

Listening to the In-Between

- Part I: Introducing Pauline Oliveros and Deep Listening -

SFX

Album *Deep Listening*, track 1, 'Lear'
[0:00 - 1:12 (als hoorn is uitgeklonken)]

JOEP (#1)

Hi there, a warm welcome to the first episode of *Listening to the In-Between*. In this three-part podcast series by Radio ArtEZ we will explore various aspects of Deep Listening, a practice developed by the American composer, musician, writer and humanitarian Pauline Oliveros.

I am your host Joep Christenhusz.

The last minute we have been listening to an excerpt from 'Lear', the first track on Oliveros's 1989 album *Deep Listening*, that she recorded with trombonist and didjeridu-player Stuart Dempster and vocalist Panaiotis.

For a podcast introduction it may have been a remarkably long fragment. Quite consciously so, as listening, particularly Deep Listening, requires slowing down and allowing sounds to take their own time. Only then can we begin to fully appreciate what acoustically unfolds. In this particular case: what unfolds between a recorded past and our listening present; between the music heard and our inner soundscape of sonic memories and imaginations. But also: what is unfolding between three improvising musicians and their instruments, between their bodies and the 9 million liters underground space of the Dan Harpole Cistern at Fort Worden Historical State Park, the location where the *Deep Listening* album was recorded.

Let's take another moment, and get a feel of how this huge underground space not only serves as an acoustic background, but becomes a musical actor on its own thanks to its 45 second reverberation decay time.

SFX

Album *Deep Listening*, track 1, 'Lear'
[ca 2:40 - ca 4:00]

JOEP (#2)

Deep Listening, its connection to space and time, and the interrelations between the outer and the inner world the practice reveals through sonic awareness. These are some of the themes we will dive into in this podcast series and on Wednesday October 5, as ArtEZ Studium Generale, in collaboration with Corpo-real, the master Interior Architecture at ArtEZ, will host a hybrid event around Pauline Oliveros's Deep Listening practice.

By collectively performing Oliveros's Deep Listening exercise *Extreme Slow Walk*, participants will get a chance to explore the acoustic space around Zwolle's Sophiagebouw and Zwolle's conservatory building. Additionally, Colombian sound artist, deep listener, and academic researcher Ximena Alarcón will offer a telematic listening experience by means of her recently developed Intimal App.

In 2021 we made the podcast-series *Sounding Places, Listening Places*, which is still available at Radio ArtEZ by the way. In it we explored how sound and listening can contribute to realizing more sustainable and reciprocal relations with the earth. Back then, we already tipped our toes in the world of Deep Listening. In *Listening to the In-Between* we will put this rich practice into a broader context.

For example, in our second episode, Deep Listener Sharon Stewart will guide you through practical Deep Listening exercises and open up the possibility for creating our own listening scores. In the third and last we will dive deeper into theoretical concepts related to Deep Listening. But first things first: in this initial episode we'll offer an introduction, a crash course if you like, to both the lifeworks of Pauline Oliveros and the recent work and research of Ximena Alarcon, to whom I will speak shortly.

Firstly, however, I would like to introduce Ed McKeon, a London based researcher, music producer and occasional writer and broadcaster on contemporary music, who describes himself as a 'musician who neither performs nor composes'. Ed is a lecturer at Goldsmiths University London, and as co-director of Third Ear Music works with musicians and artists at the points where music shares a space with other art disciplines, where music *indisciplines* as he likes to say.

In the past 20 years he has collaborated with artists such as Tony Roe, Tin Men and the Telephone, Brian Eno, Evan Parker, Heiner Goebbels, Robert Ashley and, notably, Pauline Oliveros, who also plays an important role in his doctoral research, that he recently completed at Birmingham City University. A link to his PhD thesis *Making Art Public: Musicality & The Curatorial* can be found in the show notes of this episode.

JOEP (#3)

Ed, a very warm welcome to our podcast.

