

Cathy Lane

A MANIFESTO FOR NEW
LISTENING

or

20 thoughts about listening

Cathy Lane is a composer, sound artist and academic. Her work uses spoken word, field recordings and archive material to explore aspects of our listening relationship with each other and the multiverse. She is currently focused on how sound relates to the past, our histories, environment and our collective and individual memories from a feminist perspective. Cathy is a Professor of Sound Arts and Director of CRiSAP (Creative Research in Sound Arts Practice), University of the Arts London.

Books include *Playing with Words: The Spoken Word in Artistic Practice* (RGAP, 2008) and, with Angus Carlyle, *In the Field* (Uniformbooks, 2013), a collection of interviews with eighteen contemporary sound artists who use field recording in their work and *On Listening* (2013) a collection of commissioned essays about some of the ways in which listening is used in disciplines including anthropology, community activism, bioacoustics, conflict mediation and religious studies, music, ethnomusicology and field recording. Her CD *The Hebrides Suite* was released by Gruenrekorder in 2013.

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A Manifesto for New Listening (or 20 thought about Listening) is an ongoing work that seeks to question the politics and aesthetics of listening. In particular, it queries five specific aspects of listening as it is formulated within current sound arts practice. The first is the idea that listening is a solitary activity best done alone, removed from society (for better listening) and accompanied by technology (also for better listening). The second is that you have to be taught how to listen 'properly' by an 'expert'. The third is that listening is always a good thing – we should listen and listen well with full attention. The fourth is that listening is an equal playing field unaffected by our individual subjective positions – for example by our gender, our racial identity, our nationality or our class. The fifth

is that almost everything needs to be listened to very closely and attentively – except people (see the first).

A Manifesto for New Listening has been in development since December 2014, arising out of conversations with Hong-Kai Wang, Keiko Uenishi and Janine Jembere, then candidates for the PhD in Practice at the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna, Austria. The process started with the aim of collectively exploring feminist and activist approaches to the role of listening in relation to social and political subjects and subjectivities. "In particular ... acts and organizations of listening that are embedded in daily life, and that activate multiple responses: philosophical, psychological, phenomenological, perceptual, conceptual, political, etc."¹


Four initial questions were proposed:

1. What are our habits of hearing and listening?
2. What is the knowledge of listening that we are accustomed to?
3. What are the epistemic, ethical, political and cosmological modes of critical listening? Where do we locate these modes within our subjective discourses and experiences?
4. What could it mean to propose a 'de-colonial' mode of listening?

¹ Wang, Hong-Kai email 17.12.2014

The manifesto was then outlined over a two-day workshop with the PhD student cohort, the course team and invited guests in Vienna, in June 2015. It has subsequently been developed and refined through discussion, particularly with my CRiSAP and LCC colleagues and students as well as through practice-based and scholarly research.

A presentation of the following slides took place as part of "Sonic Waterloo,"² in July 2007.

 For an earlier account of the development of this work and place of listening in sound arts practices see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zmxlm6WOOcQ>.



Cathy Lane presenting *A Manifesto for New Listening* at *Sonic Waterloo*, July 2017.
Image by Pierre Bouvier Patron & Blanca Regina

² "Sonic Waterloo" can be found at <https://sonicwaterloo.tumblr.com>

LISTENING is OPEN
by LISTENING we OPEN ourselves
to the desire to learn and understand.

LISTENING is not an excuse
for an escape into solitude.
LISTENING is an active engagement.

If we only LISTEN to what we know
We are limiting our LISTENING and our potential
for new understandings.

We are always at the CENTRE of our LISTENING
to some extent We can choose what to LISTEN to,
but our LISTENING
is often dictated by external 'authoritarian' sources.

Not LISTENING to
"injunctions to LISTEN"
allow privilege

is constructed according

We can choose what to LISTEN to
but when we are LISTENING to one thing
we are probably not LISTENING to another.

We can never shut our ears
but it is easy not to LISTEN
..... nor LISTENING can be positive.

Not LISTENING can be an active choice
"injunctions to LISTEN perpetuate structures that
allow privilege and power to be naturalized." (Justine Lloyd)

Our world is constructed according
to which stories we LISTEN to.

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When we are sounding it is difficult to
LISTEN

LISTENING is not the same as imagining or
anticipating what someone is going to say.

People like to be LISTENED to
their sounds inhabit our bodies.

LISTENING enshrines power relationships.

LISTENING is not democratic.

The LISTENER is

"historically situated, reflective, contestable,
uncomfortable, partisan and fraught." (Les Back)

LISTENING can transcend boundaries
and architectural, institutional and national barriers.

Enforcing LISTENING on people is
an exercise of power.

Not LISTENING can also be
an exercise of power.

Technology can help us to LISTEN
it can also help us not to LISTEN

Understanding what you are LISTENING to
can be challenging but LISTENING is
necessary for understanding as well as for
most meaningful communication.

LISTENING is not enough
We need to be conscious of how
our different subjectivities affect our LISTENING.
"Our understanding and interpretation of what we hear
is totally predicated on who we are." (GWS Stadler).

LISTENING demands ethics.

Permissions can be negotiated

but not with all subjects.

Non-negotiated LISTENING is eavesdropping,

surveillance or spying.

LISTENING is "an interpretive site where racial difference is coded, produced and policed." The "sonic colour line" is a "dominant sonic protocol that attempts to contain the sound of "others" and silence alternative listening practices as aberrant and dangerous, even inhuman". (Jennifer Stoever-Ackerman).

References

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