

MATTER

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#5: On Listening

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Editors' Note

We sit down in a circle. Ahead of us is a workshop with focus on Deep Listening. We slowly adjust to the topic of the day: listening. Tuning in. We prepare our minds and bodies to receive and respond. Outside it is late autumn, light is dimming early. We are a group of 20-25 people who have gathered in the Red Room at the Inter Arts Center in Malmö, Sweden. We are there to take part in a workshop on Deep Listening facilitated by two Deep Listening® tutors: Morten Svenstrup (DEN) and Ximena Alarcón-Díaz (COL).

Later, we are asked to walk as slow as we can around the room while listening. Very few sounds can be heard. Bodies moving across the room before we all gather in a circular formation in the middle of the room. This workshop is the beginning of the collaboration of this issue's journal about listening.

Focusing on listening for an entire day is a challenging but rewarding experience, encouraging a deep and embodied attitude towards all sounds, movements and surroundings.

This issue of *Matter Journal of Artistic Research in Performing Arts* is dedicated to listening in artistic and pedagogical practices and contains a broad selection of approaches to listening. Opening the issue is Ximena Alarcón-Díaz' with a sonic meditation in response to the world we live in. Listening to and through materials in the creative process is the focus of *Jacob Remin's* sound piece. Polyvocal listening is discussed in *Vanja Hamidi Isacsson's* article and conveyed into a choir piece for multiple queered voices in *Sall Lam Toro's* text and sound contribution. Listening to experiences is what both *Felicia Konrad* and *Iury Salustiano Trojaborg* propose. They offer insightful personal accounts of listening to the heartbeat of trees and to the sounds of water. *Lukas Quist Lund's* poem explores the performative potential of listening, while *Morten Svenstrup* elaborates in his article on the art of facilitating spaces for listening and *Bureau for Listening* offer a broad selection of listening services that can open new perspective to how listening and institutional practices can be intertwined.

We dare you to listen!

The Editorial Team

Tanja Hylling Diers, Yann Coppier and Iury Salustiano Trojaborg

Bio

Tanja Hylling Diers is an artist researcher, dramaturge and theatre maker based in Denmark and Southern Sweden. She is currently pursuing a PhD at Lunds University and Malmö Theater Academy. Her artistic practice is socially engaged and has listening at its center, strongly informed by Deep Listening.

Yann Coppier, PhD candidate in Artistic Research in Music at Malmö Academy of Music / Lund University. He is a sound artist, producer and performer. Through his doctoral research, 'How to make the future unpredictable' he is working with improbable ways to generate acoustic and synthetic music, while exploring silence and spaces from a non-anthropocentric point of listening.

Iury Salustiano Trojaborg is a Brown Queer diasporic interdisciplinary artist-researcher interested in the interconnections between theatre/performance, migration, decoloniality and social sustainability. She is currently a doctoral candidate at the Malmö Theatre Academy and at the Agenda 2030 Graduate School at Lund University, Sweden. For over ten years, Iury has been experimenting with listening as an attempt to get in touch with other existences and times.

AMERICAN DREAM

by Ximena Alarcón-Díaz

Sound A softly surrounding an entire continent
from South to North

Sound M for marvellous mountains

Listen for the wings of Endemic free birds
Fly by sounding them

Whisper R I C A

Wait in silence for a N of never again
sound invoking the N of never again

Sound a D in repetition for a destination (at your own pace)

Vibrate R for rEcomposing...
From human anger to a beetle warm song

Breathe A for surprise

Sing M for an anthem of a free migrants' land

Bio

Ximena Alarcón is a sound artist and researcher exploring sonic migrations – the sensory experiences of crossing borders through sound and listening. She creates telematic improvisations and interfaces for relational listening, and composes hybrid listening rituals with trained and untrained musicians. She holds a PhD in Music Technology and is a certified Deep Listening® tutor.

Listening as a Method for Composing Polyvocal Stage Text

By Vanja Hamidi Isacson

“Theatre is really a large act of listening.” (Fosse, 2023)

The article discusses how I, as a playwright, use listening as a method in the composition of polyvocal stage texts.¹ These stage texts can include both multiple voices in languages I do not necessarily understand and be based on so-called ‘found material’ that is, written and audio content—texts, utterances, sounds, etc.—that already exist in the world and can be repurposed in a stage work (Hamidi Isacson, 2025).

In adopting listening as my principal tool of making play texts, my artistic practice has come to take a form closer to “composing” rather than “writing”. Below, I define and discuss different types of listening in relation to my practice. These include:

Extended listening: listening to understand both semantic and psychological meaning.

Active listening: listening as a method for the making of artistic decisions.

Inner listening: playing the dialogue/text back to my inner ear.

Collective listening, in which a group of people conduct a joint listening session.

The article is based on my research within the PhD project *The Potential of Multilingualism in Dramatic Works* (Hamidi Isacson, 2022)² and an artistic work generated through this research between 2018– 2022. Examples of how I have used listening as a method in relation to multilingualism are giv-

1 “Polyvocality” refers to the presence and orchestration of multiple, distinct voices or perspectives within a single dramatic or literary work (Castagno, 2012). In my present artistic research, I consider the inclusion of multiple languages as part of the concept, which is why I use this term instead of “multilingualism”.

2 The article is partly an edited version of the chapter “To Write and Compose Multilingual Drama”: <https://media.researchcatalogue.net/rc/master/ee/53/90/ec/ee5390ec9744203a0281ed8caa41a1a6.pdf?t=4feec3c86dd5722d7e78796da9467010&e=1747474800>

en from the project ASIA/ÄRENDE: Kaarle Vihtori Turunen – a polyvocal dream play in Finnish, Finnish Swedish, “standard” Swedish, Russian and English dealing with themes of language loss and family trauma. My alter ego, Swedish-Finnish Tanja, comes from Sweden to the Foreign Ministry archives in Helsinki to find out what happened to her Finnish great-grandfather who disappeared in the Soviet Union in the 1930s. In the archive, she meets her dead relatives: her grandmother (Eevi), her great-grandmother (Vilma) and her great-grandfather (Kaarle), all of whom speak Finnish. Through their own words and the bureaucratic letters of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the fate of Tanja’s relatives, a family split up and never reunited, unfolds. Their struggle for Kaarle to return to his homeland after travelling to the Soviet Union in search of work; instead he was imprisoned as an “illegal border crosser”, put in Stalin’s gulag system, convicted of espionage and counter-revolutionary movement, and shot in 1938.



This is also the history of my own relatives – something I have spent nearly ten years trying to understand. As I was growing up, I heard my grandmother repeat the phrase “This is my father, look how handsome he is. He disappeared in Russia” while showing his photo. That was all I knew about my grandmother’s lost father. A silence surrounded his fate. It remained that way until after my grandmother’s death. The process of understanding their fate has largely been about breaking that silence and to listen.

Kaarle, Vilma and Elvi Thurén, 1930.
Photo: Unknown

Learning to listen

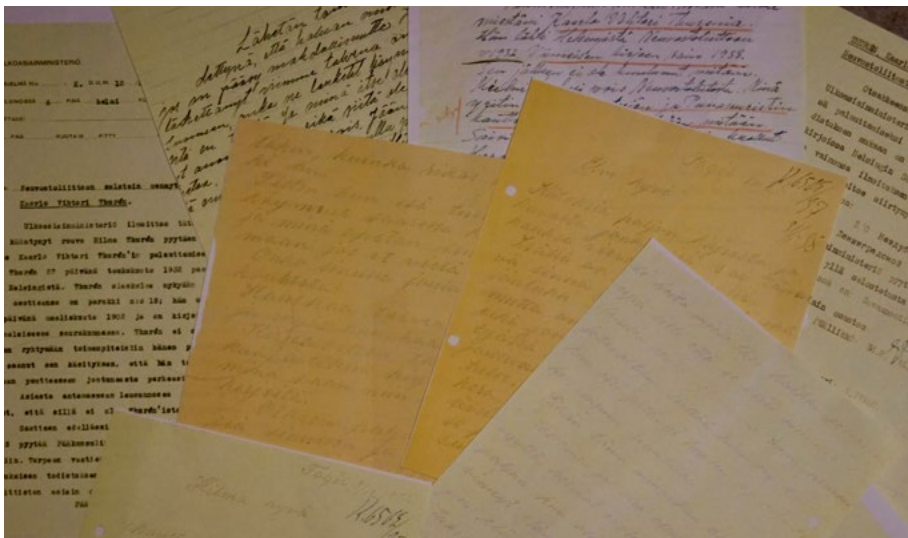
“If I should use a metaphor for the action of writing, it has to be that of listening.” (Fosse, 2023)

Listening is one of my tools as a playwright – perhaps the most important, both during the actual writing process, and in the sense of reading situations and people, too. To listen to what is not said, to what is said and how, listen-

ing to stories both hidden and visible. But it was only in the course of the research that I became fully aware of its importance for working with languages I have not mastered myself. Here, I had to find new ways of listening.

This process of learning to listen in different ways was initiated, in part, through an encounter with Rolf Hughes's concept of "an ethics of receptivity" – treating our found materials with the care, attention and respect they deserve (Armstrong et al., 2017, p. 30). As I understand it, this ethic involves being present and attentive to what is happening in a given situation. Respectfully listening to what is expressed and also to what is not expressed. "Likely, we will first need to learn to *listen* attentively" (Armstrong et al., 2017, p. 30). To develop the piece *ASIA/ÄRENDE* I had to learn how to listen.

The piece is based on documentary material in Finnish concerning my Finnish grandmother's family: three letters my great-grandfather wrote, and some twenty official documents concerning his disappearance in the Soviet Union in the 1930s which I had discovered in a file in the Foreign Ministry Archive in Helsinki in 2017. I wanted to include this found material in the original language, which I did not know myself.



Letters and documents from the 1930s.

Photo: Vanja Hamidi Isacson

The piece was motivated by a strong desire to give voice to my great-grandfather. To be able to do that, I needed to listen carefully to his voice through the letters written eighty years earlier, under difficult physical and psychological conditions in a gulag camp, and after being away from his family and

country for several years. Since he knew the letters would most likely be subject to control and censorship, he could not express himself freely. Here, my listening was largely about listening to what was *not* being said.

I had to take time to listen without either a pre-conceived idea of what the eventual work would be, or imposing structure or dramaturgy, or even a frame, on the material. In line with the ethics of receptivity (Armstrong et al., 2017) I formulated this stance:

I am trying to bring something hidden into the light (the unknown/hidden destiny of my great grandfather...) I am doing this through listening, listening to the “materials”; the story, the voices...

I will try to understand, to make sense out of all the details/documents/ things people told to me. (To understand what actually happened to him and my great grandmother and my grandmother). And try not to impose myself on it... “Listening” also in the sense as looking (at the photos, the documents, the letters and their envelopes, the places they lived, the chair he built, the playing clock), use all the senses to grasp their “story” (Hamidi Isacson, 2017).³



The chair and playing clock, seminar at Stockholm university of the arts, 2018.

Photo: Vanja Hamidi Isacson

3. The text was written in 2017 but was not published until 2022 (Hamidi Isacson, 2022, p. 76).

The type of listening I used in the first part of the work is what I refer to as “extended listening”, which, to me, involves several interconnected processes. First, I needed to grasp the literal meaning of the content, which included having the letters translated. In my work diary, I reflect on the process of translating the letters:

Jag har låtit översätta dem till svenska för att förstå. ... Översätta, ordet som härstammar från ordet ”erövra”. Har jag erövat hans ord? Och vad gick förlorat på vägen? Hans ton, hans röst? Hans sätt att uttrycka sig? ... Finskans klang, rytm, melodi, de långa vokalerna och de många konsonanterna.