ED

[0:16]

Joep, it's very good to meet you again.

JOEP (#4)

My pleasure. Well, Ed, to start... As you are well acquainted with Pauline Oliveros and her work... Would you be so kind as to give our listeners a short introduction about who she was?

ED

[18:31]

Of course. Well, Pauline was born in Houston, Texas, in 1932. And she passed away in 2016, in her home in upperstate New York. So, that's when she was around with us in person. She played French horn early on, and accordeon. Her mother taught piano, her grandmother may have taught piano as well. A somewhat musical family.

[19:01]

She is a real pioneer.

[19:17]

And as such she was really ahead of the game. She was doing things 70 years ago that still seem very current now.

[19:28]

So, for example, one of the things that she started to do in the very late 1950's, encouraged by her composition teacher in San Francisco, Robert Erickson, was to set up a free improvisation group with the composer Terry Riley, and with Loren Rush, and I think it may also have involved Stuart Dempster at times. And this was in a sense the first, outside of the field of jazz it was the first free improv group.

[20:35]

And in fact I came across some recordings of that not so long ago, which are online. And listening to them I thought I could have gone to various venues I know that regularly present free improv. I could have gone to them last week, and it would have sounded as fresh last week as it did when she was making it over 60 years ago. That's astonishing.

SFX

Free improv session with Loren Rush and Terry Riley, among others

Link: https://archive.org/details/C_1957_XX_XX/4_P07256-ORR-improv4.aiff

ED

[20:58]

That was one aspect. Another is that she was a real pioneer of using a variety of different technologies. Particularly recording technologies. Using tape delay for example, but also resonance, spatializing sound, and she also was a pioneer of what has become known as telematic performance.

JOEP (#5)

This term telematic... Could you explain it for our listeners?

ED

[21:24]

Eh, you and I, now, are in different parts of the world, speaking simultaneously through a virtual platform, it's *that* but it predates the internet by decades. And it's fascinating to see the way that musicians were pushing at the very limits of technology in order to be able to explore how certain kinds of music might be possible, and might be made, in conditions that we are now beginning to normalize. And she was doing it from the... certainly the early 1980's

[22:57]

She was still pushing at the edges of that right until she passed away in her mid-80s in 2016. She had done performances on Second Life. She had an ensemble that she played in on Second Life.

JOEP (#6)

In fact, let's listen to an excerpt from a performance of the Avatar Orchestra Metaverse in Second Life. You can find a link to the entire recording, with video, in the shownotes of this episode.

SFX

Performance of the Avatar Orchestra Metaverse on Second Life

Link: https://youtu.be/clRiT8_7zWg

JOEP (#7)

As Pauline Oliveros herself describes in her well-known book *Deep Listening, A Composer's Sound Practice*, first published in 2005, her pioneering in early electronics led her to a teaching position at the University of California San Diego in 1967. Apart from establishing an electronic music program for graduate study, she began teaching a course

called *The Nature of Music*. Oliveros writes: "This course was hands-on. Every student was expected to compose and improvise, even though most had no musical training." End of quote.

To provide her students with teaching materials she composed *Sonic Meditations*, a series of simple text scores, or written instructions that could be performed by persons without musical training. In Oliveros's own words: "*Sonic Meditations* are based on patterns of attention. In other words these pieces are ways of listening and responding." End of quote.

The initial set of 12 *Sonic Meditations* was published in a journal called *Source Magazine* in 1970. To those were added a further set of 12 that were published in 1974. In many ways the *Sonic Meditations* can be understood as the basis for Oliveros's Deep Listening practice, that she started to develop in the years following. Many years later, in 1991, Oliveros established the first official Deep Listening Retreat at the Rose Mountain Retreat Center in New Mexico, together with writer, therapist and 'dream listener' Ione and movement professional Heloise Gold.

I asked Ed if he could elaborate on some important characteristics of Deep Listening, in terms of attitudes to sound and listening.

