

Podcast Sounding Places

Mini-series Deep Listening

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Welcome to this three-part miniseries centered around Deep Listening, the lifework of composer, musician, writer and humanitarian Pauline Oliveros. I'm Sharon Stewart, a creator of sound works, musician, researcher, poet, and Deep Listener.

In the first episode "Deep Listening: Pauline Oliveros and the Sonosphere," I offer facets of my connection to Deep Listening along with some of the history of the practice, as related to the sonic environment - or the sonosphere - with pertinent excerpts from Oliveros' text scores. Together we can perform a seminal Sonic Meditation, number VIII: Environmental Dialogue.

In the second episode "Deep Listening and Reciprocal Listening with Tina Pearson" I draw upon my own scores and the work of Canadian composer, multimedia artist and Deep Listener Tina Pearson, inviting you to contemplate some ways we can involve ourselves in a respectful, listening and playful dialogue with our sonic environment. This interview forms part of my current area of inquiry for the ArteZ Professorship Theory in the Arts, namely: ethics and ethical practices within artistic research and the creative arts.

In the third and final episode "Deep Listening performance scores with Lisa E. Harris," I ask Deep Listening practitioner, interdisciplinary artist, creative soprano, and composer Lisa E. Harris from Houston Texas to tell us about her connection to Deep Listening and share with us some scores she has written. For those of you who love participatory vocalising, this one is for you!

Welcome to the first episode: Deep Listening: Pauline Oliveros and the Sonosphere

∞ = 0

I could love my listening
I could listen to me listening
I could perform my listening
I could be my listening⁽¹⁾

~Pauline Oliveros in *The Roots of the Moment*

Before I open into this story of Deep Listening to our Sonic Environment, I'd like to bring my attention back to how I am listening to you all:

What are all the aspects of my awareness that I can now direct toward the pleasure of listening to you, through this particular medium, even while I'm talking and especially when I might never hear your voice or your particular soundscape?

Simply asking the question "what am I excluding from my listening?" can open up a field of possibility that can be quite transformative.

And perhaps especially now, while listening online, while listening to each other in the intermittent isolation of the past year, while considering how our listening might include the non-human, the more-than-human, we are also experiencing how listening is always more than "simply" hearing with the ears.

It includes the body, all the senses, and it also includes listening to and through technology, listening to intuition and to dreams, to messages that we may not be able to place, beyond technology, beyond our usual habits of listening.

That being said, I'll be periodically inviting you to engage with a selection of Listening Questions, offered in Oliveros' 2005 book *Deep Listening: A Composer's Sound Practice*. Please feel free to pause your device to take some time to explore the question.

What are you hearing right now? How is it changing?

SOUND

[From "Lear", Deep Listening Band album](#)

around 13:30-14:00

I came across the 1989 Deep Listening Album in 2004, when working on my Master's Thesis, and I was immediately struck by the "Other" in the music. It spoke to me "otherwise," of the bodies of the musicians, the body of the resonant space (a 2-million-gallon underground water cistern in Washington State), of improvisation or instant composition, the reverberating space as a participating actor, the pure sensual joy and love of listening expressed by the musicians.

Pauline speaks of this cistern experience at a TED talk in Indianapolis

SOUND

[The difference between hearing and listening | Pauline Oliveros | TEDxIndianapolis](#)

1:17 "The meme" - 1:45 "myself"

The first time I met Pauline Oliveros was in the summer of 2008 at the the 18th annual Deep Listening Retreat at the University College Cork, Ireland and I wrote this following her passing:

26 Nov 2016: "Her presence, sitting, cross-legged with eyes shut, in the room as the participants came in immediately called up for me the sense of a weathered granite boulder, glistening in the seashore sunlight, stroked by the lapping waves and withstanding the buffeting of the greatest storms."

Pauline faced those storms, the student protests against the Vietnam War from 1964 on, including the self-immolation of George Winne Jr. at UCSD in 1970, where she was teaching.