I have had them translated [översätta] into Swedish in order to understand. ... Translate [översätta], a word that comes from the word “conquer” [erövra]. Have I conquered his words? And what was lost along the way? His tone, his voice? His way of expressing himself? ... The sound, rhythm, melody of Finnish, the long vowels and the many consonants. (Work Diary, 2018–02–27)⁴

This translation was not enough. In order to listen to my great-grandfather’s voice, I needed Finnish speakers to help me interpret the letters, not only literally but emotionally and psychologically. I therefore recorded a number of people in Helsinki reading the letter *Elvi hyvä* (“dear Elvi”) – which my great-grandfather wrote to his daughter, my grandmother, in 1937.⁵ Afterwards, I asked the reader to write down the feelings they noticed in the letter and to describe their impression of the person who wrote it. To avoid their reading being coloured by the information, I did not tell the participants the background to the letter or my personal connection to it. Despite this, these readings evoked emotions in the reader – and in me as a listener:

Den unga studenten som börjar gråta när hon läser brevet till Elvi. Den väcker hennes egen saknad, saknaden efter pappan. Pappan som i det här brevet skriver till den saknade dottern.

Tyngden som kommer över mig när hon läser Kaarlos sista brev. Den nästan

4. The excerpt from the Work Diary was written in 2018 but was not published until 2022 (Hamidi Isacson, 2022). For all extracts from the work diary, the date refers to the entry’s writing.

5. The recordings took place autumn 2018 partly at the University of the Arts’ Theatre Academy in Helsinki with students, and partly at the Sibelius Academy with staff members.

outhärdliga klaustrofobiska tyngden. Är det hans känsla av instängdhet som tränger igenom? Som gör att jag vill resa mig, gå ut, andas. Fast han inte med ett ord säger det, inte nämner de känslorna vid namn.

The young student who starts to cry when she reads the letter to Elvi. It evokes her own loss, the loss of her father. The father who in this letter is writing to his missing daughter.

The weight that comes over me when she reads Kaarlo's last letter. The almost unbearable claustrophobic weight. Is it his sense of entrapment that comes through? That makes me want to get up, go outside, breathe. Though he doesn't say a word, doesn't mention those feelings by name. (Work Diary, 18 September, 2018)

Another person, on the other hand, was upset when he read the letter, explaining that he thought the father in the letter had given up on his child and was just making excuses for his absence.

After their first readings, I asked them to read the letter again, this time based on one of the emotions they had read out, as a simple representation. My listening then shifted focus from the text (the Swedish translation) as such to their reading of it.

Hur lyssnar jag? Första genomläsningen de gör, med brevet på svenska framför mig, för att följa innehållet. Tänker att om jag gör det upprepade gånger så kommer jag tillslut veta vad innebörden i de olika delarna är, kunna urskilja ord. Andra gången de läser (med en vald känsla som ingång) så försöker jag lyssna mer till deras uttryck, röst, andning. För att uppfatta vilken känsla de läser med.

How do I listen? The first reading they do, with the letter in Swedish in front of me, to follow the content. I think that if I do it repeatedly, I will eventually know what the meaning of the different parts is, be able to distinguish words. The second time they read (with a chosen emotion as input) I try to listen more to their expression, voice, breathing. To perceive what emotion they are reading with. (Work Diary, 18 September, 2018)

Before and after the readings and recordings, I also held a number of workshops with Finnish- and Swedish-speaking actors. We read, listened to, and reflected on the letters, individually and in writing, and through discussion.

Listening in company affected me.

Vi lyssnar gemensamt, ett slags koncentrerat, förstärkt lyssnande: En läser och tre lyssnar ... Att vi är flera som lyssnar förstärker. Att vi är där för att lyssna. Uppgifterna jag ger att reflektera individuellt skriftligt gör att vi alla måste koncentrera oss.

We listen jointly, a kind of concentrated, amplified listening: One reads and three listen ... The fact that we are several listeners reinforces. That we are there to listen. The tasks I give to reflect individually in writing make us all have to concentrate. (Work Diary, 18 September, 2018)

This work was presented at a doctoral seminar which focused on the emotional function of multilingualism.⁶ An audio collage of the different voices reading the letter *Elvi hyvä* was played at the beginning of the seminar as a way of directing attention towards the listening.

LINK TO SOUND COLLAGE "ELVI HYVÄ":

<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/539081/1753442>

This first part of the process of working on *ASIA/ÄRENDE* can be described as “extended listening”. If, for Pauline Oliveros, “to hear is the physical means that enables perception” and “to listen is to give attention to what is perceived both acoustically and psychologically” (Oliveros, 2005, p. xxii), extended listening is a matter of perception: how I, as a listener, receive what is communicated either semantically, psychologically or contextually – or on all levels simultaneously.

Through my research, I began to reflect on the basic premises of communication, whether between two individuals in everyday conversation or between actors and audience during a performance. It became increasingly clear that the intention of the person receiving or listening is central to all communication, and especially to communication involving multiple languages. A discussion about this became part of the thesis:

Wanting and trying to understand each other: the basis of communication between people. Without the will, it doesn't matter if we speak the same language, the same dialect, come from the same country, village, family – we can still misunderstand each other. Or not understand at all. We can choose

6. 30% seminar, Stockholm University of the Arts, 2018.

not to even try. We can choose not to listen, or to listen. To languages we may not even know. But still listen with the intention to understand as much as we can. Communication is an active act; if all parties are not active, there is no communication. This is also true for characters in a play, and for an audience during a theatre performance. The actors as well as the audience are part of the communicative event that is the performance; both parties contribute. As an audience, we always have the choice to participate or not – to listen or not to listen (Hamidi Isacson, 2022, p. 256, my translation).

Extended listening can be applied to multilingualism. Listening to languages I do not understand with the intention of understanding has long been an approach both in my private life and in my work as an artist. This means listening to try to understand as much as possible of what is being said by reading the situation, the relationship between the speakers, direction, body language, intonation, voice volume, and so on. It is also a question of recognizing any questions, or recurring expressions or words that one understands, and which may be linked to the context and situation to create a whole.

This relates to what Stefan Östersjö refers to as “open listening”, a form of attention he argues to be required in intercultural work (Östersjö, 2020): “But even more fundamental is the function of listening, more specifically, a form of listening that is radically ‘open’ to the other” (Östersjö & Nguyen, 2017, p. 132). While this is line with my transcultural approach,⁷ I consider my own listening practice to include open listening; I include listening to objects, places, and so on – hence the term “extended”.

Composing through active listening

After the initial phase of the extended listening, which consisted of trying to understand the found material, I began the process of writing the play *ASIA/ÄRENDE*. It turned out to be quite different from my usual writing processes.

Skillnaden från min vanliga process, eller en process som inte baserar sig på dokumentära materiel och/eller andra befintliga röster/material: att jag inte har allt inne i mig, inom mig, att jag måste söka utanför.

The difference from my usual process, or a process that is not based on doc-

7. In my research and work, I choose to use the concept of *transculturalism*, as it expresses an anti-essentialist view of cultures as non-static; see Hamidi Isacson, 2022, pp. 61–62.

umentary material and/or other existing voices/materials: that I do not have everything inside me, within me, that I must search outside (Work Diary, 21 February, 2019).

Searching beyond one's own experiences and competences is crucial when working with documentary material or composing multilingual stage text, especially when one has not mastered the languages involved. This method of writing, which was new to me, led me to defining my practice as composing with the material I found – in this piece, the letters and documents. This process is described in more detail in the forthcoming article “To compose with multiple languages and found material”.

In my artistic practice I tend to use something known in the field of musical composition as “inner listening”. Stefan Östersjö describes how the relationship between this inner listening and “considered decision making” also takes shape through inner listening in the silent writing situation of a musical composition: “The musical ear is the place where listeners make creative choices in the sonic domain” (Östersjö, 2020, p. 17). For me, as a playwright, the inner part often consists of playing back to my inner ear the dialogue or text I have written or am writing in order to make choices.

Inner listening was not central to the composition of *ASIA/ÄRENDE*; a different type of listening method involving the actors reading the material aloud during my writing process was required. This took place over a period of about a year-and-a-half, when I alternately read the script with the actors, in different constellations, and worked on the piece. Hearing how the actors read the text was crucial, giving me ideas for changes.

I refer to this process as “active listening”, which I define as a method of listening conducted to make artistic decisions. It requires existing material to relate to, such as draft scenes. As a playwright, I had never worked with active listening before as I had during the composition of *ASIA/ÄRENDE*. This has to do with the complexity of the work and its multilingualism.



Reading *ASIA/ÄRENDE*, Stockholm University of the Arts, 2019. Participants from left: Alma Pöysti, Eeva Putro, Johan Fagerudd, Klara Wenner Tångring, Mari-Helen Hyvärinen, Kimi Vikkula, Turo Marttila.

Photo: Per Bolkert

The first version of *ASIA/ÄRENDE* was read in its entirety to an audience at a seminar 2019. My listening was affected by the fact that there were people in the room who had never heard the play before. I was afraid that those who did not understand Finnish would feel excluded. These fears turned out to be true for some in the room and not at all true for others. But reactions I received, indicating that the emotional content of the piece was not effectively communicated, prompted me to begin a process that led to a reworking. That is: the audience's listening influenced the composition.⁸

This process led me to create a choir, *Skuggkören* (The Shadow Choir). Echoing fragments of the Finnish lines in Swedish, it thus become a reflection and reinforcement of the characters' feelings and a bridge between the character Tanja and her Finnish-speaking relatives (as well as for the Finnish-speaking audience). After rewriting the entire piece, I decided to wait until I had heard the new, 2020, version with the Shadow Choir read by the actors before I chose whether to use it or the

8. A discussion around this is included in my thesis in the chapter "Kommunikativ potential": <https://media.researchcatalogue.net/rc/master/ee/53/90/ec/ee5390ec9744203a0281ed8caa41a1a6.pdf?t=4feec3c86dd5722d7e78796da9467010&e=1747474800>

earlier version of 2019 without the choir. This decision would be determined by active listening.

Lyssnandet... tvinga mig själv att dra ut på processen – att inte fattar vissa beslut innan jag lyssnat på alternativen. I vanliga fall skulle jag nu bestämt mig för ALT2- skuggkören. Men nu ska jag försöka att vänta med det beslutet tills efter läsningen i Helsingfors om 2 veckor. Plågsamt? Läskigt. Men vill hålla möjligheterna öppna, eller snarare höra innan jag beslutar och även höra deras reaktioner på de 2 versionerna.

The listening... forcing myself to delay the process – to not make certain decisions before listening to the options. Normally, I would have decided in favour of the ALT2 shadow choir. But now I will try to wait with that decision until after the reading in Helsinki in 2 weeks. Painful? Scary. But want to keep the options open or rather hear before I decide and also hear their reactions to the 2 versions (Work Diary, 14 February, 2020).

The effect of the Shadow Choir I had written would have been impossible to imagine without listening. It was only when I heard the text read aloud by the actors that I fully realized the choir's effect. What struck me most was the way it introduced a distinct musical quality: voices layered and contrasted with one another, creating a sense of polyvocality. The chorus was composed with a rhythm that differed entirely from the dialogue and included musical instructions for the actors; for instance, they were directed to read certain lines *forte* (loudly) or *agile* (quickly), further enhancing the sonic dimensions of the text and the languages.⁹ After readings and discussions with the actors I decided that the 2020 version was the one I wanted to continue working with.

In the audio file scene 6:2 of the 2019 version, the actors read first the version of the scene including the letter *Elvi hyvää*.

SOUND FILE SCENE 6:2 (2019)

<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/539081/1736931>

9. A discussion of this is included in my thesis in the chapter "Dramaturgisk potential": <https://media.researchcatalogue.net/rc/master/ee/53/90/ec/ee5390ec9744203a0281ed8caa41a1a6.pdf?t=4fec3c86dd5722d7e78796da9467010&e=1747474800>

In the audio file scene 6:2 of the 2020_version, the actors read the final version of the scene including the letter *Elvi hyvä*.

SOUND FILE SCENE 6:2 (2020)

<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/539081/1736938>



Sound recording of ASIA/ÄRENDE. Borgå, 2022.