ED

[40:30]

I can try...

[36:04]

I got to know her mainly at the very end of her life. Really from 2014 onwards. And.. she was saying even then: 'I am still learning what Deep Listening is.' So, Deep Listening is not... it's not a recipe or a menu that says: if you do these five things it's Deep Listening, and if you don't do these five things it's not Deep Listening. Deep Listening sets up this constant process of learning what listening is and can be.

[24:02]

A couple of things. She was given a tape recorder by her mother in 1952. There's a story that she would tell often... leaving it hanging outside the apartment window in San Francisco, listening. And then playing the tape back a little while later, and hearing all sorts of things on the tape that she hadn't realized that she'd heard, but *had* heard. This is part of a beginning of realizing that our listening is a more complicated procedure that we might ordinarily take for granted..

[24:45]

...and that in a way we can become like microphones. So there is a mode of listening that is just open to the environment and soaking up all sorts of sounds that we might not be absolutely conscious [about] or paying attention to, but nevertheless it's part of our field of experience.

[25:15]

So that's one aspect.

[25:34]

Another way of appreciating the move that she made towards listening is through the experimental music scene in the States in particular. I don't want to reduce this to John Cage, but Cage is a well known and familiar figure within music and within the arts more broadly. And I think that it can be understood that she took two very particular lessons from key works of his in 1952 and 1962. So the first is 4'33", Cage's manifestation that there is no such thing as silence. And if there's no such thing as silence than music becomes a product of our mode of listening, or type of listening. So it begins to draw attention that

music or musical value is going to come or emerge as a product of a certain kind of listening.

[26:35]

And the other, ten years later Cage created a piece called *0'00"*, whose subtitle was *4'33" Number Two*. And this involved... it's a determined action caught, captured with contact microphones. In this instance, when he first presented it, at Brandeis University, I think he was writing letters to... various people on a creaky chair, and the contact microphones were picking up these different sounds and relaying them to an audience. But the demonstration was that there was no such thing as inactivity. So, one way thinking that in terms of listening is that that mode of open, or passive, or what previously might be thought of as passive listening, where we just in a sense allow ourselves to be open to the field of sound around us, isn't inactive at all. It's not passive at all. There is a mode of activity, it's a mode of meditation ... which involves a voluntary letting go, of certain kinds of control mechanisms that we produce mentally and bodily, and allowing ourselves to be open to experience.

[27:54]

So, those two lessons together, I think, begin to coalesce in some way around what becomes her practice of Deep Listening.

JOEP (#8)

Now that we have heard about some of the backgrounds of Oliveros's Deep Listening practice, it is time to zoom in on the *Extreme Slow Walk*, an exercise that will be collectively performed on 5 October 2022. In short, the *Extreme Slow Walk* is an exercise that became a regular part of the Deep Listening practice and workshops. A decisive aspect in the genesis of the *Extreme Slow Walk* 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.

In fact, as becomes clear from the instruction of the exercise, the *Extreme Slow Walk* is all about moving consciously. Let me read the instructions quickly:

"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."

In my conversation with Ed, I asked him about his experiences with the *Extreme Slow Walk*. His answer turned out to be a wonderful contemplation on the notion of simultaneity and how the exercise allows us to physically attune to the spatial and temporal dimensions of a given place.

ED

[1:00:44]

In her commentary she says: '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.'

[1:01:05]

So, 'the point-to-point connection of movement'... which you might think of as a kind of focused walking, a sense of a line or moving in line... and an opening to flow, a sense of just being moved, rather than necessarily being the agent, rather than go back to this dualistic notion that there is an interior self that is instructing the legs to move my right leg, now move my left leg, almost like there's a computer program somewhere telling me to move..

[1:01:54]

...it's two movements happening simultaneously, one of which... one leg is in a more relaxed mode, being acted on, and the other one is in a more tension mode, which is resisting gravity and is lifting itself up..

