Loom Quarterly

Listening

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practice for cultural transformation

2026 Q3

Listening

LISTENING AS A TRANSFORMATIVE ACT

In our mediatised world a lot is being said, but there seems to be little room for listening to others. While echo chambers and algorithmic amplification feed political polarisation, today's privatised and 'smooth' cities seem to lack space for collective negotiation of differences too. These tendencies affect how we may understand and orient ourselves in the world, and in relation to others. Listening to our surroundings may occur as something that happens without noticing. But listening out for others and with attention in times of political and environmental collapse, can be a transformative act that requires patience and persistence.

UBIQUITOUS AUDITORY CULTURE

Conflict and confrontation are inherently part of the dynamics in democratic and pluralist societies, but in today's privatised spaces and filter bubbles we see an increasing lack of space, time and capacity for listening. We also witness a ubiquitous auditory culture that separates ourselves from our sonic surroundings through noise-cancelling devices, which enable big tech companies to eavesdrop on us. How can we reclaim the capacity and the agency to listen for ourselves, and with others? To decide what we consider to be 'noise' or not, what we wish to attend to and look and listen after, on a planet full of life that struggles to be heard and live together.

Anthropologist Anna Tsing writes that it is in listening to the cacophony of troubled stories that we might encounter our best hopes for precarious survival. But finding and holding spaces for attuning to different and quieter voices in cacophonous times is not an easy task. Poet and writer Anne Carson, for instance, writes about the gendering of voice through Western culture, and how female sound throughout time has been suppressed. In this context, writer and theorist Sara Ahmed suggests ways of becoming a 'feminist ear'. Listening with feminist ears is about becoming receptive to voices that surround us, especially to voices that defy certain norms, that are more quiet, or even silenced.

INSPIRING APPROACHES

We can take inspiration from composer Pauline Oliveros, who practiced and taught what she called 'deep listening', as an invitation to listen in every possible way, to everything possible to hear, no matter what you are doing. Deep listening offered her a way to connect to all that there is. It includes active listening to the sounds of daily life, of nature, but also to one's own thoughts, and to music. What is heard is changed by listening to it, while it changes the listener too. She called this the 'listening effect'. Often we can only hear something in our own stories when we listen to the stories of others. Listening can nurture experiences of recognition and of being heard. By listening carefully, we may notice our interdependencies. Not only with other people, but with other elements and beings too.

Looking at fields such as sound studies and the arts, listening emerges not as a passive act of hearing but as an ethical, relational, and exploratory practice. Composer Annea Lockwood for instance emphasises the porous relationship between listener and sound, which resonates with composer and sound ecologist Hildegard Westerkamp's approach to listening as a way of sensing environmental conditions, and artist and researcher Salomé Voegelin's notion of developing a 'sonic sensibility'. Artist and researcher Lawrence Abu Hamdan further adds a political dimension, stressing how contemporary technologies shape what is heard, ignored, and surveilled. While artist and writer Brandon LaBelle expands listening into a multisensory practice of care and attention, and as a form of poetic imagination and communion.

HOW WE PRACTICE LISTENING

With Loom, we are interested in finding different ways of coming together in today's online and offline spheres. Our work often involves and engages with practices of listening, as we feel it offers a fundamental capacity to position, reorient, and reposition ourselves, as part of the many social fabrics we inhabit, but also as part of an entangled web of life including other species. Some of our methodologies and formats include sound walks, podcasts, and sonic installations, and we often use listening exercises to ground ourselves in a particular situation or social and spatial context. Instead of listening out for something particular to gain knowledge about, we can approach listening as a more sensorial way of knowing, which is something we can practice every day.

Beyond visual representations such as maps, we for instance create audio essays and audio routes that offer the possibility to experience different localities and temporalities simultaneously, and reflect on how we may relate to changing environments. Within such soundscapes or audio collages, urban and rural sounds, natural or man-made sounds, land and water sounds, overlap, blur, and coexist, and make us receptive to their entanglements. Perhaps it is only when we understand, or rather feel with our bodies, that people and other species share similar struggles and needs, and that we are highly interdependent, that we can start thinking and acting otherwise.

We often work with artists and musicians too, for instance for our audio essays, as music can move us into different directions: when listening to music, we become part of it, as our bodies respond to the frequencies and vibrations that move us and convey feeling.

But listening also involves creating the conditions for others being heard. With Loom, we are interested in creating alternative scenographies and auditory configurations, where we consider how to include or amplify voices that are less heard or recognised. We are committed to conductive practices, and to making connections while holding differences. For instance in carefully moderated gatherings, or public walks that allow for more intimate forms of exchange. By working with designers to develop spatial settings for speaking, listening and recording. Or in our publications, where we give credit to the voices that continue to inspire us.