Participants from left: Elina Saarela, Turo Marttila, Eeva Putro, Ellen Edlund.

Photo: Darina Rodionova.

The willingness to listen

Work on ASIA/ÄRENDE took place over a long period of time and under aggravating circumstances such as not understanding the spoken language and being limited to listening to the actors via Zoom during the pandemic. These experiences led to a reflection on the conditions required for extended and active listening.

Physical and mental presence, proximity to the speaker, good acoustics, minimal interference and possibly even a common language (figuratively or literally) are components that facilitate listening and understanding what is being communicated. But even if these criteria are met, it is not enough. Extended listening is not possible without both the willingness to listen and to understand what is being communicated. It is also possible to listen to someone who died long before you were born and who speaks through a labori-

ously written letter in a language you do not understand. To listen and perceive what is communicated through and beyond words. Listening or hearing without the state of being receptive is not sufficient; a certain openness and willingness are required for the composition of a polyvocal work.



Sound recording. Borgå, 2022

Vanja Hamidi Isacson

Photo: Darina Rodionova

Ongoing listening

My practice changed and expanded with the research and the production of *ASIA/ÄRENDE*. It is now characterized by dialogue, listening and composing. The use of multiple languages and found material constitutes an integrated working method that permeates my artistic practice. In my current practice, the form this might take depends on the context, including collaboration partners, languages, material, place, and so on. I have been developing three new polyvocal pieces since 2023.

The piece *In Memoriam*, also based on found material consisting of documents concerning my great grandfather and his participation in the Finnish Civil War 1918, is a continuation of *ASIA/ÄRENDE* showing Tanja's investigation of the background story to Kaarle's disappearance. The extended listening in this process has consisted of trying to understand these documents and what happened to him. This has been conducted

in close dialogue with two multilingual actors living in Finland.¹⁰ The search for answers constitutes the action of the work. Tanja's listening to her dead relatives and their voices is part of the story.

The pieces *SILENCE*¹¹ and *Det finns inga ord* (*There are no words*),¹² developed in collaboration with a director (*Silence*) and a composer (*Det finns inga ord*), are based on other people's life experiences and languages. In the latter, the found material consists of young people's accounts of fatal gang-related shootings in public places.



Workshop. Inter Arts Center, Malmö 2025

Participants from left: Daniel Fjellström, Tor Lind, Sebastian Hastrup.

Photo: Vanja Hamidi Isacson

As a method, the music composer Fjellström and I have been conducting listening sessions in places where fatal shootings have taken place. The aim of these has been to collect found material consisting of both human and non-human sounds: voices in different languages and sounds characteristic to the specific environment (the greater body of found material will also include interviews and news reports). The composition of the music, sounds and polyvocal text constituting the work is based on this found material.

10. These are Turo Marttila and Mari-Helen Hyvärinen. The process is described in the article "Reclaiming a Lost Language": <https://www.davvi.org/img/Davvi-Arbeidsfil-TRYKKEKLAR.pdf>

11. Collaboration with Post Theatre Collective and director David Kozma, Helsinki. Premiered in September 2025: <https://www.theatrecollective.com/news>

12. Collaboration (2023) with composer Daniel Fjellström: <https://www.iac.lu.se/development-live-composed-hybrid-work>

This can also be described as extended listening. While listening at a shopping mall surrounded by a multitude of languages, several of which I could not even identify, new questions (or perhaps the same question from the work with *ASIA/ÄRENDE*, but in a new context) arose – how do we listen to voices and languages we don't understand?

Lyssnandet som metod: hur lyssna till språk en inte kan? Hur arbeta med/komponera med språk en inte behärskar? Mina egna frågor kommer tillbaka. Hur lätt det är att utesluta det jag inte begriper, inte har referenser till, att sortera bort, som att de inte fanns där. En falsk bild. Skapa en falsk bild/återspeglning/gestaltning. Eller en ytterst begränsad, snäv. En slags symbol för all scenkonst som skapas: hur mångfalden sällas bort, för att vi som skapar det som (eventuellt) spelas inte har kunskapen eller förmågan att inkludera detta - det rör oss inte. Vi hör det vi förstår, känner igen. Det som talar direkt till oss..

Listening as a method: how to listen to languages you don't know? How to work with/compose with languages you don't know? My own questions come back. How easy it is to exclude what I don't understand, don't have references to, to sort out, as if they weren't there. A false image. Creating a false image/reflection/representation. Or an extremely limited, narrow one. A kind of symbol for all performing arts that are created: how diversity is filtered out, because we who create what is (possibly) performed do not have the knowledge or ability to include this – it does not concern us. We hear what we understand, recognise. What speaks directly to us. (Work Diary, Malmö, 3 October, 2024)

What I call *collective listening*, in which a group of people with different linguistic competences conduct a joint listening session, offers a possible means for me to overcome my own limitations. Listening of this kind permits more languages and voices to be captured. I already used collective listening during the work with *ASIA/ÄRENDE* (see p. 5), but with a different purpose. My current work can be seen as a development of this method.

An important issue in this work is, of course, the ethical aspect of collecting phrases and words from people in a public space. Neither my dead relatives, nor these people alive today, have chosen or even know that I use their “stories”. Do I have the right to use their words without their consent? The guidelines for *There are no words* that I have formulated are that none of these people should be identifiable; the fragments are never long enough for

a whole conversation to be reproduced.

Linked to this ethical question is also the question of artistic quality. What is it that I cannot create myself that justifies the collection of this found material? In the work diary I reflect on this and the connection to my appropriation of my great grandfather's voice.

Found material: samla in mer. Fraser, fragment av människors samtal och yttranden i offentliga rum. Triangeln, Emporia. Stjåla. Lyssna. Använda. Vad är det jag inte själv kan skapa? Det autentiska, det som kommer från en människa vars språk och liv inte är mitt. Som kan indikera något... signalera mångfalden av röster? Grundmaterialet som väljs av mig, och sedan processas. Det som inte kan konstrueras. Det som är situationsbaserat. Det som yttras i en specifik situation och tid, plats. Det specifika som sedan blir allmänmänskligt? Som blir förhöjt genom att sägas eller sjungas av en aktör på en scen. På samma vis som Kaarlos röst, gammelmorfars röst, inte går att efterkonstruera. Hans röst som hörs genom breven han skrev. Som jag sedan integrerade i pjäsen. På samma vis integrera dessa röster? Fast de är fragmentariserade, tjänar till att skapa ett rum, en plats, en atmosfär.

Found material: collect more. Phrases, fragments of people's conversations and utterances in public spaces. Triangle, Emporia. Steal. Listen. Use. What is it that I cannot create myself? The authentic, that which comes from a person whose language and life is not mine. That can indicate something... signal the diversity of voices? The basic material that is chosen by me and then processed. That which cannot be constructed. That which is situational. What is uttered in a specific situation and time, place. The specific that then becomes generalised? Which is elevated by being said or sung by an actor on a stage. In the same way that Kaarlo's voice, great-grandfather's voice, cannot be reconstructed. His voice heard through the letters he wrote. Which I then integrated into the play. Integrate these voices in the same way? Although they are fragmented, they serve to create a space, a place, an atmosphere (Work Diary, Malmö, 2 October, 2024).



Workshop "Det finns inga ord", Inter Arts Center, Malmö, 2024

Participants from left: Negar Zarassi, Linda Mallik, Tor Lind, Lovisa Kowalcyk and Annika Bjelk.

Photo: Alla Edine Benyahia

Listening can be described in a number of ways and encompasses a multitude of aspects:

extended, open, attentive, active, collective... The purpose of the terms I have discussed is not to precisely define different types of listening in an artistic practice that can be fixed once and for all. Rather, they should be seen as an indication that listening is not a uniform process but a variety of different processes.

Listening is linked to the specific artistic process, which for me consists of composing polyvocal stage texts. In these processes, the reflective, creative work diary has become an important method of both reflection and of moving forward in the work, too. In this way, it can be seen as a way for me to listen to myself – to capture thoughts, associations, questions and ideas that are not yet well enough formulated to be articulated out loud. A way to engage in a dialogue with myself and the artistic material.

The practice of listening could also be questioned. What is it that we listen to – and what do we exclude? Is its function merely to confirm what we already know or to open up new perspectives?

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Bio

Vanja Hamidi Isacson (1976) is a Swedish-Finnish playwright and artistic researcher. Since 2024 she is affiliated guest researcher at Malmö Theatre Academy. In 2022, she completed her doctorate at Stockholm University of the Arts with a thesis titled *The Potential of Multilingualism in Dramatic Works*. Her research explores the relationship between multilingualism and its communicative, dramaturgical, political, and emotional dimensions, drawing from her extensive experience as a playwright. She has written around ten multilingual plays for adults and children – a few of them performed at Teater JaLaDa the Malmö based theatre she co-founded 2013. Listening is a crucial part of her work with different languages and voices.

Listening

Identifying languages and dialects is something I enjoy doing when I'm among people. I listen to voices, languages, dialects, and different ways of talking. I'm particularly interested in listening to "languages within languages" - e.g. a first language within a second language (for example Persian within Swedish).

Water Stirs Our Grief: A Choir of Tears

By Sall Lam Toro

This text was written to be listened to. The listening proposed here is somatic, metaphysical, and one that transcends the limits of matter. The voices that converse move between earth and the unearthed, the dead, the unseen and the intangible. Some are human, or have been human previously, and others have been divine all along. The listening proposed here is not rational nor linear. It exists in a multidimensional parallel world(s) across spirals of time within this garden of revolt(-ades). It's the waters that speak mainly through these voices and bodies. And the waters also listen to you.

The script begins from Act III by introducing a pond in a garden of revolt inviting you, the reader/listener, into a somatic imagining of a reentering into the pond while we witness a poetic correspondence between the embodied and unembodied voices on the element of water. Act IV follows another water journey between Copenhagen and Malmo through the öresund train line where the voices profess a poetic grief through an erotic reckoning and embodiment of water. Act V introduces unembodied voices journeys through waters in an interlude in Montgomery where a dock brawl unfolds; and then there is a reprise (where it began but the future comes first here) where the voices journey further into the waters of the Strait of Gibraltar where a choir of tears and rage unfurls.

The sound weaves elements from specific locations, memories, nature elements, voices and an aspect of non-linear time where past, present and future blend, crossover, remix and repeat. These sounds reflect erotic relationships between the inner livings of human and non-human bodies allowing the listener to become a witness of this chaotic and at times overwhelming universe. They were made in collaboration with Amalia Garay (sound composer and musician), Auria Paz (musician and shaman) and Skrot (instrument builders and musicians).

On listening

I was looking for inaudible sounds and the relationships within what is sub-

tly, or, less obviously inaudible, and how to amplify these, and bring them into a louder existence. I am often interested (almost obsessed sometimes) in listening to what seems invisible, intangible, and unknown, or unheard of when I am having an active listening relationship to material. I get pulled in when sound produces a sort of oracular encounter affect to my senses.

Note on methodology

I am writing characters that exist within a type of multi-reality. This script is rooted in afro-diasporic cosmologies remixed with a sort of queering of orixá inspired characters in the text. In these script, I attempt at syncretizing astrological signs with Afro-diasporic Yoruba inspired orixás - “animist divinities connected to forces of nature” (Linares et al (2015)) - that are already raced even if some exist in a dis/unembodied (multi-)reality. I am mirroring an old black diasporic practice of remixing seen in all the Yoruba /Ifa based traditions in Nigeria (where it originated), and other West African countries, and subsequent developments such as Vodou and Lucumi in Haiti Cuba and Dominican Republic, Candomblé in Brazil, Umbanda in both Angola and Brazil, and, Santeria in Latin America and Caribbean where these orixas / deities become syncretized with Christian saints. This practice, called “sincretismo” (syncretism in Portuguese) between orixás and saints emerged as a survival practice during slavery times between the different African communities that were displaced from Africa into the Caribbean and Latin America. The orixas are called, organized and systematized differently depending on geography with some similarities within different spiritual orders: some call them religions, philosophies, mediumship practice of rhythmic rituals, and spiritual practices.