[1:02:17]

...the two steps are moving in tandem

[1:02:20]

It's a really odd experience, because we walk all the time without thinking about it. But when you strip it back, and you try to do it as slowly as possible, you suddenly realize there are all of these things going on at the same time.

[25:15]

So that's one aspect.

[25:34]

Another way..

[46:05]

... of understanding the Extreme Slow Walk

[46'14]

... this is my terminology or shorthand, rather than something that Pauline said... but it's a way of thinking on our feet.

[1:45:00]

I think there are dimensions to this which are... I tend to think of a walk on a flat surface, again, which moves in a line, from one place to another. But the *Extreme Slow Walk* emphasizes, or the experience of doing the *Extreme Slow Walk* also emphasizes that the walk is vertical, or moves in that dimension as well, and that that dimension has... in philosophical terms Heidegger talks about 'skies' and 'earths' ... it produces a relationship to place in terms of what is the history of this place that I ... you know, the ground that I take to be the ground also has a time, and has a history, and is something that I can connect with, and I can feel through my feet

[1:46:03]

I've not stopped listening, whilst I am walking I am also listening and attending to how I situate myself, that what we call proprioception, how I understand my position within an environment, particularly as a mobile figure within a landscape. So, there is an awareness of self in relation to place, on multiple levels, which happen in the process of a walk. And it's something that... when we slow down, we can begin to attend to in a much more heightened fashion.

JOEP (#9)

Thank you so much for this, Ed. I am sure we will further contemplate on these notions of simultaneity and attunement in the third episode of *Listening to the In-Between*.

JOEP (#10)

For the second half of this episode I am happy to introduce Ximena Alarcon, who on October 5 will guide us through a telematic listening experience by means of her recently developed Intimal App.

Ximena was born in Bogota where she originally studied social communication, after which she moved to Europe where she works as a sound artist and academic researcher, focusing on listening to in-between sonic spaces such as underground transport systems, dreams, and the context of human migration, or what she calls 'Sonic Migrations'.

Ximena did a PhD in Music, Technology and Innovation at De Montfort University in Leicester, and was a researcher at CRiSAP - Creative Research into Sound Arts Practice at the University of the Arts London.

Thanks to the Marie Sklodowska Curie Fellowship she researched Embodied Music Cognition methods at RITMO, the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in Rhythm, Time and Motion at the University of Oslo. It was here that she developed INTIMAL, a telematic interface for Relational Listening and Sonic Migrations, a project which we will discuss shortly.

In tandem with her artistic research Ximena is an avid Deep Listener. After getting acquainted with Pauline Oliveros and Deep Listening in 2008, she completed the three year Certificate Program. Since then she worked as a certified Deep Listening tutor in various parts of the world.

Ximena, a very warm welcome to our podcast.

XIMENA

[0'15]

Yes, thank you Joep, for this invitation.

JOEP (#11)

Ximena, given your work as a certified Deep Listener, I am very curious to know more about your collaborations with Pauline Oliveros and what you deem to be the most valuable insights that Deep Listening brought you.

XIMENA

[15:46]

Ehm... I met her in 2008. She was invited by Ron Herrema to De Montfort University to 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 big 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 informal workshops and the masterclass

[17:11]

In my case, in 2003 to 2007, while doing my PhD ...

[17:23]

... I was kind of influenced more by ...

[17'27]

... 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. After so many years of being in sound, and in listening. Because I felt that she brought a non-judgemental approach to listening and sound..

[18:04]

...The word 'noise' was not part of her vocabulary, necessarily. While the word 'noise' was certainly part of the vocabulary of the other school.

[18:14]

So that started to change a lot. Particularly in the effects of sound, as if it was something super-external. And she brought for me the inner

listening, what was something that I already had in my ethnographic work with commuters. Because when I ask 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.