Martha Mockus writes in her 2008 book *Sounding Out: Pauline Oliveros and Lesbian Musicality* "the assassinations of both the Kennedys and Martin Luther King, Jr. were "very upsetting" to Oliveros. "[quote] I felt the temper of the times. I felt the tremendous fear and - what can I say - the opposite of calm. Everybody was in an uproar and I began to feel a tremendous need to find a way to calm myself. The pressures were too great. The social events were simply mirrors of what was inside. I began to retreat. I didn't want to play concerts. [end quote]" Playing long tones on her accordion and singing with them was, in a sense, Oliveros's personal response to this unrest, her musical answer. However, her work with breath, meditation, and sound moved away from the personal to the communal in the formation of the ♀Ensemble (here she uses the symbol for female) and later the Sonic Meditations."

Non-verbal forms of expression have been very important within Deep Listening, and before I move on to the relationship with listening to one's sonic environment, I would like to take a minute to introduce the non-verbal as a source of personal exploration and collective trust-building that is also central to the Deep Listening practice.

Non-verbal, the making of sounds, tones, vibrations, with the voice or instrument as well as tuning into the natural movement of the body, cries, sighs, hummmmmms, tones, flops, convulsions, shakes, slumps that do not rely on semantic meaning but exist, not simply, but as expressions of themselves, of a, perhaps unconscious, state or feeling. When we follow the voice, the body, while letting the prefrontal cortex relax its function to control or filter, we open ourselves to layers of knowledge, "stored" in the body, in the voice, and we give them expression. We listen whole-ly.

When we do this with others and with all that is in our environment, we mirror this whole listening, not just the intellectual self, the edited or scripted self, but the unedited self, the vulnerable self, the bodily, noisy, quiet, intimate self, the very young and very old self who speaks through touch and relies on mirroring to feel safe and understood. We tap into the playful self whose play exists in the playing together, playing with others.

But what about this self as it is centered in its immediate sonic surroundings? Oliveros grew up in the rich sonic world, which she would later refer to with the term *sonosphere*, of Houston, Texas, with both mother, Edith Gutierrez, and grandmother, Pauline Gribbin, dedicated to piano teaching.

In an essay from 2007 - entitled My "American Music": Soundscape, Politics, Technology, Community - Oliveros opens the section on soundscape with "Certainly my childhood in Texas opened into a "wonderland" of natural sound. There were large rural areas, which I relished early on. "Pauline often refers to these sounds as a source of rich joy and inspiration during her childhood, as she also slowly turned to developing her inner sound world, later using Mendell Kleiner's term *auralization*, one's auditory imagination, which she began to develop in her first steps into composition. Her mother had given her a Sears Roebuck wire recorder as a present in 1947, when

she was 15, and a Silvertone magnetic tape recorder in 1953, when she was 21.

SOUND

Tape Machine:

<https://www.redbullmusicacademy.com/lectures/pauline-oliveros-lecture>

"As soon as I got my first tape recorder I put the microphone in the window of my apartment and recorded. What I noticed was that there were sounds on the tape that I had not heard, so I tap myself on the shoulder now, anytime I record, make sure I listen to everything. I tell myself to listen to everything all the time. That's my trip. [laughs]"

This lifetime devotion to listening developed into the seminal quote by Pauline that shaped my very first interaction with [Deep Listening](#) and that I have contemplated many times since:

Deep Listening is listening in every possible way to everything possible to hear no matter what you are doing. Such intense listening includes the sounds of daily life, or one's own thoughts as well as musical sounds. Deep Listening represents a heightened state of awareness and connects to all that there is. As a composer, I make my music through Deep Listening.

Are you sure that you are hearing every thing that there is to hear?

In 1991, Pauline wanted to explore Deep Listening further with others and accepted the invitation of choreographer, dancer, T'ai Chi/Qi Gong instructor Heloise Gold to establish the first Deep Listening Retreat at the Rose Mountain Retreat Center, together with author and playwright, director and improviser and her artistic and life partner, Ione. These three women joined their experience with scores for interactive listening and sounding, movement scores and dream sharing, and I was fortunate to take part later in three international retreats.