Furthermore, the syncretism aspect would manifest as an orixá becoming assimilated to a particular saint in Christianity with similar attributes so that the enslavers would not find out that enslaved Africans would continue to practice their spiritual practices behind their backs believing them to be devoted to their saints and religion, forcefully. In this text though, I’m syncretizing them through an active queering with merging them with astrological aspects instead, removing their historical christianized development.

Queering as a rooting method for such a text opens possibilities for writing a bending and (re)twisting of the body within these scripts’ narrative in multi-directions for endless realities that resist normative trajectories based on heterosexual, patriarchal and hyper capitalist modes. This *queering* as a method for both writing critically builds a methodology to disturb, subvert

and develop, ask questions, expand and rip meaning apart, and acknowledge its contextual multitudes, contradictions and transgressions. Yet also ways to speak of what is “unclassifiable” and “out of line” (Ahmed, S., 2006). Furthermore, *queering* offers spaces of ambivalence and contradiction to coexist in discourse and meaning creation, making it possible to imagine what hasn’t been imagined yet, or to destabilize what has been imagined. And see possibilities to transform meaning and (sur)render it from what has been classifiable (Russell, J. 2001) and known in the world.

Cast of Voices

Mar: a human shapeshifter body, genderless, attached to every water known to be energetically speaking; the vessel that incorporates every other spirit / orixá or ghost through the waters. They represent a connection to the multitudes of water from the sensuous to the organic, physical and metaphysical. Mar also incorporates ancestors in their body through possession being the only character that actually incorporates all the other un/disembodied characters in the garden onto their own body. These characters speak through Mar, yet also outside of them with Mar in their multi-journeys across the scripts. Mar also ends up being the one that enacts rituals and food and drink offerings towards the un/disembodied voices interconnecting the material and cosmic realms. And establishing a bridge between the two in an endless organized dialogue, in which land, ancestry and the sensuous communicate, transform, and commune.

Mar channels Oxum and Oxumaré often. Oxum and Oxumaré (in Brazil) (also written Oshun and Oshumaré in Yoruba) are related orixás. Oxum rules love, the rivers, seductive sexuality, intimacy, beauty, wealth and the arts. She is often represented by the color yellow or amber, cowrie shells and mirrors; and Oxumaré rules the skies, the liminal spaces between life and death, ancestors. Oxumaré has no fixed gender, it shifts from half a year as a half-woman-half-snake and then the rest of the year as half-man-half-snake body. Oxumaré is often represented by the ouroboros or infinity symbol denoting eternal and infinite cycle of life, abundance, transformation and mutation. The two orixás have the symbol of the rainbow in common.

Mar’s voice is warm, shifts between low cold /low warm type of textures, naive, idealistic, expansive, sensual and romantic.

Exu(a): inspired by the orixá Exu in African diasporic spirituality rooted in Yorubá originally (born in Nigeria and then spread over West Africa, the Americas and the Caribbean) and then appearing also in Vodun, Umbanda, Santeria, Ife, and Candomblé. This is a queered version of Exu, a more queer feminine archetype. Exu(a) is an in-between type of orixá communicating with other orixás and humans (and non-humans). They become a messenger between worlds, and are responsible for facilitating journeys for the humans which might be full of difficulty and obstacles, or even chaos. It is a type of trickster orixá whose motivation is to ensure movement, action, execution, crossings and the opening /closing of paths. Exu(a) also dominates over bodily pleasures and sexuality. Their colors are represented by red and black.

Elements: feminine, fire, communication, body, movement, transformation, oracle, and rebirth

The unnamed/the undammed: An earthly spirit based on the planet Saturn - which is one of the biggest planets in our solar system, usually seen in strife with Mars and Jupiter in astrology. Saturn represents patriarchal authority born from the land and in connection to ancestry and the relationships we as humans have with nature and agriculture. Saturn rules the sign of Capricorn in astrology, a realist capricious archetype. The capricornian archetype is a cardinal sign represented by characteristics of initiation, sacrifice, old age, time, authoritarianism, and patriarchy. The Unknown/the undammed has a role of an old sibling, grand-fatherly type of archetype, often responsible to relay reality and the truth, difficult revelations, often hidden or inaccessible. The unnamed /undammed is concerned with non-linear time and the passage of time itself. His voice is sharp, authoritative, paternalistic, old-timer, dull at times, with an informative attitude.

Elements: masculine, cardinal earth, time, authority, building legacy and the legacy we inherit, ancestry, nature, land, agriculture, patriarchy

Macumbarias e veneno a cohort spirit, an amalgamation of every organism of the garden: from the plants, to the water, to the soil, mycelium, fungi, stone, trees, animals, human ghosts, etc. They often split into the other voices and are its own cohort at once. They always speak in an androgynous multiplicity of voices in cryptic codified short language.

Oya(dé): inspired by the orixá Oya in Yoruba (and other denominations similar) and also called Iansã (in Brazil). Oya is the orixá of the wind, fire and lightning, a warrior of justice. She is destructive, unpredictable yet powerful, and punitive towards betrayal.

Oya, like the unknown /the undammed is also connected to ancestry but as the one that has the role to take the souls of the dead into another world. She is represented by the color red. oya(dé): becomes a queered form of Oya, syncretized here with the Aquarian archetype in astrology that rules the rupture of social systems, rebellion, and revolution. Aquarius is an air sign ruled by the planet Uranus (and Saturn in some astrological systems). Oya(dé) represents the committed ride or die type of energy needed in a revolution, the creativity, magic and futurist approaches required in the apocalypse. Their voice is often loud, strident, warm, authoritative,

Elements: wind, fire, lightning, thunder, justice, war, futurism, death

Unknown/ghosts/spectres: a cacophony of millions of human spirits that have lost their life attempting to migrate from the african continent (specially West Africans and north africans closer to the Mediterreanean) onto Europe mixed with former enslaved people thrown off boats by colonizers during the atlantic slave trade and European colonialism periods. Their voices are at times close and loud, always multiplying and then also distant, echo-y, as if their manifestation is just a glitch.

SOUND FILE WATER STIRS OUR GRIEF- A CHOIR OF TEARS _AUDIO_20.06

<https://soundcloud.com/malmoe-theatre-academy/water-stirs-our-grief-a-choir-of-tears-4?in=malmoe-theatre-academy/sets/matter-5>



CHAPTER I: WATER STIRS OUR GRIEF: A CHOIR OF TEARS

Act_III: Water

Setting: Inside the pond at the garden of revolt(-ades), sounds of thousands of feet stomping to the sound of drumming emanate from the waters.

(a distant echo, the words are muffled and barely understood)

We leave our erotic bond to the earth then.

We leave the thing that makes us of this earth and of each other.

You: *(Come closer to the pond. Stand next to it. If you dare, you may enter it too. Bring your feet slowly into the cold water, with intention. Sense the temperature of the water penetrating your pores. Sense the ground underneath and the water enveloping your weight, skin, nerves, and the vibration it emanates. Make sure you do not touch the plants in the pond as they might alter you in ways you are not ready for, nor can handle.)*

Exu(a): *(laughing quietly)* careful careful, if you rub yourself on that mugwort, you may overdose on plant t(estosterone)!

The unnamed /the undammed: *(soft but assertive)* some t-beaux ¹bitches are coming to pick that mugwort² up.

Oya(dé): *(slightly excited)* ah, and just behind that big rock, you can pick on the hairs and scrape one by one of the stinging nettle and make a tincture that will keep the dolls away from the fiends and chasers. Just spray it up. 25% alcohol! Remember!

(one hears all versions. Read slowly, digesting every word, every silence. Give it time)

Mar: « les cigales haïtiennes pensent à crisser l'amour.

Quand il n'y a plus une goutte d'eau
dans l'herbe brûlée, elles chantent
furieusement
que la vie est belle,

1 A queer slang term for trans* masculine, trans* men, non-binary or gender nonconforming trans* bodies transitioning

2 Mild poisonous plant also called artemisa vulgaris

elles éclatent dans un cri
 trop vibrant pour un corps d'insecte.
 Leur mince pellicule de soie
 sèche tendue à l'extrême,
 elles meurent
 en laissant fuser le cri de plaisir le moins mouillé du monde».³

Amalia and **Auria**:⁴ Las cícadas haitianas piensan en amor estridente
 Quando ya no hay ni una gota de agua
 En el pasto quemado
 Ellas cantan furiosamente que la vida es bella
 Ellas explotan en un llanto demasiado vibrante para el cuerpo de un insecto
 Su delgada envoltura de seda seca estirada al límite
 Ellas mueren soltando el llanto menos mojado de placer en el mundo

Mar: "Haitian cicadas think of squealing love.
 When there is no longer a drop of water
 in the scorched grass,
 they sing furiously
 that life is beautiful,
 they burst into a cry too vibrant for an insect's body.
 Their thin wrapping of dry silk stretched to the limit,
 they die letting out the least wet cry of pleasure in the world".

Macumbarias e veneno a memory that is soon to be yours

You: (*keep entering the pond (if you dared), let the water inform your next movement. Stay there. Empty your mind. Don't think about your next movement. Sense it. Let it arrive. Let yourself arrive*)

Exu(a): (*teasing*) if you choose the joys of death, the nightshade⁵ down south is your girl.

The unnamed /the undammed: (*smiling*) whoa whoa whoa, don't scare them away!

Mar: water is my second habitat

3. Suzanne Césaire in "The great camouflage: writings of dissent" https://monoskop.org/images/0/04/Cesaire_Suzanne_The_Great_Camouflage_Writings_of_Dissent_1941-1945_2012_part.pdf

4. Amalia Garay and Auria Paz helped me bring the adaptation of this text into sound and bring an aspect of sound into this text too

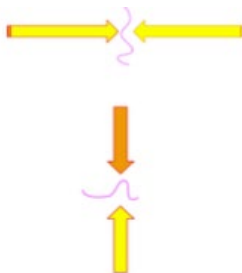
5 An extremely poisonous plant from the family of the solanaceae

an embracing vast vessel

i bathed,
i felt,
a joyous lingering
expand,
and
collide
with grief

i float on a surface of the ocean
a melancholic desire descends,
the rain down my back

You: *(make your feet heavy, and then your ankles, your calves. Bend your knees slightly, and bring your butt inwards, tightening it. Your torso is lighter and your arms, hands, neck and head accompany this lightness, as if you are being pulled upwards. There is a contra-energy: your lower body is being pulled downwards and your upper body is being pulled upwards. Sense the contra-energy moving in opposite directions).*



Macumbarias e veneno *(distant voice, distorted, glitchy, androgynous voice)*
A false beginning. Backwards jumping time. In the future now. Jumping back again into the present, just wait. Wait!

Exu(a): *(cunningly)* ok, let me tell you something fun for the girls. Ishanga as I call it... I don't like nettle because it's too basic of a name. But *(emphasis on the next word)* ishanga! See how powerful it is! Ishanga makes your tities get milk. *(amused)* If you wanna be a breeder so much! They are behind the trees.

Mar: *(the sound of their words come out as if they circled around themselves backwards)* This false beginning starts with waters, both oceanic and unsalted such as rivers, rain, puddles, or even, domesticated, such as the one

that runs in homes, altered.

Mar: (*with a warm voice*) Or even carried within a sensuous body,
“on the verge of praying”⁶

like tears,
saliva,
sweat,
or bussy juice.

Mar: (*cold tone*) there is no separation between body or land,
river and flesh are the same.

Oya(dé): (*almost whispering*) “Breathing in unbreathable circumstances is what we do everyday in the chokehold of racial gendered ableist capitalism. We are still undrowning”⁷

Mar: (*one hears this backwards*) water carries memory, the same way our human and non-human bodies carry different memories in one’s body.