[18:54]

So she started to bring all of that, and that is not something that you can reduce, or can objectify, but is something more fluid. So I learned a lot from her.

JOEP (#12)

Another aspect of Oliveros's work that proved to be of influence, was her pioneering work in the fields of telematics. As Ed explained earlier, telematic performances are live performances that make use of telecommunications to distribute the performers between two or more locations. It was precisely this notion of listening and sounding collectively at a distance, that Alarcon began to pursue in her own work, of course adapting the concept to her own artistic needs and interests.

XIMENA

[25:05]

When I met her ...

[25:25]

... I was already developing some co-located improvisations, networked improvisations ... but for me, still the idea of transmitting sound, bi-directional sound, I needed to know more about the technology.

[26:20]

So, I started to work with the technology that she was working with: Jack Trip, which is still the most advanced technology to transmit bi-directional sound, or multi-directional sound, in high quality, with low latency.

[28:00]

Then I started to create my own style of telematic performances...

[28:11]

...I was working with non-musicians and I started to create more improvisatory listening and sounding games in a telematic way. Very influenced by Pauline's Deep Listening. And ... adapting some of her scores, that ...

[28:39]

... I started to adapt for the idea of migration...

[1:02]

...being an economic and cultural migrant...

{3'12]

...myself...

[0'22]

...I was born in Bogota, Colombia...

00:32

And I have lived a total of 22 years of my life outside of my country: in Barcelona, in England and in Norway.

[5:38]

So, I started listening to my migration. And I engaged in the making of telematic sonic performances, with people who have experienced migration. And then I engaged in ...

[5:56]

... creating my own technology to perform or to experience what I call the migratory journey.

JOEP (#13)

When I asked Alarcon about the sonic properties of this migratory

journey, she explained that acoustic memories are fundamental to people's perception of space, time, even of their own self. We all carry sonic memories of earlier stages in our life with us. You may have traveled from a village to a city or the other way around, with their own sonic landscapes stored somewhere in your mind and body. For migrants, having lived parts of their lives in different parts of the world, the rift between their former home and their present surroundings is particularly sharp, to the point in which they turn out to be irreconcilable, Alarcon explains...

XIMENA

[1:02:06]

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...

[1:02:37]

...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.

[1:02:49]

But that never happens fully, is my experience of migration.

[1:02:29]

There is something of the body that wants to go back, and you keep remembering the other...

[1:05:33]

Migrants refer to this as a limbo ... an emotional limbo ...

[1:05:53]

... you are neither there, you are neither here

[1:06:23]

So this is what I wanted to explore creatively with telematic performances and with Deep Listening...

[5:50]

And then I engaged in recent years with Intimal, creating my own technology to perform or to experience what I call the migratory journey.

JOEP (#14)

Speaking of Intimal again, let's dive a bit deeper in this project of Alarcon's, which on her site 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'.

That's quite a mouthful, so let's try to break that down a bit. In short, we can think of Intimal as a telematic software environment that, through improvisation and Deep Listening techniques, allows participants in different parts of the world to collectively explore this migratory limbo state that Alarcon spoke about earlier. In doing so it reconnects people's inner soundscapes to their actual acoustic environments, both their own physical environment and elsewhere.

Important to note is that Intimal is not only about sound and listening. Although these are surely important aspects, Alarcon emphasizes that Intimal is an *embodied* system.

XIMENA

[36:28]

I had the question of embodiment. So, the body is also important in Deep Listening, in the workshops that are not telematic, so physically. But I

thought: what do I do with the body when I am in this space, in this telematic space?

JOEP (#15)

In fact, the question of embodiment became the focus of her artistic research between 2017 and 2019, when a grant from the Marie Skłodowska Curie Fellowship enabled her to do a research project at RITMO, the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in Rhythm, Time and Motion at the University of Oslo. In the motion capturing studio of the institute, Alarcon experimented with movement and breathing sensors, which enables Intimal participants to trigger various sound materials, ranging from synthetic sine waves, to recordings of environmental sounds and fragments from oral migratory testimonies.