SOUND

Healing Dream Mandala Bee Hive version by IONE

A book we all continually draw upon is the well-known "Deep Listening: A Composer's Sound Practice".

In the Introduction, Pauline writes:

Deep Listening is a form of meditation. Attention is directed to the interplay of sounds and silences or the sound/silence continuum. Sound is not limited to musical or speaking sounds, but is inclusive of all perceptible vibrations (sonic formations). The relationship of all perceptible sounds is important.

The practice is intended to expand consciousness to the whole space/time continuum of sound/silences. Deep Listening is a process that extends the listener to this continuum as well as to focus instantaneously on a single sound (engagement to targeted detail) or sequences of sound/silence.

The practice of Deep Listening is intended to facilitate creativity in art and life through this form of meditation. Creativity means the formation of new patterns, exceeding the limitations and boundaries of old patterns, or using old patterns in new ways.

Animals are Deep Listeners. When you enter an environment where there are birds, insects or animals, they are listening to you completely. You are received. Your presence may be the difference between life and death for the creatures of the environment. Listening is survival!

How many sounds can you hear all at once?

At the TED talk in Indianapolis, quoted earlier, Pauline goes further:

SOUND

[The difference between hearing and listening | Pauline Oliveros | TEDxIndianapolis](#)

8m0s - 8m35s

"The level of awareness of soundscape brought about by Deep Listening can lead to the possibility of shaping the sound of technology and of urban environments. Deep Listening designers, engineers and city planners could enhance the quality of life as well as sound artists, composers and musicians." (xviii-xix)

While R Murray Schafer was defining features of the soundscape, such as the keynote sounds, sound signal and sound-mark, and Bernie Kraus was considering the relationships between biophony (including the niche hypothesis), geophony and anthropophony,- you can hear more on these topics in episode 1 of the podcast series Sounding Places | Listening Places - Oliveros used the term *sonosphere*, as "the sonorous or sonic envelope of the Earth that is comprised of two irrevocably interwoven layers, the biospheric layer and the technospheric layer" in a 2006 article "Improvisation in the Sonosphere". More on this in the second podcast of this miniseries.

What is your earliest memory of sound? How do you feel about it now?

Oliveros was always interested in the human-soundscape interaction, a subjective consciousness shaped by attention. While listening, becoming aware of four modes: Sensation, Feeling, Thinking and Intuition. And, always, interactively improvising with one's sonosphere. Some examples can be found in text scores and sonic meditations, such as:

"The River Meditation" from 1976 with vocalisations blending with key tones in the rushing water.

"Thirteen Changes", written for Malcolm Goldstein in 1986 that includes fantastical stimulants for the sonic imaginary, such as "Songs of ancient mothers among awesome rocks" and "a single egg motionless in the desert"

"In Consideration of the Earth" from 1998 in which a solo brass or wind instrument player turns and plays to the five directions, interacting with sounds perceived or imagined.

And, to end this non-conclusive collection, there is "Dissolving your Earplugs" from 2006, which offers encouragement to "close your eyes for a while and just listen" and to listen to and play or sing along with a favorite machine or favorite natural soundscape.

How long can you listen?

I will conclude with a seminal work by Oliveros, included in her original "Sonic Meditations" publication by Smith Publications in 1974, as number VIII, Environmental Dialogue. Here I offer the 1996 revised version.

I'd like to invite you to perform this work now or at a moment that is right for you. Set a timer, or your inner clock, to 10 minutes, and perform the following, pausing this podcast when instructed to and continuing once again after your timer goes off.

First, please find a comfortable place to sit or to lie down. If sitting, I invite you to take on an active sitting posture, with your feet flat on the floor, balancing first your two sit bones and moving up the curve of the spine to feel your shoulders hanging, relaxed, above your ribs and your head balancing nicely on the top vertebrae (you might need to slightly tuck in your chin) so that your upper body feels light and relaxed.

