

Podcast Sounding Places
Episode 3: Land, Listening, and Leaving:
Talking to Ame Kanngieser and Lisa E. Harris

PART 1 - INTRODUCTION

SOUND

[Eulogy for the Handfish](#), Ame Kanngieser

00:19 - 00:54

AME KANNGIESER

Half of my work is leaving, you know. Of knowing when to leave, of leaving despite expectations, despite money paid, despite what I want, you know, despite anything. And saying, you know what, I am not, I'm not welcome here. I am unwanted here. And not because someone said something to me, but because I (feel)... know, I just know, inside of me, that this is not my place. You know, this is not a place for me. And I think, good intentions, the good intentions of the researcher are some of the most damaging things that we can conceive.

SOUND

[Eulogy for the Handfish](#), Kanngieser

01:52 - 02:30

SOUND

[Cry of The Third Eye: Act 1 - Teaser](#), Harris, Studio Enertia

00:00 - 00:30

LISA E. HARRIS

But what we practice in our, due to capitalism and patriarchy, and this this, like, horrible, horrible disease of ... patriarchy and ... really white supremacy that has pervaded our planet for so long, is that there's a conquering of a land, and a renaming, and a stripping, and a reclassification of things that are already going on. So there what stood before as an opportunity for biodiversity has just become a desperation. A despairing. A 'despairation.' And it's systemic, and it is definitely problematic.

SOUND

[Cry of The Third Eye: Act 1 - Teaser](#), Harris, Studio Enertia

00:53 - 01:23

SHARON STEWART

Hello, this is Sharon Stewart with "Land, Listening, and Leaving: Talking to Ame Kanngieser and Lisa E. Harris"

Themes of land, ownership, sound ...

The question of who owns sound, who owns music and creativity?
The question of how we feel rooted in place or why we might think we
have an intrinsic right to record, to capture soundscapes?

These are some of the things I wanted to discuss with geographer and
sound artist Ame Kanngieser, University of Melbourne, Australia, and
vocalist, writer, composer and interdisciplinary artist Lisa E.
Harris, of Houston, TX.

PART 2 - AME KANNGIESER

SHARON STEWART

I first came into contact with Ame Kanngieser's work through their
2016 article for the Journal of Sonic Studies, focusing on the site
of Rajarhat New Town, a newly developing satellite town in West
Bengal, India, and in 2020, I heard their talk at Sonic Acts in
Amsterdam about the research they did on the island of Nauru in the
Pacific, which has become largely uninhabitable due to intensive
phosphate mining, a site of offshore incarceration and socio-
ecological crisis. A combination of site specific recordings and the
voices of Indigenous Nauruans, speaking to their situation, amplify
deep relations to land and sea.

Care-full listening, activism, pirate radio, racism, ecocide and the
role of the sonic artist and researcher are among the themes evident
in Ame's research, their theory always anchored in practice. I was
curious to hear about their perspectives on the sounding voice
within radical political organization, the idea of environmental
"kin study" (instead of "case study"), the impacts of listening to
ecocide, and, perhaps most intriguing to me, the issue of ethical
decision-making for the white, settler field recordist and
researcher. Ame's land acknowledgment can be found in the podcast
notes.

I opened our conversation with a question related to my Deep
Listening practice, from Pauline Oliveros: "What am I excluding from
my listening?" and asked them who or what might be excluded in the
format of the podcast and in our listening at that moment.

AME KANNGIESER

When I'm thinking about any kind of technology of
recording or documentation, I always think about the
materiality of the technology that I'm using, in the very
first instance, right. And ... so much of the technologies
that we take for granted when we think about
communication and transmission are old technologies that
have come out of some kind of ... logic of militarization
and logic of research and development. And a particular
kind of way of, I suppose, capturing ... the world and
capturing sound. And so that's always something that I
think of, is like. What function did this thing serve?
Where did this thing come from? What is this thing's
history, in the first instance? I have a very difficult
relationship with microphones, to be honest ... because I
think of all the different ways that microphones and
technologies of listening have been used to oppress and

persecute people. So I think, for me, one of the first things that I think about in any kind of form like this is, what are the histories of the devices that we're using?

And so obviously, podcasting has in some ways been touted as this kind of liberation of radio, everybody can make podcasts ... And I think to some extent, that's true. I also think that podcasts are, as we've already seen, extraordinarily white, again, you know. The particular kinds of formats that podcasts often take place in are very American, or very Anglo European. There are particular ways that we tell stories on podcasts that are very Western, very American ways of telling stories, very European ways of telling stories. And so, I think the thing is, yes, I think podcasts [and] the technologies associated with it has opened up new ways for other people to engage. But we are always practicing forms of exclusion and oppression in the ways that we use technologies. Because we never interrogate what we are actually doing. And I think ..., if I have to think about who is here and who is not here, I also think about who is even going to listen, you know? How does this stuff get disseminated? Who is this of interest to?

