the internal memories of its former home, and as such is inherently contradictory, fragmentary and ambiguous in nature.

To illustrate this ambiguous nature of the multiplicitous self Ortega, in her article *Multiplicity, Inbetweenness, and the Question of Assimilation* (2008) refers to Gloria Anzaldúa, the Mexican-American scholar of Chicana cultural theory. More specifically Ortega quotes from Anzaldúa's book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, where Anzaldúa describes the migrational In-Betweenness as 'an inner struggle or restlessness, an inner state of disruption and being torn'.

I asked Ximena if she, through her work with Deep Listening and INTIMAL, aims to 'heal' this inner struggle that Anzaldúa describes. And, if so, how we should understand 'healing' in this respect? Is it about a sense of unification of the self, or rather about finding peace with inner contradictions, ambiguities, fragmentations and multiplicities?

**XIMENA** Yes definitely. I think this duality is healed ... challenged, but also healed in the sense of ... There are two ways of seeing this: duality, but fragmentation also, I think. So, the duality is that in this listening to yourself, listening to myself, listening to yourself, to myself... there is a moment in which that duality is blurred. I get a sense of a global space, where all the elements are there, and I am navigating in and out, between all these elements, and I have the assurance that all are part of my experience, and I am a part of that: this multiple experience, even with contradictions as in your question... How I find peace is not necessarily about unification of the self, or synthesis, but expansion... It's the possibility of feeling for a moment that this is the self, I can gather it as a unity, but at the same time it is not [a unity].

**JOEP** And in this sense, Ximena stresses, the notion of In-Betweenness transcends its migrational context and is relevant in a broader humanitarian context as well.

**XIMENA** I think this experience of this inner struggle, is brought because of migration, migration is the big hit... but this struggle is the struggle of all human beings. It's a struggle about gender identity, about cultural and geographic identity... so many struggles, which the Deep Listening practice helps also to ease... you get a sense of ease, a sense of flexibility. It's possible to be whatever you are in the moment, and five minutes later, you can be, you can sound another thing.

**JOEP** Thank you for listening to this final episode of *Listening to the In-Between*, a Radio ArteEZ podcast-series, in which we explored Deep Listening, its connection to space, time and the interrelations between the outer and the inner world the practice reveals through sonic awareness. In case you missed the previous two episodes, or simply would like to re-visit them, please see the links in the show notes.

*Listening to the In-Between* was commissioned by ArteEZ Studium Generale. Interviews, texts and voice overs by Sharon Stewart and myself, Joep Christenhusz. Editing and sound production by Dennis Gaens of ondercast.

We hope to welcome you again in one of our next podcasts.