Macumbarias e veneno a memory that belongs

The unnamed /the undammed: (*robotic*) water moving violently,
Their flesh immersed completely in,
Their face distorted,
following the ruptures of the waves onto each other⁸

Mar: (*to be read with an erotic memory evocation of hot water pouring in your back*) “Will we remember from where we’ve come?”

Mar: (*with a betraying face*) How long have you lived under my blood-stream?

The unnamed /the undammed: I touched your haunted wrinkles upon my face

6 Natalie Diaz “postcolonial love poem” (p.51)

7. Alexis Pauline Gumbs in “undrowned: notes from black feminist lessons”

8. My poem *Old Keeper* (2020), published as part of the text HOME WAS, HOME IS, HOME WILL BE for zine HOME by Uhørt/Kin Collective

Oya(dé): (*doubtful*) “Will we remember from where we’ve come?”⁹

Mar: (*with an assuring voice*) The water.

Macumbarias e veneno (*an echo*) The water.

The unnamed /the undammed: (*mercurial, informational, neutral*)

And once remembered,
will we return to that first
water,

Exu(a): (*obedient*) and in doing so

Mar: (*hopeful*) return to ourselves,
to each other?”

Oya(dé): (*a future echo*) weeping with open mouths
and hearts,

Mar: (*with a full joy*) weeping so loud
it became an endless song

Mar: (*a past echo*) weeping so loud
it became an endless song

Exu(a): (*seductive and commanding*) “Drink from yourself until you are
full.”¹⁰

The unnamed /the undammed: (*with warning*) “When a river is disrespect-
ed

Exu(a): (*relaying facts neutrally*) “a dragon will take revenge”¹¹

The unnamed /the undammed: (*with tenderness in their throat*) laying soak-
ing wet down the shore

9. Natalie Diaz “postcolonial love poem” (p.51)

10. Natalie Diaz, postcolonial love poem, (p.51)

11. Alice Sparkly Kat, Postcolonial Astrology: Reading the Planets through Capital, Power, and La

Oya(dé): (*euphoric*) We were the same body

Exu(a): (*curious*) what awaits revenge

Mar: (*searching the words*) from your... L_I_B_I_D_O?

Oya(dé): (*pleading*) I ran to you,

Mar: (*joyful*) to our birth,
water, salt, sand

The unnamed /the undammed: (*with passion*) And returned to dance,
in white

Oya(dé): (*truthful*) Moving with your old feet

Mar: (*concluding*) Water birthed us again

End of Act III

Act_IV: Öresund water journeys between Copenhagen-Malmö

Setting: inside the øresund train via copenhagen-malmö, crossing the bridge and border between Denmark and Sweden. Sounds of the train ride are loud, distorted, deconstructed.

(recited as a poem in whatever way one understands that)

The unnamed /the undammed: a train ride from copenhagen destined to malmö
is not *just* a train ride
For,
a passing of invisible borders awaits you!

Mar: within the sea
above the sea
along the sea

Exu(a): a skipping heart beat
a racing pulse the next second
a twisting,
a bending of my entrails

The unnamed /the undammed: the border police
the border police
an imminent appearance
depending on how full the train was that day.

Mar: to appease my own mask,
i looked at the sea,
i asked for (sub)refuge
in the waves' ripples

Exu(a): and breathed,
breathed as much as i could

Mar: there was days i forgot my passport or identity card,

Exu(a): composure with my rage,

Oya(dé): a masking of my daily revolt,

The unnamed /the undammed: a hiding of my (un)resting bitch face,

Mar: and asked the godxxx
they did not see me
question me,
take me,
harass me,
violate me,

The unnamed /the undammed: or, others that look like me, but did not
have an european passport

Oya(dé): or, others that have (so called) alien passports,
or, unrecognized passports,
unexisting,

The unnamed /the undammed: effaced from the eyes of legality.

Mar: i wonder if the sea just outside their window
appeared a sharing of uncertainty of not / never / unlikely of arriving to
their destination

Exu(a): those minutes in between

The unnamed /the undammed: fantasy (~~phantom~~) borders

Mar: riding above the sea

Exu(a): have been the sole moment of pleasure,
of heightened desire

Mar: to marry the cold oceanic waters

and *be-come* whole
Re-birthed,

Exu(a): in-love,

Macumbarias e veneno in-flow,

The unnamed /the undammed: out-of-line.

Mar: becoming mine
becoming mine

End of Act IV

Act_V: Strait of Gibraltar

Setting: at the strait of Gibraltar, in the atlantic ocean, south of Iberian peninsula

Mar: the ripples and swells of 500 orca attacks
at the strait of Gibr-al-tar

Oya(dé): The unrest of thousands lost at sea
Year after year

Mar: We were left to drown

The unnamed /the undammed: (repeating the distant echoes as if it has
passed millions of years) We were left to drown

Mar: the unrest of those murdered at sea
Dumped as if they deserved no rest,
Undrowned

Oya(dé): (*protesting*) ;no rest! No rest!

The unnamed /the undammed: (repeating the distant echoes as if it has
passed millions of years) undrowned!

Interlude: Rowdy docks at Montgomery

Setting: a collective memory evocation, docks, Montgomery, Alabama

Oya(dé): the waters holding what we know as ~~Alabama, Montgomery~~
holding
holding

The unnamed /the undammed: years of horrors

Mar: in that water's
unwashed memory

The unnamed /the undammed: for (a)
centu-ry(ies)
clearing bloodied linen
tortured hands and feet
marked iodizing backs

Mar: These same waters laying under a dock
A witness to a riverfront brawl

Exu(a): (*gasping laughingly*) The white folding chair
The white folding chair was the true hero

Oya(dé): (*seriously irritated*) No, it was kin!
Seeing that man, alone
fighting

The unnamed /the undammed: (*grimacing*) You saw how all of them
jumped on him?

Mar: (*with authority*) No, it was the waters! The waters stirred justice to be
made!

“Pamodi mar, ka ten kau di pega”

Reprise: At the Strait of Gibraltar

Setting: An echo “the waters stirred justice to be made” is heard

Exu(a): (*in a choir with all*) 500 strikes for 500 years of unrest! 500 strikes
for 500 years of unrest! 500 strikes for 500 years of unrest! 500 strikes for
500 years of unrest!

Oya(dé): (*protesting*) ;no rest! No rest!

The unnamed /the undammed: (*repeating the distant echoes as if it has
passed millions of years*) undrowned!

Exu(a): *(in a choir with all)* 500 strikes for 500 years of unrest! 500 strikes for 500 years of unrest! 500 strikes for 500 years of unrest! 500 strikes for 500 years of unrest!

unknown/ghosts/spectres: the orcas become us

Mar: The orcas avenge us

Oya(dé): The orcas avenge us

Exu(a): *(low distorted voice, gradually lowered)* They intimidate like a bad bitch with a deadly stare

The unnamed /the undammed: They slam
They rebel
They organize
They revenge

(almost in unison, one after the other, like a harmonious choir)

Mar: They throw the rudder

Oya(dé): They chew off the hull

Exu(a): They sank them boats

The unnamed /the undammed: they been injured,
they fought back

Oya(dé): They been captured / **unknown/ghosts/spectres:** They just like us
They just like us
Paraded like at the zoo

End of Act V

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Bio

Body_hacker (aka Sall Lam Toro, they/them) (1990) was born in Portugal and is based in Copenhagen, Denmark, working with immersive multimedia performance art, orchestrating sensuous meetings, entanglements and rituals between the human and non-human. They do so within the context of unnumbing and hacking bodies from everyday violent structures of modern capitalism and legacies of coloniality. This looks like involving the erotic, or, the sensuous as a way to confront alienation and illusions of separation in the modern living world between humans and non-humans. They also engage in community organizing around queer care work and autonomous living, and live and work collectively as part of queer housing and art collectives. www.bodyhacker.love

Invitation to linger

This is an invitation to linger. To stay with. To start and to start again. This is an invitation to hold. To discover. Unravel. To speculate, to seed, to doubt, to consider, to question. To listen. To sense. To start.

Prologue

Bureau *for* Listening works across many formats. Fragmentation is a foundational part of our approach to listening; attempting to demonstrate the vastness of listening and the cultivation of staying with only partial and poetic knowledge(s). The following is an invitation to explore a selection of our multifaceted work that we hope you will find equally serious and joyous. We do not operate with a homogenous or dominating understanding of listening. We are curious about learning from ancient listening practices, as well as developing future ones; to hold spaces for them, allow them to manifest and disrupt our 'institution'.



Bureau *for* Listening is equally an operating bureau, a performative art practice, and a conceptual framework for something to come.

Advertisement for the Bureau *for* Listening:

**When no one is there to listen to
you, we are! Have you listened
today? We are here to help!**

Invitation to obtain a new perspective

Choose one perspective from the list and stay with it for the rest of the day.

Among-ness
Around-ness
Back-ness
Before-ness
Beside-ness
In-Between-ness
Outward-ness

Follow-up question: In what ways does your new perspective affect your being, your spatial presence and your capability to listen?

Listening as Institutional Practice: Towards an Institution of Attunement

By Bureau *for* Listening

The following essay is written by Bureau *for* Listening in context of our wonderings: what happens to our listening as we become an institution, and what happens to our institution if we keep listening?



Bureau *for* Listening strive not to govern, but rather lean in. Rather than demanding, it hesitates, waits, and reorientates. While still keeping track of some of its original architecture, it strives to be an institution that unbuilds itself, an architecture of attunement that bends to what it hears. Bureau *for* Listening claims no mastery. It does not seek to contain but to be moved, to tremble at the edges of understanding, to mobilize the art of noticing and promote the potential of not-yetness and not-knowing. It remains porous, uncertain, undone by the act it upholds. However, over the years, our listening authority has been increasing—both in others' perception and ways of greeting us, and in our own self-installed performativity. There is a risk of becoming and being a listening institution practicing institutional listening.



We may understand an institution as an architecture of rules, systems, and repetitions—a structure that governs behavior, determines belonging, and reinforces hierarchies. A possible stereotypical notion of an institution at least. Listening, in contrast, is more ephemeral, porous, and relational. Never repeated. It exists in the folds of encounter, in the slowness of reception, in the willingness to be moved. What, then, might it mean to practice listening as an institution? Can listening, with its attention to intersubjectivity and the unknown, disrupt institutional power, or does institutionalization inevitably betray the transformative potential of listening; does institutions domesticate and tame our listening?

We may proclaim that to listen is to acknowledge the not-yet—what re-

mains unsaid, unheard, unformulated, unsayable; to hold back one's own judgement and sense of knowing. In doing so, listening resists the demand for efficiency, for resolution, for mastery. Institutions, as they currently exist, tend toward the opposite: they consolidate authority, they define and delimit, they demand coherence. Yet paradoxically, we may speculate that listening is also the foundation upon which institutions are built. From legal proceedings to governance, from education to healthcare, don't institutions rely on different acts of listening(?)—often not as a means of care, but as a mechanism of control, surveillance, and selective attention. Some institutions extract listening to serve their own ends, while others silence through strategic deafness. Would it be fair to assume that without obedient, domesticated and uncompensated listening; no institutions?

And yet, listening may however disrupt power and institutions precisely because it refuses singular authority. It is an embodied act of interrelation, a practice that reconfigures the conditions of who gets to speak, who gets to be heard, and how knowledge circulates. Within an institution, listening has the potential to redistribute authority, decenter expertise, and attune governance to those in its margins. It fosters intersectional awareness by making space for voices that have been historically silenced—not merely by granting them a platform but by restructuring the very conditions of presence and recognition. Perhaps we simply need to *listen differently*. Not obediently or domesticated but untamed. Rather than listening to the speaker, we may listen for the silenced, the underheard, and voiceless. While all institutions demand listening, stand upon the listeners, an actual listening institution is perhaps rather shaped by the listeners, listens back; exists in the service of listening. A listening institution may not simply *include* more voices; it would rather allow for and nurture disorientation as well as reorientation, for multiplicity, for forms of knowing and not-knowing that exceed bureaucratic legibility, and for recognition and healing of those listened to.