XIMENA

[38:19]

So in the Intimal system I started to interrelate body movement, voice, language, memory, memory of place, of soil, geography..

[38:44]

...and also oral archives.

[38:47]

... I wanted a technological system that allows people to improvise in the making of all these relationships, in the physical place where they are, and in the virtual space. Eventually that created the Intimal system for relational listening.

JOEP (#16)

So far, so good. But then, in March 2020, the Covid pandemic came..

XIMENA

[49:22]

With the pandemic. Well, first I wanted to communicate what I did in Oslo, but I couldn't because the technology... I didn't have the breathing sensors anymore.

[49:44]

So I needed to change the material of work. I needed to change the technology, and I became a resident in a place called The Studio, supported by Bath Spa University. A residency as an individual worker and an artist.

[50:04]

And i said, well I am going to do an app. A very simple app that tries to bring together all of...

[39:11]

...the Intimal system.

[50:49]

And this is how the Intimal App was born.

[53:46]

To clarify first to the listeners the Intimal App as it is at the moment

[53:56]

...is more an environment ... which invites people to perform a migratory journey ... or to experience a migratory journey. And that means that people can walk, people with the app can walk... and their rhythm of walking makes a sound, a wave sound... and if many people are walking in distant locations connected in the same space, they could listen to each others waves produced by their walking rhythm.

[54:32]

Also people can record experiences with a microphone. And these recordings are saved in the app, in different locations: north, west,

east and south. That helps to listen...

[54:59]

... to the recordings of others's experiences.

JOEP (#17)

To conclude this first introductory episode of *Listening to the In-Between* let's have a sneak preview, or pre-listen actually, of the Intimal walk that is on the program for October 5. The following excerpt is from a composition called *Dreaming While Awake*, that Alarcon recently made for the Earth Model Day Telematic Festival, based on materials of a telematic improvisation session with the Intimal App.

SFX

File: DreamingWhileAwakeBetterLevelsNormXA.wav

JOEP (#18)

Thank you for listening to *Listening to the In-Between*, a Radio ArteEZ podcast-series, in which we explore Deep Listening, its connection to space and time, and the interrelations between the outer and the inner world the practice reveals through sonic awareness. In this first episode we have been listening to Ed McKeon and Ximena Alarcon who introduced us the life of Pauline Oliveros and the world of Deep Listening. We will meet the two of them again in the third and last episode of *Listening to the In-Between*, in which we will explore and unpack relevant theoretical concepts.

In the meantime, don't forget to listen to our second episode, in which Deep Listener Sharon Stewart will guide you through practical Deep Listening exercises and open up the possibility for creating our own listening scores.

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

Hope to welcome you again in our next episode.

LINKS FOR SHOWNOTES

PhD-thesis Ed: <http://www.open-access.bcu.ac.uk/13406/1/Ed%20McKeon%20PhD%20Thesis%20published%20Final%20version%20Submitted%20Jul%202021%20Final%20Award%20Nov%202021.pdf>

Recording Avatar Orchestra Metaverse: https://youtu.be/clRiT8_7zWg

Backgrounds Avatar Orchestra Metaverse: <http://avatarorchestra.org/>

Links Cage's 4'33":

Reinbert de Leeuw's performance on prime time Dutch Television, including fragments of an orchestral version (3:39) and Cage against the machine (4:41). Reinbert de Leeuw starts at 6:00:

https://youtu.be/YMh_0KizEM8

Cage performing 4'33", explicitly outside the concert situation:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Je30JCQNTIw>

John Cage, Official Website: <https://johncage.org/>

4'33" app: https://johncage.org/4_33.html

Ximena Alarcon, site: <https://www.ximenaalarcon.net/>

INTIMAL Project: <https://www.ximenaalarcon.net/intimal-project>