SHARON STEWART

Because Ame's work is also grounded in understanding the voice as an affective and ethico-political force, and because voices operate in public spaces to both create a sense of belonging as well as influence decisions on all levels regarding who belongs in a place, I turn the topic to their 2011 article, entitled "A sonic geography of voice: Towards an affective politics," asking about their connection and attraction to radical political organization. Did it have a certain sound, perhaps, that they were missing or seeking in their life?

AME KANNGIESER

For me, the work around voice and listening and organizing really came out of ... I guess, noticing very much how the ways people speak and not just like the languages or whatever that people use, or, the affectations or whatever that people have. But, really almost how the viscosity of a body gets articulated in a way that someone speaks and how on so many different levels that can impede, and affect and ... almost, I would say, sometimes determine possibilities for working together across difference.

And I was just really interested in how much that affected a dynamic within a group and how much that affected people's capacities, and also people's desires to work together. To kind of collectively work together. How did the shifting tonalities and cadences and rhythms and accents within these oftentimes quite stressful situations, how do they affect the atmosphere and the relationality within that space? You know, how do they almost create a particular kind of relationality within that space?

SHARON STEWART

Ame's parents fled Germany after the Second World War, and their witnessing how they and their adopted grandparents, who had survived the Holocaust and Camps, communicated with one another through enduring stress and grief had a lasting impact.

AME KANNGIESER

Just how much is said, in voices and in sounds when things aren't necessarily being said. So how much is kind of said underneath something or sideways or, you know, through silence, you know. How much all these different sounds we make communicates so much about our histories, and our dispositions, and our capacities in ways that we may not even know ourselves.

SOUND

[CTM 2021: »Critical Modes of Listening«](#)

1:24:38 - 1:25:17

Listening as Relation, an Invocation« Lecture-performance by AM Kanngieser and Zoe Todd

SHARON STEWART

That audio excerpt was derived from the online lecture-performance "Listening as Relation, an Invocation" by socio-anthropologist Zoe Todd and Ame Kanngieser for the CTM Festival 2021 Discourse Series »Critical Modes of Listening«

AME KANNGIESER

Part of the work that I'm doing with Zoe Todd, at the moment. And part of what we've been talking about for a long time is invocation. And how we articulate things, how we tell stories of places, how we narrate our relationalities to places how we listen to places are particular ways of invoking, I really do think that there is so much power in ... how we sound places in a way. And how we sound relations. It's not just in words. I kind of want to get away from that. And, one of the things that I really work on in listening as well is ... that it's not just aural listening, for me listening is an entirely bodied thing. It is kind of more like sensing, almost like my skin is listening, or just, I don't know, I kind of feel like my whole body is a ginormous receiver, ... or something. And so it kind of hits on so many different registers that I don't even know how much of it is actually aural.

SHARON STEWART

While we are immersed in how our own ears and body sense vibrations in our environment, when recording, pretty much all the time a microphone "hears" an environment in a different way than our ears do, due to how our, collective, but also individual, human ears and brains are designed to register and respond to sound. Psychoacoustics is the field devoted to understanding this. This is why listening to a recording later will often give you a (sometimes

very) different impression of a soundscape. The microphone prioritizes different frequencies than your own ear does, and it doesn't get distracted by visual or other sensory input. How did Ame's use of recording technology evolve, and how are they connected to the field of acoustic ecology?

AME KANNGIESER

So the person who I grew up with as a grandfather was a composer. And so, when I was very small, ... he used to have this old tape deck and reel to reel, and used to record me saying things and reading things... and we used to, like, pour water to make sounds of like streams, and, you know, play around with all of these different things. So I grew up with that really present, you know, and ... I think, also, because ... I have a condition, that's a sensory processing disorder. I don't really think of it as a disorder at all, but it means that I kind of hear everything at the same level. So if I'm kind of outside, and someone is trying to talk to me, but I can hear the sound of a bird or there's wind or anything else, it is kind of all at the same level, in my brain, in a way. So I don't kind of ... put emphasis on the person. It is ... everything. It is like an entire Sonic field that I hear in its entirety. And I think, ... before I even knew what field recording was, ... that was how I've always experienced the world. So for me to kind of start. Yeah, I don't know. I mean, I've had more problems with field recording, I think then I've found it satisfying. To be honest . . .

SHARON STEWART

I can very much relate to that, absolutely.

AME KANNGIESER

... Because, yeah, I mean ... when I first started building microphones, I was very excited by how much it opened up. I was like, wow, I can hear this stuff. Like having bionic ears or something, and that was amazing. But then I think what I struggle with, with acoustic ecology and field recordings, is the segmentation of sound from itself in a way, this kind of arbitrary imposition of beginning and end. And saying, this is the bit that's important. And this is a bit that I can hear in this moment. And everything else is kind of ... I don't know, it's like, ... damming a river or something, you know, uhm, yeah?