If an institution of listening were to exist, what would it entail? First, we speculate, it would necessitate a practice of slowness, an intentional pause that disrupts the speed of institutional decision-making. Slowness as an institutional principle challenges the violence of immediacy, allowing for listening to be sustained rather than merely performed, disciplined, and repeated. Second, it would embrace not-knowing, resisting the assumption that institutions must produce answers and measurable results, that governance must be predicated on certainty and hold authority. This builds on an understanding that to listen is to remain unfinished, to be willing to be shaped by what is

encountered. Third, such an institution would be governed by reciprocity, ensuring that listening is not extractive, not an act of surveillance or capture, but one of shared vulnerability.

When playing with and partnering concepts such as listening and institution, perhaps a possible paradox of ‘institutional listening’ is that it demands structure while resisting enclosure. To listen is to witness without claiming ownership, to remain open to transformation without foreclosing what that transformation must be. An institution of listening must be an institution-in-motion, one that cultivates the conditions for listening while refusing to determine its outcomes.

The question remains: Do we need an institution of listening, or would cultivating listening differently inherently undo the need for institutionalization? If listening is already an institution—a shared, lived practice of attunement—perhaps the task is not to build new institutions, such as Bureau *for* listening, but allow *for*, and trust in, the reorientation of the ones that fail to listen. Rather than striving for ‘institutional listening’, what listening practices within the institutions may we still appreciate?

Bureau *for* Listening seek, as a parasitic institution to disassemble the architectures of silencing and, in their place, cultivate the conditions for listening to emerge—not as governance, but as relation, as presence, as the ever-unfinished act of being-with.

Listening comes with risk.

We hope that Bureau *for* Listening as a possible listening institution is not

a monument, but a breath held open. We will never own or repeat our listening, or demand it of others; rather we strive to share it, to keep giving it away.



While this essay do not apply direct references, the following literature and its different concepts was instrumental for its development and reflection:

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**Invitation to shift your
orientation:**

**Breathe until you feel
your orientation shifting.**

Listening Service Descriptions and Fees:

Listening is fundamental - an act of care, attention, and presence - yet it is rarely given structured value. The Bureau *for* Listening explores this paradox: how do we price something that is both highly valuable for being a human, priceless perhaps, and at the same time taken for granted?

These services formalize listening as a practice, revealing its role in conflict resolution, storytelling, memory, public space - and as an artistic practice. Some offerings follow market logic, while others disrupt it, allowing listening to be exchanged, gifted, or withheld.

By setting a price on listening, we ask: What happens when attention is treated as labor? Who gets heard, and who remains unheard when hired? How to challenge the extractive nature of expecting but not compensating the listening of the workers? How is listening changed when offered at a price - in what ways do we listen differently when hired to do listen? How may we still reimagine support systems for those who listen? These questions challenge economic, artistic, and ethical assumptions, positioning listening as both a service and a radical act.

Find other Listening Services and further context at: <https://bureauforlistening.com/listening-services/>

Service	Description	Price
Civic Listening Mediator	Provides professional listening services in cases of civic disputes, neighborhood conflicts, or public disagreements. The listener documents key emotional undercurrents and unmet needs, offering a non-judgmental report to all parties involved.	3,500 DKK per mediation session (1.5 hours, including report).
Listening to Lost Words	A service dedicated to recording and preserving personal stories that might otherwise disappear. Often used for elder care, family histories, or undocumented narratives.	800 DKK per hour or free for stories at risk of being lost.
Silent Mentorship Program	A mentorship structure where the mentor listens but does not provide verbal feedback, allowing mentees to process their own thoughts with an attentive presence. Sessions conclude with a short written reflection.	1,200 DKK per session (60 min, including written reflection).
Workplace Soundscape Assessment	An analysis of office or institutional sound environments, with recommendations on how to create a more mindful, attentive, and productive listening culture.	5,000 DKK per workplace assessment (includes recommendations).
Second-Hand Listening Exchange	A unique service where individuals share stories they have heard second-hand. The listener helps trace how narratives change through transmission, exploring misinterpretations, embellishments, and memory distortions	1,500 DKK per session or free if contributing a story that has traveled through at least three people.
Public Listening Booths	Temporary or permanent booths placed in public spaces where individuals can enter and be heard without judgment. A trained listener records key themes while maintaining confidentiality.	Free for users. Funded through institutional or municipal partnerships (10,000 DKK per booth installation).
The Art of Unfinished Conversations	A listening session where individuals revisit conversations they never completed—whether due to time, distance, or personal reasons. Listeners help process and reflect on these unresolved dialogues.	1,000 DKK per session or free for cases of deep emotional importance.
The Bureau for Listening Library	A service that collects and curates audio recordings of different listening practices, making them available for research, artistic use, or personal reflection. Users can access recordings or contribute their own.	500 DKK annual membership or free for contributors.
The Listening Hotline	A confidential phone service where callers can speak freely without response. The listener remains silent, offering only presence. Callers may request a short reflection at the end, based on key themes.	500 DKK per 30-minute call or free for those in emotional distress.
A Listener-in-Residence	A trained listener embedded in an institution, event, or creative process, providing continuous listening presence and documenting evolving narratives.	10,000 DKK per week or negotiable based on project duration.

**A confidence boost?
Listening guidance?
Or just want to be listened to?**

Call 45 22 28 75 65.

**The Listening Hotline is open
24/7**

Discover more about this hotline at: weblink:
<https://bureauforlistening.com/listening-hotline/>

Two Proposals for Listening to *MATTER**

In response to the invitation to contribute to the publication on listening in the journal *MATTER – The Materiality of Artistic Research in Theatre and Performance*, Bureau for Listening proposes the following:

1. We propose that *MATTER* organizes a live version of its journal in the format of a minimum two-week camp for both contributors and interested parties, where the contributions are performed, presented, expanded, tested, discussed, realized—acted upon (!!!). In doing so, the results and responses should be listened to, cared for, and allowed to materialize—making the camp a generative space for listening as a transformative practice. The camp should not end until all participants feel moved by the listening (how they are moved is irrelevant). The camp can take place anywhere, under any material circumstances. The traces of this live version of *MATTER* should be documented by a survey 30 years later, asking: “Dearest you who were at the camp, in what way has your listening changed since the camp?”

2. We propose that *MATTER* includes a contribution exclusively for listeners at a Listening Level 13. Two key aspects must be addressed for this proposal to materialize: What kind of contribution should be strictly for an already advanced listener? What can only these listeners bear witness to? What do they need to be challenged by, reminded of, whispered to? What wisdom of listening should be revealed at a later point? How should *MATTER* assess a person’s listening ability? Should it be determined by a survey, an exam following a ‘listening course,’ or a point system based on good deeds? Is it even possible to rate one’s ability to listen? And if such a rating proves arbitrary, how might its arbitrariness and disorienting nature still contribute to cultivating one’s listening practice? How might both the creation and dismantling of a listening ‘score’ foster deeper listening?

Proposals for Listening is an artistic practice of Bureau for Listening: a framework through which applications, concepts, and actions aimed at nurturing, promoting, and researching listening as a transdisciplinary practice are envisioned and shared. Some proposals may seem realistic, while others are speculative. You can find many more Proposals for Listening as part of Bureau for Listening’s manifest 3: weblink: <https://bureauforlistening.com/manifest-3/>

A Campaign by the Ministry of Listening

LISTEN MORE!

Listening is a choice.
Choose wisely. Join the
Ministry of Listening. The
revolution will not be tele-
vised, but it will be heard.¹

1. Read a possible manifest for a Listening Ministry at: [weblink: <https://bureauforlistening.com/manifest-for-a-listening-ministry/>]

Bio

Bureau *for* Listening (2021–) is an artist and research group investigating and promoting listening as critical, empathic, and artistic practice. We work nomadic, transdisciplinary, and strive to engage others in shared practices and projects. <https://bureauforlistening.com/>

To Not-Know and to Listen

by Lukas Quist Lund

The following exists within a continuum of different versions. It's equally a poem as well as a performance score.

You are invited to read the poem slowly, almost as a whispering to a loved one. This might be an ideal reading/listening situation.

to listen

to listen

to listen and to not hear

to not hear and to strain

to strain and to distort

to distort and to lose clarity

to lose clarity and to doubt

to doubt and to disbelieve

to disbelieve and to dissolve

to dissolve

to dissolve

to dissolve and to re-form

to re-form and to fragmentize

to fragmentize and to scatter

to scatter and to follow the wind

to follow the wind and to search

to search and to resist finding

to resist finding

to resist finding and to fail

to fail and to keep resisting

to keep resisting and to encounter echoes

to encounter echoes and to repeat

to repeat

to repeat and to lose the source

to lose the source and to lose one's orientation

to lose one's orientation and to spin

to spin and to drift

to drift and to drift

to drift and to drift

to drift and to fall away

to fall away and to be pulled apart

to be pulled apart and to feel tension

to feel tension

to feel tension

to feel tension and to hold it

to hold it

to hold

to hold and to be stretched

to be stretched and to almost break

to almost break and to remain intact

to remain intact and to vibrate

to vibrate and to resonate discordantly

to resonate discordantly and to be

overwhelmed

to be overwhelmed and to sink

to sink and to spiral inward

to spiral inward and to be confronted

to be confronted and to recoil

to recoil and to confront again

to confront again and to not know why

to not know why and to resist knowing

to resist knowing and to not know why

to not know why and to resist knowing

to resist knowing and to listen

to listen and to hear what is unhearable

to hear what is unhearable and to hear what
is unsayable

to hear what is unsayable and to hear what
is unsaid

to hear what is unsaid and to hear what is
silenced

to hear what is silenced and to mishear

to mishear and to misunderstand

to misunderstand and to linger

to linger

to linger

to linger and to listen
to listen and to linger
to linger and to hesitate
to hesitate
to hesitate
to hesitate
to hesitate and to listen
to listen and to hesitate
to hesitate and to hesitate hesitation
to hesitate hesitation and to be moved
to be moved and to resist
to resist and to surrender
to surrender and to let go
to to let go and to not-know
to not-know and to unknow
to unknow and to unravel
to unravel and to unlearn
to unlearn and to hold all the threads
to hold all the threads and to let them fall
apart
to let them fall apart and to pick them up
to pick them up and to weave dissonance
to weave dissonance and to witness disorder

to witness disorder and to rest in chaos
to rest in chaos and to be slow
to be slow and to breathe in
to breathe in and to let it out
to let it out and to breathe again
to breathe again and to breathe
to breathe and to breathe
to breathe and to breathe
to breathe and to listen
to listen and to question
to question and to not answer
to not answer and to be undone
to be undone and to listen
to listen and to begin again
to begin again
to begin again and to forget
to forget and to lose ground
to lose ground and to stumble
to stumble and to move without knowing
to move without knowing and to remain lost
to remain lost and to listen to loss
to listen to loss and to let it speak
to let it speak and to hear silence

to hear silence and to break it
to break it and to break it with dance
to break it with dance and to listen for
fragments
to listen for fragments and to gather them
to gather them and to hold them loosely
to hold them loosely and to question their
shape
to question their shape and to doubt the
whole
to doubt the whole and to listen again
to listen again
to listen again and to not-know
to not-know and to expand
to expand and to disorientate yourself
to disorientate yourself and to break
to break and to remain
to remain and reorientate
to reorientate and to listen
to listen and to be
to be
to be and to not-know
to not-know and to listen

The form of the text as a poem is inspired by a presentation by performance artist Cuqui Jerez, at the third TRAVERS Camp in Copenhagen, titled Confront the Future, 2021.

Bio

Lukas Quist Lund is a philosopher, art historian, and organizer exploring para-institutional research-actions and experimental pedagogy. His work focuses on wondering as a method across art, philosophy, and education.