BEYOND THE AUDIBLE

Hearing things may seem to require no effort, but attuning yourself to your environment and actively noticing the many rhythms that surround you is an active practice. Listening encourages you to fundamentally reconsider how we may live collectively. On any given day, you can decide to turn off your noise-cancelling headphones, and lend someone an ear. You may participate in a quiet sound walk or loud protest. You may direct your attention inward, to memories inhabiting your body, to voices that are no longer with us. You can begin to listen, to something specifically, or to everything and everyone at once, including yourself. You are not alone here. You can listen together with others. To things not yet articulated, but that may already be humming in lower frequencies.

We invite you to join us in recalibrating our relations with our surroundings. And to reach out to us to practice new ways of listening together.

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FURTHER READING AND LISTENING

Quantum Listening by Pauline Oliveros (Silver Press, 2024) — In response to the anti-war movements of the 1960s, pioneering musician and composer Pauline Oliveros began to expand the way she made music, experimenting with meditation, movement and activism in her compositions. She was fascinated by the role that sound and consciousness play in our daily lives, and developed a series of Sonic Meditations that would eventually lead to the creation of Deep Listening.

The Mushroom at the End of the World. On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins by Anna Tsing (Princeton University Press, 2015) — Despite the trouble today's world is facing, there is still the company of humans and other species, says anthropologist Anna Tsing. In *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, she writes that it is in "listening to the cacophony of troubled stories that we might encounter our best hopes for precarious survival."

Poetics of Listening. Inner Life, Social Transformation Planetary Practices by Brandon LaBelle (Bloomsbury Academic, 2025) — Artist and writer Brandon LaBelle emphasises listening as distinct from hearing and the experience of sound. While it is clearly connected, it is also profoundly unique, he says. "Listening, instead, names a much broader form or quality of attention, one that compiles all the senses together, enhancing a receptivity, feeling, care as well as reflection, knowing, intuiting. Listening is a way of attending to things, a way of caring, that extends far outside the sense of hearing."

The Political Possibility of Sound: Fragments of Listening by Salomé Voegelin (Bloomsbury Academic, 2019) — Instead of listening out for something particular, we can approach it as a more exploratory capacity that we can practice every day. Salomé Voegelin writes about listening as a physical and continuous effort to understand momentarily and always again how to live in the between-of-things. To engage through doubt in a temporary and sensorial knowing. She writes about this as a 'sonic sensibility'.

Listening by Miriam Rasch (Columbia University Press, 2026) — *Listening* offers a philosophical and personal exploration of the ethics of listening, understanding it not as a passive act but as a relationship between the self and the world. This relationship is always mediated—by technologies such as algorithms and social media, by techniques like dialogue and attention, and by our bodies and surroundings.

Earshot.ngo — Earshot is the world's first non-profit organisation using sound in the defense of human and environmental rights, led by Lawrence Abu Hamdan. Their sonic investigations support communities affected by corporate, state, and environmental injustice. Through research and advocacy they transform sound into a tool of justice: from the sharp crack of gunfire to the oppressive hum of drones, their investigations treat sound as an acoustic trace of violence and a means of control.

Leaky Turns: Stories from Amsterdam's Waterlands by Loom – practice for cultural transformation, (podcast, 2025) — An audio tour by Loom, in collaboration with the research group Art & Spatial Praxis (Gerrit Rietveld Academie). Seven practitioners welcome listeners to a water-related place in Amsterdam, and explain what it tells us about water when we listen, look, and think carefully. Each interview is preceded by a listening exercise. Listen via www.research.rietveldsandberg.nl/en

COLOPHON

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Making audio recordings at the Hambach Tagebau brown coal mine during the Rhine River Rehearsal journey between 1–5 September 2024. The recordings became an audio collage as part of the Rhine River Rehearsal cahier, published by Loom in 2025. (Photo: Loom)

The Time Troublers installation invites one to rethink our understanding of time and consider alternative temporalities in these troubling times, by listening to a soundscape by Loom and with the narrated text ‘Temporal Confusion’ by Jibbe Willems. Commissioned by the Urban Futures Studio and presented during the Pathways to Sustainability conference at Tivoli, Utrecht, 4 April 2023. Installation design by Marloes & Wikke. (Photo by Wikke van Houwelingen).

During the Plekberaad Oud Herlaer (Site Council Oud Herlaer), an initiative of Loom in collaboration with a.o. the Ministry of the Future, artist collective De Onkruidenier took participants on a field trip and performed rituals to strengthen the connection between humans and the landscape. One ritual consisted of listening to the underground and the air, using your finger tips. (Photo: Maarten Nauw)