SHARON STEWART

In 2020 Ame co-wrote an article with Zoe Todd, entitled "From Environmental Case Study to Environmental Kin Study," indicating a shift from a belief in the objective and analytical gaze, or ear, of the researcher toward a relational approach of understanding our

kin, our relations. They "[quote] propose a method of listening and attuning that can attend to the dislocation and abstraction often found in work addressing ecocide and environmental violence. a method called "kin study," which invites more embedded, expansive, material, and respectful relations to people and lands." [end quote] Now is a good time to say that links to articles cited can be found in the podcast notes.

AME KANNGIESER

It took me quite a long time to realize that the way I heard the world was not the same as everyone. And I think, really, especially in the work with Zoe, we both have a very similar approach to the world in that, it is almost like what you say, it is like, not having those filters, you know, and ... I guess the way that we both inhabit the world is through this extremely relational way. It can be quite overwhelming, to be honest, you know. It is a lot. It's kind of like being in a perpetual kind of psychedelia or something. But, I think that's probably in part where our work comes from so much is because that's how we experience the world: is these constant, energetic or sonic flows and relations between everything, and ... I guess ... what we kind of came to together was thinking, well this way of taking the world and cutting it into pieces and categorizing it. I mean, it is an entirely colonial approach to the world. It is an absolutely colonialist and capitalist approach to the world is to cut things up, and to segment them, and to take them out of their relationality, and to categorize them, and to order them in a very specific kind of way, in a very European kind of way. You know, it is talking about these ecocidal and environmental catastrophes without any sense of relation to the place or relation between people and ecologies. Like, without any kind of, I suppose, like liveliness, in a way. We spoke about how it just, it is this particular kind of flattening and abstraction, and almost like, I don't know, it's a real deadening. And I see that as quite a violence, and I know that Zoe also perceives this as quite a violence to kind of do this to places to take away ... the life out of places, and the relationality out of places. And we saw this particularly in work around environmental catastrophe. And so, Zoe had already been working for quite a while on the idea of environmental kin study, and we came together around trying to understand the role of listening and attunement in being in good relation with place. And in shifting this kind of perspective, I suppose, on how academics and how researchers, and artists, and you know, cultural workers, how lots of ... policymakers, how, you know, a whole range of people approach sites.

SHARON STEWART

I now pose the question that has been haunting me: "Is it possible for a white settler scholar to "mean well," to create a meaningful

contribution or ethically enter a space to "do research" when this might be in direct opposition to local understandings of the "ongoing reciprocal relations" of place?

AME KANNGIESER

I don't think it is. ... I have to say that, you know. I am a white Australian German scholar, and I have been doing this work for a very long time, and I don't think it is possible ... to do it.

I think when I listen, I bring all of my lineages is with me, and I have been writing about this a lot. I've been writing about listening as arriving, as coming to, listening as being with, and I'm going to talk about this a little bit later on. The most important part for me, which is listening is leaving, and leaving with grace. And, you know, I think all of my work around listening is precisely around this tension. Because there are so many places that I've been, that I know I am not, it is not my place to be, and I leave, you know. And I feel like ... half of my work is leaving, you know. Of knowing when to leave, of leaving despite expectations, despite money paid, despite what I want, you know, despite anything. And saying, you know what, I am not, I'm not welcome here. I am unwanted here. And not because someone said something to me, but because I (feel)... know, I just know, inside of me, that this is not my place. You know, this is not a place for me. And I think, good intentions, the good intentions of the researcher are some of the most damaging things that we can conceive, you know. Because I think that ... every well-meaning ... good white person researcher comes in and says, but I'm not doing this thing. I'm not doing this thing. And certainly what I've discovered through the work that I've done in ... the Pacific, is that oftentimes, my sheer bodily presence is doing harm, right? I don't need to open my mouth or say anything, just being there already indicates something to someone. And that is, that is something that we need to take seriously, because it doesn't matter how good my intentions are. That doesn't even come into it, you know.

SHARON STEWART

Ame's realization and commitment - that sometimes, no matter how much they might want to do something, that it might just not be appropriate - has changed the course of their academic career. In the talk "Listening to Ecocide" Ame gave at the Sonic Acts Academy in 2020, they talked about attunement to the Pacific Island of Nauru, which began with a powerful listening moment, a moment that revealed that listening to ecocide can mean listening to silence. And I ask her about the process of attunement and engagement in this particular "kin study."