This Magical Gong

by Jacob Remin

Last year I did a thing:

I submitted myself fully to magical ritual and magical thinking and to its logical conclusions, I pushed myself in to new materialities and mediums, making a piece, more ambitious and perhaps more honest than ever before.

I long to return to this shapeshifting state!

the process of transformation

the radical openness

the now-ness of all.

In this sound-text I try to make sense of that process: a process which is still somewhat a mystery to me.

If I can crack the script open, perhaps I can return to this magical state of extrasensory listening to the logic of love, chaos, beauty and truth?

SOUND FILE

<https://soundcloud.com/malmoe-theatre-academy/thismagical-gong-3?in=malmoe-theatre-academy/sets/matter-5>



Bio

Jacob Remin is a Copenhagen based artist and composer. Central to Remin's work is collaboration and infrastructural critique.

Remin experiments with performative and aural manifestations of alternative algorithmic logics. the intention of his praxis, is to create other narratives and worlds, which are more expansive and plastic. www.jacobremin.com

Listening. Listening to. Listening through. Listening with.

by Felicia Konrad

SOUND FILE ON DEEP LISTENING

<https://soundcloud.com/malmoe-theatre-academy/feliciakonradondeeplisteninf-1?in=malmoe-theatre-academy/sets/matter-5>

SOUND FILE ORACLEPOETRY

<https://soundcloud.com/malmoe-theatre-academy/oraclepoetry-2?in=malmoe-theatre-academy/sets/matter-5>

Bio

Felicia Konrad is a multidisciplinary artist. Her practice of Deep Listening has extended and blended with her practice of more-than-human/becoming with/making kin, entanglement, and the fact of aural diversity that everybody hears differently, as we all have unique fingerprints. She has attended Deep Listening courses by Morten Svenstrup, Björn Eriksson and The Center for Deep Listening at Rensselaer and follows Helen Frosi's Aural Diversity sessions at Goldsmith University.





A Box Full of Time and Sensuality: On How Becoming Conscious of Framings can Make a World of a Difference

By Morten Svenstrup

To set a frame can be surprisingly easy, really.

I know you know what I'm talking about, dear reader. Because if you're reading this, I know you've set a frame for yourself already.

To set a frame for reading, we need a place to do it (your living room, a seat in a train, next to a cup of tea), and an amount of time. Preferably undisturbed – even though for some of us this might seem like a real luxury! In this frame, we direct our senses in a specific way, one appropriate to what we've set out to do.

Frames are defined and structured in many different ways. From the everyday structure of work hours, school hours for our kids, film screenings, games of badminton, and so on, to the planetary – the rhythm of the days and nights; phases of the moon; sleep patterns; years. All are frames that we align to in order to flow with everyday life and its demands. And all frames present certain ways of doing and being. Some invite us to think, some invite us to move, communicate, feel, listen or sleep. We adjust our way of being and perceiving to fit the frames we enter – whether they're created by others or by ourselves.

At this very moment, I hear my phone chime with the sound of my marketplace app. I'm asking myself "Is somebody bidding on the subwoofer I put on the market yesterday?". But I choose to keep my focus. I'm writing this text about framing. I need to maintain the frame I've made for writing. So I resist the temptation to break it. Another time, I might have entered into the digital frame of the app for a while before re-entering the writing frame.

In this text, I want to share techniques for framing that I've studied and cultivated for a number of years in my teaching and in my personal life. These techniques are derived mainly from the fields of music and psychology. Both of these (as with the things between them) offer an advanced knowledge of framings supporting ways of being that may challenge our everyday selves. These include frames that encourage connection with our senses and our bodies. And even with profound sonic experiences such as silence, inner dream-like experiences, and other highly important modes of being.

Why do I bother writing about framing? Isn't it a tedious topic? Ten years ago, I probably would have agreed. For most of my life, I've thought of framing as something boring, something too square and dull to really be bothered with. But after having studied practices drawing on the senses, I've found working with framing to be utterly fundamental. When we care for how we frame things, we essentially define the direction things are going to flow. When we care to be conscious about them, frames can provide good leadership in themselves. Make a good frame and you may just see wonders happening without lifting a finger!

Framing happens whether we want it to or not. And there are a surprising number of benefits to be gained with just a little awareness about how framing works and what we can do with it.

1. How outer frames influence internal frames

First, I want to mention that the one who sets the frame is the one who is in charge – the leader. Politicians make laws that allows certain behaviours and make other illegal. That's a frame. Our teachers decide what happens in the classroom – how the students get to sit, move, what they should direct their attention to, and the *kind* of attention to be encouraged. That's a frame too. My partner and I decide what kind of manners we think are right at the family table during suppertime. A frame. Needless to say, sometimes the kids don't agree and challenge it!

Those of us who have the freedom to set our own frame once in a while are lucky! It's a privilege. And not least when we're making the frame for others. So let's use this privilege in a considerate way!

It's especially important since the frames we make for others influence those who enter them (kids, students, citizens). We tend to model our ways of behaving on the frames we enter. In other words, we change our *inner* frames so that they align with the outer frame.

Inner frames determine how we let ourselves move and direct our senses in a given situation. What do we choose to pay attention to, and why? How do we use our sight, our ears and our bodies – and our precious voices, if we do at all? What kind of information do we consider worthy of our attention, and what gets filtered out? This concerns our relationship to *ourselves*, the most precious thing of all.

Have you ever experienced a boss, leader or teacher who made a frame that encouraged ways of being different to those you might be used to? How did it change the way you related to yourself in that moment (your inner framing)? What did you allow yourself to do or be in that situation?

Again, there are many different definitions and structures of frames. The following chapters present suggestions for working with a number of framings, both for us as individuals and for working with groups.

2. Framing as a shield, personal and cultural

To be able to dedicate time without being disturbed is another kind of privilege – and also a decision.

A frame can offer protection from outside information that wants to reach us – phones, chatty neighbours, dogs, the things that attract us, whatever. It's a way to say: *do not disturb!* Something else needs my undivided attention, and I'm determined to give it. I might just consider a fire alarm, but that's about it!

We often mute our phones when we go to a concert. At a classical concert, we mute our conversation, too. The flow of music is given privilege, and the framing is set so that other sources of sound are filtered out. Our listening is given a frame where we can listen undisturbed for a prolonged period. A few days ago, I attended a performance of JS Bach's Saint Matthew Passion.

This particular piece is three hours-long. Except for a twenty-minute break, the framing allowed the listening to continue undisturbed for an extended period of time. Thank you, JS!

A therapy session is also a frame. When I work as a therapist, my sessions last 90 minutes. When the door is closed, the room and the time is completely devoted to the unfolding of the inner and outer processes that emerge. The framing supports this specialized kind of attention.

A prolonged, undisturbed frame is especially important in meditation as well. Some people pay attention to the breath cycle for an extended period of time. Some practice giving attention to one part of the body after the other until every part of the body has been consciously heard. No matter what kind of meditation we practice, the framing is always important. In order to step into other kinds of consciousness, undisturbed space and time support us. We go to a forest, a garden, a church or a mosque to meditate or pray – surroundings that support the inner framings by excluding unwanted disturbances from the surrounding world.

3. Framing as a temporal changer

When we decide to create an undisturbed frame, we are able to enter into a different temporality. Slower rhythms can be noticed and even followed. Our breath changes. Our heartbeat drops. Our muscles relax. We start to notice the sounds around us. Listening might occur. And when we really allow listening to happen, and stay with it, our sense of time changes, too.

Right now, as I write this paragraph, I'm in my apartment in Nørrebro, Copenhagen, and it's late in the evening. I hear my kids breathing in their room next door, sleeping. I notice my own breath, and the sounds of air passing in and out through my nostrils. I also sense my tired body, and that it's soon time for bed. I can physically feel the past rhythms of the day in my muscles, in my tired eyelids.

When we allow ourselves to not merely dip our toes into the listening but to really stay with it, and to continue staying with it, we are able to experience

time as a continuum. Like the flow of a river. Or a piece of music. Not as something to be measured. But as a lived experience.¹

When do you ever stay with listening for an extended period of time? Even to the extent of really getting a sense of the physical, full experience of one full day? Or one night? A year?! How often do we even get so much as a glimpse of this? Do you value looking at the stars? Or resonating with the unhurried ebb and flow of our seas?

What kind of framework supports these relationships with time and our surroundings? Do you encounter them once a year, once a month, daily? When? Do you ever consciously create such a framework? How did you do it?

Please let your mind wander for as long as you want before reading on!

4. Framing the marginal – the body, listening, dreaming, silence

The majority of framings we turn to are used to support productivity. Work, economy, transportation, and so on. That's of course great, and necessary. And yet: if we often repeat frames with a narrow focus, or repeat the same framings over and over, they might end up achieving the opposite of what we intended them to do. Most of us can only concentrate for a certain length of time. After that, something else arises, wanting to carry us away in another direction. Having discipline is great, but knowing when that narrow focus does not work for us anymore is just as important.

That's partly why framings that support more marginal states of mind are so beneficial. At this point in my own life (perhaps in yours too?) I think framings that support the body, sound/listening, dreaming, and even silence, are of utmost importance. They support our health and connect us with our surroundings in a meaningful, even profound, manner.

1. For a philosophical account of this way of thinking about time, see Henri Bergson's doctoral dissertation *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (1889).

I want to invite you to try it out right away.

The invitation goes –

Follow your breathing for five full and slow cycles of breath. Pay attention only to your upper body's movements while breathing.

You're invited to do it right away, before reading on.

OK! Was it difficult or easy to step into this framing? What made it so? Were you able to reach the end? What information, if any, did you get from this experience? If you did, was the kind of information you got different to the kind you get through reading? How so?

5. Facilitating not-doing for one person

Whenever I need to prepare for a performance, a class that I'm teaching or an article that I'm writing, I've got into the habit of taking a long walk or bike ride. The sole purpose is to make room for catching ideas.

I need to get the body going, get the blood running and the oxygen flowing. And to avoid paying attention to my usual thoughts for an extended period of time.

In fact, I actively want to make space for that which is in the background of my body/mind. All of those small sensations, feelings, intuitions and ideas that so often pop up but tend to float away if attention isn't paid to them. All those valuable sensations that have a spontaneous and dreamlike nature, so often just waiting to be listened to. And even connected to each other.

So my task is to begin the process of letting go a little bit, making sure to maintain the frame I set for myself – the frame of not-doing,² or making room. That is never easy. Something inside tends to try to derail me.

Let me give an example.

2. For an elaboration of this concept from the viewpoint of physics, psychology and Taoism, see Arnold Mindell's *Dreaming While Awake*, p. 66, or Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*, verse 29

To prepare a class I'm teaching, I set out to bike from my home here in Nørrebro in Copenhagen. I ride north along the coast. Usually, the first sabotaging thoughts pop up just after the town of Hellerup, where the traffic thins out, the traffic lights are infrequent and the sky and sea are present. They sound something like this: "Now you need to create some good ideas, Morten!" With practice, I've grown familiar with this opinion and now I'm able to contradict it: "You're not part of the frame I've made! You're not not-doing! I don't care about your opinions right now." After a few minutes, this voice pops up again: "Hey, how about your plan on preparing for the class?" Once again, I'm able to reject it. And after that something happens. I enter another state of being, a more flowing state of mind. A more musical and dreamlike state where I'm able to listen to the surroundings, and to listen to the ideas that start to emerge. The gems.

The vast majority of those are glimpses of insights and ideas I've already had but that I didn't manage to properly capture earlier. Now that there's room for them, they pop up again. And now I'm ready. I write them down, voice them into my phone as a memo, or simply chew on them for long enough to memorise them.

Everything that's always happening in the background is invited forth. It just needed space!

When the frame is maintained, the ideas usually grow and embody themselves. Dots connect and problems find their solutions. All of this happens by itself, so to speak. I don't need to do anything except for maintaining the frame and listening to what happens. With some encouragement from psychology – letting the dreaming happen, and appreciating it.³

In this case, a long bike ride does the trick for me. But the framing can be a lot shorter. It can be set for as little as thirty seconds. Incorporating this into a hectic work schedule only a few times a day can really work wonders. Do you ever let yourself really do nothing? Does it come easily or do you have to make an effort to get there? Do you do it voluntarily, or does it sometimes just happen? When? And how long do you like doing it for?