Let's take a few deep breaths together and, if possible, close your eyes.

This piece uses the term "reinforce the pitch." For example, I hear the hum of the ventilation. I don't need to exactly copy the sound, but I can bring out one dominant pitch in the sound that I hear in a long toned out-breath, for example.

"Environmental Dialogue" (1996 Revision)
by Pauline Oliveros

Each person finds a place to be, either near to or distant from the others, either indoors or out-of-doors. The meditation begins by each person observing his or her own breathing. As each person becomes aware of the field of sounds from the environment, each person individually and gradually begins to reinforce the pitch of any one of the sound sources that has attracted their attention. The

sound source is reinforced vocally, mentally or with an instrument. If one loses touch with the sound source, then wait quietly for another. Reinforce means to strengthen or to sustain by merging one's own pitch with the sound source. If the pitch of the sound source is out of vocal or instrumental range, then it is to be reinforced mentally. The result of this meditation will probably produce a resonance of the environment. Some of the sounds will be too short to reinforce. Some will disappear as soon as the reinforcement begins. It is fine to wait and listen.
(Oliveros 2005: 35)

...

Welcome back after your adventure with Environmental Dialogue

A Deep Listening workshop might include listening to the breath; listening with and through the body; listening meditations with global and focussed listening, remembered and imagined sounds, and more; sonic meditations and/or text scores; listening in dreams; and solo and/or group creation with possible performance. The Center for Deep Listening at RPI offers a Deep Listening online training program, for which I am a core teacher. Links can be found in the podcast notes.

In the next podcast of this Deep Listening mini-series, "Deep Listening and Reciprocal Listening with Tina Pearson," I'll be sharing more of Oliveros' writings and her personal example of "Improvisation in the Sonosphere," offering some of my own scores and asking Canadian composer Tina Pearson about her work "Toward a Reciprocal Listening," created for World Listening Day 2020.

And in the final podcast of this Deep Listening mini-series, I'll be touching on Deep Listening as a source of inspiration for creating and performing, with our special guest Lisa E. Harris, who was interviewed in Episode Three of the Podcast *Sounding Places / Listening Places*.

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This was an inversion of some writings of Pauline Oliveros in *The Roots of the Moment*.

Shownotes:

["Listening to Deep Listening: Reflection on the 1988 Recording and the Lifework of Pauline Oliveros"](#), by Sharon Stewart, *Journal of Sonic Studies*, 2012

First Episode

∞ = 0 poem by Pauline Oliveros, printed in [The Roots of the Moment](#) (1998: 27).

"[Pauline Oliveros](#)" at Red Bull Music Academy, Hosted by Hanna Bächer

Masterclass Pauline Oliveros at Sonic Acts 2021: '[Introduction and Background of Deep Listening](#)' (Stories start around 15m30s)

Pauline Oliveros, [Deep Listening: A Composer's Sound Practice](#), 2005. New York: iUniverse, Inc.

[Deep Listening](#) Album 1989 with Pauline Oliveros, Stuart Dempster and Panaiotis

TEDx Talk 2015 [The difference between hearing and listening | Pauline Oliveros | TEDxIndianapolis](#)

[The Center for Deep Listening at Rensselaer](#) (RPI)

[Deep Listening® Retreats](#)

[Anthology of Text Scores by Pauline Oliveros](#) (2013) Deep Listening Publications

"VII: Environmental Dialogue" from *Sonic Meditations* by Pauline Oliveros (1971) Smith Publications

Excerpts from "Healing Dream Mandala: Beehive version," by IONE and "Slow Walk, Slow Song" by Pauline Oliveros, led by Jennifer Wilsey, at the [Ratna Ling Deep Listening® Retreat](#) in 2018. Both recordings were made and edited by Sharon Stewart.