SOUND

Ame Kanngieser - [Listening to Ecocide](#) 04:14 - 04:35

AME KANNGIESER

So, Nauru was sort of initially colonized by Germany, and it was Germans who found phosphate in the first place, which is the resource that Nauru exports. And ... to be somewhere, and to know that, you know as a German Australian being in a place that, Germany's history with Nauru. Australia's intensive neocolonialism, across the entire Pacific region, but with Nauru as well because Australia has put one of its offshore detention centers on Nauru, which comes from these very long history of colonization, you know. The decimation of the land through mining, through phosphate mining which, Katerina Teaiwa has done brilliant work on this in regard to the island of Banaba, where there was also a lot of phosphate mining, to basically shore up the agricultural stability of Australia and New Zealand, you know. Taking this natural resource from this one place to enable the economic and agricultural growth of another place. The absolute destruction of that environment and then, you know, the ongoing relationship, the ongoing neocolonial relationship with Australia, the economic relationship where the economy has then been run on, you know, the detention of refugees and asylum seekers, trying to come to Australia, ... There is such ...

... a horrific geopolitical history there ... or not even a history, contemporaneously as well. And to come there. And to know this. And to sit there. And to listen to that space and to know that this is what is happening in that space is ... a lot. You know, I don't really know how else to kind of speak to the gravity of that. And so, I think for me knowing all of these things, and the fact that these are the frameworks for the work that I do is actually facing all of those things and then to listen ... to the ... biophony of that place. And to hear that one reed warbler. And I sat there, I went every night for over a week, you know. I sat in the same spot. And I just waited, and waited and waited. And, ... for me that was incredibly illustrative of everything that I was speaking to people about, you know. Hearing from people about their experiences of ... ocean inundation, of food shortages, of drought, of extreme heat, you know, the loss of land. All of these different kinds of climatic experiences that they were having just was so ... I don't know for me felt so articulated in that particular instance, you know. In that particular experience of returning again and again, to ... to this particular site and that being what the acoustic environment was.

SHARON STEWART

Through my prompting we turn back to the question of asking permission from a place.

AME KANNGIESER

You know, I think the first question that I always ask myself is... . Do I, ... do I need to be doing this? Is this for me to do? Is this for me to hear? Does this need me? And most of the time, the answer is no. And I think maybe that's the first thing that we need to do is to reconfigure our understanding of why we do what we do. As something that is oftentimes driven very egoically, and

driven very much by a colonizer mentality of: I want this. I want to go there. I want to experience this, I want to record this. I want to put this into the world, and I want to lay claim to it. I want to be known for this, you know. There is such a process of possession and ownership, that goes on in that, seemingly ... again ... I'll say benign. Because I think for most field recorders and in most acoustic ecology, this is seen as benign. You know, there's no harm, generally attributed with this. It's like: Oh, I want to go out and record this bird, or record this waterfall, or record this whatever. There's never a question of does the waterfall want to be known by me? Does the bird want to be heard by me? It's never even, it's never even brought up. And I wonder if perhaps ... that question of what relation do I have with this place? What relation am I willing to put the time and effort into developing with these place, and people who leave here? Or, to the people who this land is sacred, or meaningful? You know. Most of the time people don't even know whose land they're on. They don't even know anything that's happened there or what is special about that place, what is integral to that place? And I think maybe, if coming from a position of saying: Before I do something I need to seek permission. And I need to seek relation. And starting from there, I think things would look very different.

I don't know, it would make things a lot sparser, I suppose. Because asking permission, at least in my experience, is a very slow process.

SHARON STEWART

Ame talks about the failing of equipment or - in the anecdote she relays, dolphins failing to come close - when she is in a rush or doesn't connect properly.

AME KANNGIESER

Maybe they fail because it's not for us to be there, you know. And I wonder if thinking about things from that perspective might change something, you know. To kind of move from this idea that the world is ours, like, we have a right to the world. And to really think, am I invited? Am I wanted? What are my intentions? You know. What is my intention in this place?

One of the things that I'm really working on now is thinking about listening as leaving. About knowing when to leave. And not just to leave, in the sense of: Oh, this is a failure or, oh, I didn't get what I want, or, you know, with some kind of attachment to an idea of leaving that is negative. But leaving with grace, you know. Like leaving with saying, you know: I'm thankful that I know when to leave. Because I ... it's so important to know how to actually go and not do more harm. And to know that actually the best thing you can do is to just leave something alone. You know, that's literally the best

thing you can do, is to just leave. Leave it alone. You know, just respect it and leave it alone.

SHARON STEWART

This might be your legacy, your contribution to the whole field of ... sonic ecology. The gracious act of being thankful and leaving

PART 3 - Lisa E. Harris

SOUND

00:42 - 01:06 [You've Got a Right to the Tree of Life](#)

SHARON STEWART

Trained as an opera singer at the Manhattan School of Music in New York, Lisa E. Harris is a vocalist, performer, composer, poet and - as they say in a recent acknowledgment of her receiving the Dorothea Tanning Award for Music/Sound - "Harris's work resists genre classification as Li focuses on the energetic relationships between body, land, spirit, and place.