3. Arnold Mindell's *Dreaming While Awake*, p. 17

6. Facilitating “not-doing” with a group of people

In my experience, framing and facilitating not-doing for a group of people is wild.

In most settings where people meet, the standard framing is talking. Usually, it's so predominant that we don't even notice it.

To invite a group of people into a frame of not-doing is to let the talking reduce itself until it's in the background, even rendering it out entirely. What happens if the leader or facilitator in a group just stops talking? To do this or to frame a letting-go of words is a fundamental change, and a challenge for most of us. This is weird! What do we do now!? Are we allowed to look at each other without talking? What to do with the body when it no longer has the role of supporting verbal communication? Being close to someone without a familiar set of rules now seems intimate – perhaps a little bit too intimate! But the other option, to just sit alone looking out the window, or even closing the eyes, might also seem strange and unfamiliar.

The frame has been changed, and it takes time to readjust to the new rules, the new ways of being and relating. For most of us, it's not easy, and we might feel stuck (“What to do now? I have no idea!”). We might look for others in the group or to the facilitator for ideas and models for new ways of being or doing. For others, the new rules might be more familiar. Some people may have experience or even training in other ways of being and relating – meditative practices, creativity with movements, or similar. If people have some kind of artistic background, it might not be so frightening.

Usually, after a while, the awkwardness slowly resolves, and the room eases. The group starts to accept the rules of the new frame.

As facilitators, open frames are a big challenge, and take training. Experienced facilitators with the capacity to notice what's arising in the group in the moment may be able to create, or even change, framings from that information. This is a very creative and rewarding way of working with groups, and a way for any group to learn a lot of things about themselves in fast and creative ways.

Personally, I love this way of working. In the group that I'm currently working with at the Rhythmic Music Conservatory in Copenhagen, an awesome array of scenes and ways of moving has arisen from actively inviting in not-doing. Japanese karate kicks, ways of moving and singing belonging to the traditional Maori haka and dance moments from the Scottish jig (or our versions of it, anyway) have all spontaneously arisen from the framing of not-doing. So much fun!

Have you ever experienced a sense of not-doing in a group? Where no predominant agenda was defined, and where you were able to follow what emerged in the moment? Did you like it? Was it easy or difficult? Would you consider trying it actively as a group leader?

7. Framing just listening for one person

Simply listening hardly ever happens unless there is a frame for it.

All of us have pauses once in a while. Time between activities. Like waiting for the bus. Or waiting for a friend to show up at a rendezvous. Or plain old being awake during the night – all times when common activities are not happening, when we don't really do anything except for simply being.

These make good conditions for just listening without a specific purpose. For many of us, though, the technological developments of the last ten or twenty years, with the heavy influx of smartphones and other transportable technology, has to a large extent rendered those in-between moments absent, leaving little space for this state of mind. But listening is always right here for us, no matter what else we might be doing.

One of the most radical and beautiful framings I have ever encountered is an invitation made by the American composer Pauline Oliveros. She invites us to listen “in every possible way to everything possible to hear no matter what you are doing.”⁴ This is one of the fundamental invitations in her life-long practice of Deep Listening. One of its purposes is to support awareness of sound on as many levels of life as possible.

4. Oliveros, p.1, 2000

During my ten years as a Deep Listening facilitator, I have continuously been in awe of how simple yet powerful this invitation is.

Every time I facilitate a Deep Listening session, I experience the invitation working on me as a heightened sense of listening presence. It begins hours or sometimes even days before a session. Especially when I'm on my way to a session, biking, walking or driving, the listening kicks in. I begin to really listen to the world around me. The city livens up. The sounds of the wheels of my bike spinning become present, the sounds of people talking in the streets, birds chirping, the rumbling from the different motors of the cars passing by in the street becomes vivid. And I notice the changes in the soundscapes moving from one part of the city to the next.

And along with this listening, I sometimes feel a preciousness of the moment, as if every sound is unique, new. I catch a glimpse of the profound truth that every instance of life is accompanied by a unique soundscape. No two instances of sounds are ever the same. We're always experiencing the world anew. When we pay attention, that is.

How did all this suddenly happen!? I simply accepted the framing of listening to every sound filling the moment. A box full of time and sensuality indeed!

8. We all know about listening from when we were kids!

Just listening is not new to any of us. As children, before we even begin picking up the conceptual world of words, we are natural listeners, seers, feelers, smellers, strongly sensing creatures. Our natural habitat is not so much in the conceptual world yet but in the physical presences of our body and the sounding world around us. We have all been kids, instantly paying attention to everything that happens, non-stop.

Do you have any recollection of just how long a day felt when we were kids, so much in our senses?

Now, as grown-ups, listening tends to be more on the fringe of our awareness. Yes, we use our hearing to a great extent, navigating our everyday life. But when do we ever encounter frames where listening is the predominant

mode of being, and for an extended period of time? Does that happen to you? When?

The technology of framing work wonders when it comes to listening.

For some reason, in our culture, we tend to view the conceptual and mathematical ways of perceiving as concrete aspects of life, and the sounding, listening and the musical as the more abstract.

Personally, I'm a big advocate for turning this understanding around. What is more concrete than the body, the sounds around us, and the musical levels of reality? How can sound waves resonating in our bodies, and our voices resonating in other people's bodies and eardrums, even in animals and plants, be called abstract? No! It's so utterly physical. So basic, so fundamental.

Ask your dog. Or your kid. What's the matter? Sound is matter!

9. Ways of listening

Listening is, of course, not just one thing. As humans, we're constantly shifting between different ways of listening, often without even noticing it. All of us use a multitude of listenings. There are far too many to list.

Do you have a favourite way of listening?

Every profession has specialised ways of listening as well. A teacher in a primary school knows a lot about the tonalities, the rhythms and the sounding dynamics of kids. A seasoned birdwatcher knows birdsong and when and where to listen for which bird. A hunter or fisherman knows how to listen for deer or brown trout. A musician knows about pitch, tempo, rhythm and sounds of instruments and orchestras.

What kind of listenings are unique for your profession?

In the city, we tend to listen in a more focused way, listening for traffic, crowds of people, car noises, conversations. Sounds come to us, and we receive them. When we take a walk in the woods, our listening is naturally different. It spreads out, and we usually perceive the sounds as more like a landscape, a soundscape. We listen to many sounds at the same time. Or

listening might even actively reach out, a more engaged listening. Since the sounds are lower in volume, our sensitivity thrives, and we can pay attention to sounds that are tinier or further away. In this way, our listening adapts to, and even learns, from our surroundings.

During our lives, each of us has developed a highly personal and unique way of listening. No two people listen the same way.

Do you know ways of listening that are not commonly known? When do you listen in those ways? Where and how did you learn them?

Even though it's true that our listening adapts to the environments we're in, it's also true that each of us is able to voluntarily and actively model our way of listening at all times. It's actually easy. And it can even be a very creative thing to do.

Here is a short exercise to try out in the moment:

Close your eyes and recall the voice of a dear friend of yours.

Any friend will do, but make sure to pick just one.

Let the voice emerge in your inner ear in the moment.

Listen.

Notice the tone of their voice,

perhaps imagining a sentence or them singing.

Let the experience unfold.

Listen for thirty seconds or more.

Then listen for any change of mood in your body.

That's it – thank you for trying out an inner listening exercise. Changing our mode of listening is easy.

10. Sonic Meditations, a frame for ways of listening

A Sonic Meditation is an instruction in textual form that invites us to explore specified ways of listening (and perhaps sounding) for a designated period of time. They are invitations to try out familiar or new ways of listening, actively, with ourselves or with a group of people.

The form was invented by Pauline Oliveros. Due to her influence in the musical world, it has subsequently been adapted by musicians and artists alike all over the world.⁵ The form ranges from listening exercises for individuals to lengthy compositions for big orchestras. All are built on the basic concept of creative framings for listening and sounding.

Let me present a Sonic Meditation that I composed a few years back.

Listening at Kregme

Sonic Meditation for individual listener, preferably done outside

Listen for a place that attracts you.

Place yourself in the centre or in the periphery of the place.

Through the sounds surrounding you, listen for the basic feeling of the place.

When this is clear, listen for the present basic feeling in your body.

Dissolve the difference.

Continue listening until you are ready to move on.

(M. Svenstrup, Kregme, 2018)

This meditation is essentially a framing for specified ways of listening and moving. You are more than welcome to try out the meditation. After all, the whole point of this text is to support the trying out, and even the creation of, frames that make room for other modes of being and sensing.

When you are done with the meditation, I invite you to get a piece of paper and a pen, and set yet another frame for ten minutes to write down your experiences from the meditation.

Closing comments

Dear reader, I hope this text has made its point in taking framing seriously – both as a technique for personal work and technique for facilitating group work. Framings are all around us, whether we want them to be or not. Paying attention to how framings function – both outer framings and inner framings – gives us the possibility to change them intentionally, in any direction we like. Framings that invite us to bring our listening, moving, dreaming, and more, into our bodies: these are needed.

5. An impressive publication of 365 sonic meditations collected from Deep Listeners all over the world was published early this year: *One Year of Deep Listening*, edited by Stephanie Loveless.

I'm indebted to two of my great teachers, Pauline Oliveros and Arnold Mindell. Both are masters in their fields of music and psychology, and both have immensely inspired the ideas and practices in this text. Thank you!

Further Reading

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Bio

Morten Svenstrup is a musician, researcher and psychotherapist working in Copenhagen. As a Deep Listening Certificate holder, studying under Pauline Oliveros, he has conducted more than 200 listening sessions, including years of teaching at the Rhythmic Music Conservatory. As a musician and composer, he has a prolific career including 300 concerts worldwide. He holds a Master of Arts in Modern Culture from the University of Copenhagen with a thesis on time, art and society. Since 2020, he has been running a therapeutic clinic in Copenhagen, working with relationships, listening and dreams.

The Sounds of Water

by Iury Salustiano Trojaborg

I have been listening to sounds of water.

It is 28 degrees in Campo de San Francisco, the oldest park in the city of Salamanca in Spain. The sun burns my skin already at this early morning hour. I walk relatively fast along Calle de Ramón y Cajal, the street that leads to the park. I am looking for a refuge among the trees and the shadows that their big leaves produce.

Even before reaching the park's edge, I hear water flowing. I can almost touch it and feel its freshness spreading throughout my body.

The pavement of the alleys in the park is formed by many different types of stones: limestone, cobblestone, granite. I hear the gravel stones being crushed beneath my feet. The faster I walk, the louder it resounds.

The initial faint sound of water gradually becomes palpable. It blends up with the high notes of the many songbirds that inhabit this space.

In the distance, I still hear human-made noises: cars speeding, glass bottles being collected, small talks. None of this matter though.

My whole being guided by the sound of water.

It resonates from within and without, like a fountain.

In a cross-shaped encounter of passageways, I find the source of my desire.

I am not the only one drawn to it.

Several birds fly in and out of the basin, dipping themselves and fluffing their feathers in the air, after the bath in water.

It feels like a feast, a watery celebration amidst the air heat and dryness.

We are all animated by water: its sounds, its look, its wetness.

Life in its brilliance.

But soon I have to continue through the pathways, making my way out of the liquid banquet.

Water remains present flowing within me.

I have been listening to sounds of water.

Bio

Iury Salustiano Trojaborg, PhD candidate in Theatre and Performance at the Malmö Theatre Academy and at the Agenda 2030 Graduate School at Lund University. I am a Queer diasporic artist-researcher interested in raising questions concerning the interconnections of performance, decolonisation, migration, ancestry, queerness and social sustainability. I experiment with listening as a form of getting in touch with other existences and times.



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