Using voice, theremin, movement, improvisation, meditation, and new media to explore spatial awareness, relationalism, intuition, panoptic surveillance, and personification, Li maintains a focused concentration on healing in performance and living."

I first met Li, in 2017, during the online Deep Listening Certification program. Take a listen to the Deep Listening podcast mini-series to hear more. During that time Hurricane Harvey hit her hometown of Houston, where she was immediately involved both in witnessing the impact as well as supporting her community both during and afterwards.

Li was born in the city of Houston, a sonically-rich location, rising up in an area of wetlands and coastal marshes along the Gulf of Mexico. This sonic richness was often referred to by Pauline Oliveros - the visionary musician, Deep Listener, and our common source of inspiration - who was also born in Houston. I was curious about this connection to land, through sound, that Oliveros referred to so often.

I opened the interview with a quote of Li's from an interview by the artistic and life partner of Oliveros, [IONE, in Bomb magazine](#): "During this hard time the question is: can we find these micro spaces of time before acting in order to consecrate our actions?" taking that micro space of time and thanking her for coming to share her rich experience with us, I asked her which associations - drawing upon childhood, family stories, art, music - come to mind with the word: LAND

LISA E. HARRIS

And it's such a great question that's like specifically, specific to my childhood because my mother, her name is Landa. And so, ... my earliest understanding of the word

land, really has to do with my human mother, who is Landa. Is this Spanish surname and it means, it refers to the land. And she just had that, she has that quality about her. She's very earthy...

So I that would be my very first ... recognition of that word being in my mom's name. Outside of that, I remember, so early, pine needles in my native Houston, Texas. That's one of my earliest childhood, outdoor environmental memories, being in ... early pre-k, which is like, early in kindergarten in America, at an Episcopal Church school. And walking outside in the fall, around the solstice time and smelling the pine needles and hearing them, I remember that. And I often look, looked for that moment in those places, throughout my life as I would come back to that city. And never really smelled the same as that, as that initial smelling and recognizing a pine...

We have this like Mighty Mississippi River that's here, running into the Gulf of Mexico that's like ... near, near Houston. But Houston gets the spoils of that. We have all of the ... import from all over the world, coming right in as an entry point going north to ... through the United States onto Canada, as an entryway and also going down into South America. And... there's something that, that those ... those transactions and those energetic transactions are not lost on the people or the culture. It actually is the building blocks, the protein of the people and the culture combined. So, my even, my musical or sonic upbringing ... my cultural upbringing that has to do with sound, and also food, is so mixed.

SHARON STEWART

Li is a descendent of African as well as Cherokee and Blackfoot peoples, who were enslaved and massacred during the horrific, surprisingly still barely-taught, colonial history of the United States, which underlies the current and urgent need for rightful acknowledgement. Her heritage is also part of her relationship to land, and she shares a bit of the history and this anthem she wrote on Juneteenth 2020 with us.

LISA E. HARRIS

I wrote this on Juneteenth. Which is June nineteenth ... it is a celebration, generally, of liberation, where enslaved people, specifically in Texas and where I am from, found out that the United States had actually ... abolished slavery, two years, five months and 18 days prior to when the enslaved people in Texas got the news ... So, we celebrate that now, it's tucked in between Memorial Day, which is a kind of summer solstice celebration, and also the Fourth of July, which is kind of being seen as like the birthday of America, it's tucked right in between that, and appropriately so.

...I think it should be commemorated as a not forgetting
... as a not forgetting. So this is what I wrote
for Juneteenth this year...

“‘They eat the kill and then have cake.’ ... What happens
to captives when captives are set free to run on captured
land? ... Is this called Jubilee? ... Should not their
ancestral land be restored to them and them unto It? ...
Black people, we have made a new covenant every time our
feet stand upon the Earth. ... We restored the captive
land. She is set free to run through our captured feet.
... And this is just one reason why ... They make us to
hover so ... The drip draws ... Bone from ... The meet.”

SHARON STEWART

When we spoke, Li was busy creating at a Rising: Climate in Crisis
Residency at “A Studio in the Woods,” dedicated to forest
preservation on eight forested acres on the Mississippi River.

LISA E. HARRIS

Yes, I am currently in outside of New Orleans, Louisiana.
In the Gulf south, on the Gulf of Mexico. And, I am at a
residency called ‘A Studio in the Woods,’ and it's focused on
some aspects of climate change. My project here, that I'm
researching, and getting being supported in, is called ‘Onshore
Trilling: What to Do When the Earth Sings the Bruise.’

SOUND

[Oil Pumpjack Sound Effects](#)

And, this is a bit of a poetic title as a lot of my work
... is centered around texts and poetry. But ... I am ... I
am looking at onshore trilling, as opposed to onshore ...
offshore drilling. I'm specifically looking at ... highly
productive areas. Areas that are in near proximity to
highly productive drilling sites, offshore. And I'm
curious about the practices that those coastal
communities engage in, sustainable practices. And how
being in such proximity to this, these events, has
changed their life, has changed the kind of sounds, and
movements and work that they create.

So, I'm also looking at that in my research as ‘What to
do when the Earth Sings the Bruise’ like, is that the
blues? And what is the correlation between these sonic
happenings and occurrences in proximity to a site of
trauma, or site of healing?

SHARON STEWART

In 2017, another kind of sonic and traumatic impact occurred:
Hurricane Harvey made landfall three times over six days, dumping
massive amounts of water on the city of Houston. What does she
remember from that day and what did it mean to her?

LISA E. HARRIS

Hurricane Harvey, was another ... yet another wakeup call ... to the vulnerability of the region. And not just, and that ... that's symptomatic, of ... of our, of our global climate crisis.

So, I remember hearing about Hurricane Katrina and wanting to leave New York where I was studying, just to come and help. I didn't know what I could do. And I remember my mom telling me on the phone, just stay there. They have all the help that they can get here, but you can stay there and pray for them. Pray for everyone send good energy. You know, we really believe in that, we really believe in metaphysical spiritual energy reaching, and that's what she asked me to do. Stay calm, and be grounded. We'll need your strength later. And sure enough, I was reminded of that hurricane when Hurricane Harvey came back around to our own Houston...

... Being in Houston during that I noticed, ... the difference in the severity of this hurricane, and as rapidly as they're occurring, is that our technology is also rapidly and exponentially increasing, as well. So, we're now have a technology that is, in some ways helpful to get the information to us and to get, you know, to let us know what's going on. But it also kind of distracts us from the feeling and the groundedness that we really need to have, in order to be in nature, while nature does her own thing. Like, years before, I mean, we're from a lineage of people that have known hurricanes for generations, centuries, in this area. And, what they had to rely on was a different kind of technology, that had to do a lot with our abilities that we talked about now of Deep Listening. It had to do a lot with ... telepathy, and premonition, and knowing, and the relationship between yourself and your environment. But now, we are we're relying on...we had the ... insistence of this modern day technology, kind of helping but not helping, exacerbate the ... the hysteria.

SHARON STEWART

Lisa talks about the way special-effects-like images of disaster can be both triggering as well as served up to the viewer as entertainment. But these events also generate collective creativity.

LISA E. HARRIS

My response, immediate response was to: Okay you have to turn off your computer and you have to meditate. And I did that, I did that for hours. And then I realized in my meditation, now you have to turn your computer back on and show other people how to do this, and hold this space, like this kind of anchor of meditation as an option. As a way to use the devices to reconnect us, to do our own practice, you know. And that's really like at the core of what I do.

SHARON STEWART

Turning from the topic of natural disaster to the creativity that is triggered by our sounding and listening environment, I ask Lisa about her ways of making contact with all the incredibly diverse places she performs in.

LISA E. HARRIS

Okay, great. Well, when I make contact, you know, my, my relationship to place and performance really stems back to my background and being a classically trained vocalist. And so, ... I was always very interested in acoustics. That's not mandatory for vocalists to be interested in that way, but I definitely was. I would like to go to the hall and find the sweet spots. I was really, really interested in where it would, where the sound would ring out the most. There's an aria, "Dich, Teure halle," and it's ... about, like, giving written really to like give reverence to the space, you know, the architecture. So, I would, I remember circling buildings on the inside, wanting to go during soundcheck and find the places where, you know, to practice and that, to familiarize myself with the room...

...so now and today, like in ... venturing off into performance art, and public installation and interventions, I'm usually drawn to ... pedestrian spaces. I'm usually drawn to spaces that sometimes I feel are vortexes, vortices, I think is the plural of that. But, I've always been excited about vortices and like ... oh I can feel an energy in this place or what used to be here I feel like, ... what I've described to my mother often as a ... a well, like a physical running water well under certain places like, oh there's something here. So it's, it's interesting that my work now is ... in ... energy extraction from the earth as I'm kind of always sensing like a Geiger [counter]. What is happening underneath the surface and kind of connecting at ... a gravity level ...

SHARON STEWART

Moving from connecting to place to connecting with people, Li often teams up with other performance artists, including Alisha Wormsley, Autumn Knight, Rashida Bumbray, Nicole Mitchell, and Abijan Johnson, among others. I wonder how Lisa feels about the ownership of her own voice, the creations made in such close collaboration with others, and even "Who owns music?"

LISA E. HARRIS

Right, who owns music? That's a great question. There is a certain amount of ... stewardship that comes with being an artist. And, ... I'm reminded also of another aria, 'Io son l'umile ancella' and it is from Adriana, the opera, Adriana Lecouvreur. And it is, ... she says, you know, I am the humble servant of the creative genius. And that, has stuck with me for a long time since I learned that aria, I was like 19 years old. But, there is, ... in that, I think that we have to...

We have an opportunity to be, ... really, really dutiful stewards of, of ... something that belongs to a greater. And just in that kind of succession of ... not something that belongs to me, but something that belongs to a greater, in that succession. And this is, everyone does not agree with me, certainly won't agree with this. But this is how I feel ... spiritually, that, it's very easy then for me to... speak with authority over what is mine, or what is not mine. And when I say mine, it's because my relationship to possession has to do with ... my spiritual relationship and believing that I ... am from a greater. So I, you know, so when I say mine, I'm like, this is my responsibility. This is my job. This is my duty, this was ... my ... project, my purpose. So, it's not about "my creation."

But what we practice in our, due to capitalism and ... patriarchy, and this this, like, horrible, horrible disease of ... patriarchy and ... really white supremacy that has pervaded our planet for so long, is that there's a conquering of a land, and a renaming, and a stripping, and ... a reclassific ... a reclassification of things that are already going on. So there ... what stood before as an opportunity for biodiversity has just become ... a desperation. A despairing. A 'despairation.' And...it's systemic, and it is definitely problematic. I've had my own home. I made a film about this in 2015, called 'Children of the Lost' you guys can look it up, as well. It is act two of my new opera film 'Cry of the Third Eye,' which has three acts. And it follows my relationship to a neighbour ... to my neighbourhood in Houston, over the course of a decade.

SOUND

[Third Ward Anthem](#)

And, my grandparents' house, my relationship to ... inheritance, and ... and also my relationship with the city and public policies such as eminent domain. In 2015, I was removed from my home, or asked to leave my home because the city purchased the property, due to eminent domain, which they have the overriding sovereignty to take land, depending if it's good for the public, or if it's for the public good. Of course, that is determined by the city themselves, and private NGO, non-governmental organizations. So, for pennies, of what it was worth, in a very, very, very lucrative area, my home and a lot of other homes was taken and destroyed...

...My grandfather owned this home and bought it, with good American dollars that were backed by, and weighed in, good American blood and sweat that came out of his body. So he bought this with the idea to have something that could create a legacy that he could pass down. My grandfather, George Harris believed very much in buying land and sharing, and having land be his legacy. He told

me when I was a child, always buy and take care of land. It's the only thing that they're not making any more of... ..And that stuck with me forever. He told me that as a child, and it's true. He's like, it's the only thing they're not making any more of, so take care of it, and have it. And we did that in my family. And it was not easy. Speaking of ownership, speaking of property taxes, is not easy. And it's not set up for people to actually have land. The way the banking systems are set up in laws. So we lost that battle ... But, you know, on the other side of it, I have the opportunity to experience it as a witness, and document it. So I can, you know, the land, and the story and the connection gets to live on through art.

SHARON STEWART

Pivoting from this lived story - involving land, documentation and art - I turned the conversation toward a very exciting collaboration that involved another story, the story of Lauren Oya Olamina and her EarthSeed verses within the books by Octavia Butler: *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*, both written in the 1990s. As collaborators, how did Li and composer and flutist Nicole Mitchell make the choice of sounds for this work: EarthSeed?

SOUND

[Biotic Seeds](#)

00:01-00:30

LISA E. HARRIS

Making EarthSeed was, ...was a joy. ... One of our earlier collaborative experiences was thinking about the orchestration. So, because we need, like everything, we need, we need structure, we need, like, architecture. So she says, I remember Nicole called me and said so we should think about what are the sounds, we know, just like orchestral works from a classical and romantic periods that I love, as well, from Europe, even. When we're thinking about the nature, we're bringing in these natural, these instruments, that are wood and, you know, bringing in some shiny solar energy from brass instruments. But we were very, very much dedicated to working with electronics. So ... our orchestration consists of Tomeka Reid on cello, Zara Zaharieva on violin, Julian Otis, who's a fantastic tenor on vocals, along with myself on vocals, and I also played the theremin and other electronic instruments. Nicole Mitchell on flute and electronics. And then Ben LaMar Gay who is playing trumpet, and electronics as well. Also Avreeayl Ra, who is playing percussion. So... we have this, this warm sense of, a chamber sense of, wood string instruments with the cello and the violin. And ... there are moments and passes where we just let the strings play, have the strings play together to create that kind of ... environment that we recognize as earthen. And, and then we would bring in the voices, which, you know ... are in my, and our interpretation ... human consciousness and thought, really. The consciousness, the conscious mind in an earthen environment...

SOUND

[Getting acquainted with Hermann, my theremin](#)

00:18-00:34

LISA E. HARRIS

...The electronics lend themselves to ... a more ... Octavia's description of ... present future. And, and where we can go from Earth and beyond, and where we are doing that already, I mean, electronic music. Using the theremin was particular for me because it's recognized as the first electronic instrument. But at this particular point in 2021, it's 102 years old. So, you know, that's really, really interesting that that is still so new, some people have never even heard it. And we've heard, we've had so many electronic instruments birthed since that creation. So I wanted to bring that instrument in as kind of a sense of origin or a sense of departure from one world to into the next ...

...We also had sounds ... distortion, live distortion, Ben LaMar Gay was able to record us live and also echo throughout ... using his electronics to echo and reconfigure sounds that were making live to create something immediately new and introduced into the composition as well. I think that's, that's really nice. And... an example of, again this idea of biodiversity and what can happen when we introduce like, new cultures and new ... new abilities to adapt quickly ... quickly and what happens when that's incorporated into what's already going on.

SOUND

[Whole Black Collision](#)

00:55-01:25

SHARON STEWART

In closing, I asked Lisa about what she needs from us and the music industry, how the music industry could better listen to her, as an artist and woman of color.

LISA E. HARRIS

But outside of healing, just good old fashioned gift. Like, we need gifts. We need gifts of every, in every sort of way, you know. Me as a black artist, and as a black woman, I need every sort of gift that I can receive. And that will allow me, like, just to have ... nine hours of sleep. I mean, just some of the things that we're talking about today, this is just, it's a beautiful sunshiny day I had a great amount of sleep, I had a little bit of time ... and that, you know ... just to have a little, ... a little gifts of time and space will allow for, the receiving and the regeneration of who knows what. I think the world will

... will have the opportunity to allow the world to heal itself. When we give ourselves, when we are able to receive gifts of ...
... of nothingness, ... of just, of nothingness. Like, figure it out, of non-production.

SHARON STEWART

Thank you, that idea of the gift. And giving the gift of space, of quiet, openness, nothingness. Time to get in touch with yourself, very caring. Thank you so much for that.

Ame Kanngieser

This interview took place on the stolen lands of the Wurundjeri and Bunurong people of the East Kulin Nations. We acknowledge the traditional owners of these lands and pay our respects to elders past and present and to Country itself. Sovereignty was never ceded, resistance is ongoing.

Website: [AM Kanngieser](#)

Soundwork: [Eulogy for the Handfish](#), The Parallel Effect, 2020

Talk: [Listening to Ecocide](#) at Sonic Acts, 2020

Collaborative talk: [Listening as Relation, an Invocation](#) for CTM Festival: Discourse Series – Critical Modes of Listening, 2021, with Métis/otipemisiw anthropologist Zoe Todd, 2021

Article: "[From environmental case study to environmental kin study](#)" in *History and Theory*, 2020

Article: "[A brief proposition toward a sonic geo-politics](#)" in *Journal of Sonic Studies*, 2016

Article: "[Geopolitics and the Anthropocene: Five propositions for sound](#)" in *Geohumanities*, 2015

Article: "[A sonic geography of the voice: Towards an affective politics](#)" in *Progress in Human Geography*, 2011

Website: [Lisa E. Harris](#)

Foundation for Contemporary Arts: [Dorothea Tanning Award, Music/Sound, 2021, Lisa E. Harris](#)

Rising Residents: [Climate in Crisis Residencies at A Studio in the Woods](#), 2020

Interview: "[Growth Potential: Lisa Harris Interviewed by IONE](#)" in BOMB magazine, 2020

Interview: "[Deep Space, Deep Listening, and EarthSeed: An Interview With Lisa E. Harris](#)" by Betsy Huete in Glasstire, 2020

Album: [Earthseed](#) by Nicole Mitchell and Lisa E. Harris, 2020

Live, multimedia performance: [Cry of the Third Eye](#), description in Glasstire, 2020

Album: [Cry of the Third Eye \(From Original Soundtrack\)](#) on Spotify

Installation Work: "[Please, Have a Seat](#)" and "[Black Bodies in Space](#)" in *Objektiv*, 2020

YouTube: "[You've got a Right to the Tree of Life](#)" Lisa E. Harris, 2013

YouTube: "[Getting acquainted with Hermann, my theremin](#)" Lisa E. Harris, 2017

They eat the Kill and then Have Cake.
(For Juneteenth in Texas, USA)

What happens to captives when captives are set free
to run on captured land?
Is this called Jubilee?

Should not their ancestral land be restored to them and
them unto It?

Black people, we have made a new covenant every time our
feet stand upon the Earth.
We restore the captive land . She is set free to run
through our captured feet.

And this is just one reason why
They make us to hover so
The drip draws
Bone from
The meet.

-Li Harris
6/19/2020