

## *Dialogues on Listening*

### *I do not propose an ideal listener*

Donna McCormack

Contra Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, I do not propose an ideal listener who is an enabler of testimony, full of knowledge, in control and confident in his task. Listening is a much more tentative process and involves those who are uncertain of where this sharing may lead. It is intimate, life-changing and involves an unforeseeable visceral, psychic and epistemological impact. The transformation in self and other and other others is powerful, unprepared for and does not promise a brighter future. Instead, all those gathered listen, share, exchange, get things wrong, try again and importantly keep on listening, talking and seeking out innovative forms of communication. It is all a bit queer in that the paths taken may diverge from the norm, while being haunted by what others have previously done. Witnessing is the intersubjective relationality through which the indefinite process of narrating unspoken or unknown histories begins. [...]

I would add that the speech act of bearing witness to bodies that remember is the moment where existing modes of belonging are reimagined. These bodies disrupt the existing frames of reference with their stories, and when these stories are heard they reverberate and transform lives in irrevocable and often painful ways. Sharing these histories is to take responsibility and to enter into relations that can potentially transform what it means to belong and what it means to inhabit a body that is different and that is often viewed as out of place. Telling these stories is to live with this sensed state of vulnerability, the very sense of ethical being with others. [...] The risk is that as one listens to an other one may become undone; this uncertainty and disorientation can be and is frightening, but it is also the space where one can begin to experience something other than violent belonging and where one can begin to take responsibility for previously unknown histories of violence. This precarious coming together takes place through the attempt to listen to what remains unsaid, especially by touching, smelling and listening to the body that communicates through all its senses. Bodies speak and, in so doing, a multisensory form of communication is brought into being so as to bear witness to subjectivity itself, to the very relationality of being with others, and to previously unspeakable histories.

(from **Queer Postcolonial Narratives and the Ethics of Witnessing**)

### *the salvation of listening*

Hanne De Jaegher

At the till, I hear my partner say to the cashier: "It's busy today!" It takes a moment, but then he surfaces out of the automatism of scanning groceries. His face lights up and he says: "Yes, it is!" and smiles a little smile. The interaction between us has opened up a smidgen. This is no longer such a generalised transaction.

Another example. Listening can also turn out to be: to yourself, even in conversation with others. Over days now, I've been exchanging phone calls and chat messages with my sister. She and her husband have offered to take my two small children home with them for a couple of days next week, to give me a little rest, and because they'd all enjoy it. They live a two-hour drive away. I've been worried, the kids excited. I've asked her several times: will this not be too much for them? Are they sure? Then, finally, this morning, I was able to admit to myself that I'm just scared to death to be without my babies for three days.

— — —

Listening wants an opening from us. Engaged, active listening asks us to open ourselves to what we hear. But, unavoidably, we also have terms of admission set up.

What listening has to do with admitting is this. To admit means to allow something or someone in, whether it's a feeling, a thought, or a punter—into oneself, one's group, one's place. Buying a ticket to the concert, we make sure we will be allowed in on the day. Admitting comes from the Latin *ad* (to) + *mittere* (to send). To admit, then, is to send out for what comes back—the thing to be acknowledged or let in (regret, or a concert goer). To admit requires a precise opening (along the terms of admission). It means to determine, to some extent, what will be let in. Ideally, we admit what is appropriate, what fits. (We aim for that, it might not always work.)

I find listening particularly sensuous, and particularly dangerous.

Listening takes us back and forth between what we can, will—or not—hear and ourselves. Listening can take us on a journey, can make us wonder and wander, here, there, and back, and again, outwards, inwards. Listening sweeps up: us and what we hear and what happens in-between. That this is full of tension, is precisely what moves us.

In listening, there is an expectation of what we are going to hear. This involves us. An expectation will be met, or not. *We realize this could change me.* What of this will I admit, will I take in, will I let happen? How and how much will I—and what I'm hearing—change?

What say do we have over this? And how, after that, do we go on?

And yet, herein also lies the salvation of listening. Engaging in listening gives us opportunity to evolve, if we let it.

*I wonder*

Jill Halstead

*My hands evoke sight and sound out of feeling,  
Intershifting the senses endlessly;  
Linking motion with sight, odour with sound*

*Helen Keller (from A Chant of Darkness)*

Channeling Helen Keller I wonder about the relationship between listening and sound. Often, I trace the questions I have about this relationship back to my long institutional training in music. I wonder how that training shaped what I can hear and what I can't, what questions seem to have stuck with me and to me.

Through my impressionable teenage years, I did a lot of what was called "ear training". Mr Honor said I hated it because I wasn't very good at it. He was right because I was never quite sure where my listening ears were, because the sound felt like it was in my eyes and in my fingers. Training the ear was a rigorously motionless discipline, enacted through long periods of sitting still at a desk, often with eyes closed, pen in hand translating sound into signs. It seemed a schooling to mold ideal listeners, the ideal way to listen to an ideal music. Feeling less than ideal in one class I said I couldn't hear unless I moved with and to the music. They told me to get a hearing test or join a dance class – perhaps both.

Penny, on the other hand, seemed to be an ideal listener. She had perfect pitch and pink hair, the tutors said it was a gift (the pitch, rather than the hair). Penny said it wasn't a gift because sometimes all she could hear were the notes screaming their names at her, things often existed in a state of out-of-tuneness in relation to her inner perfect pitch. It was a gift that she didn't ask for and couldn't return. Penny cried about it once after a rehearsal. Someone said that Penny crying about her perfect pitch was attention seeking, and she should be happy that she always scored 100% on the ear training tests and was allowed to skip every class.

***I am not a good listener***  
**Anna Helle-Valle**

I am constantly working on finding a balance between listening to myself and listening to others. When I listen to myself it is like bending over the edge of a deep well, left ear first, trying to distinguish reverberations and echos and murmurs and dripping and silence. When I listen to another person, one at a time, I lock eyes with this other person, or I look at their eyes as they shift their gaze around the room or inwards. When I listen to someone I like to be unwavering, with my ears like oars on each side of my head. I make my body heavy and blurry. If I am really thirsty, hungry or need to go to the toilet, I am not a good listener.

It is hard to listen to someone through the medium of text.

***my unintentional listening attitude***  
**Monika Smetana**

To me and my work, listening means a very active process of "hearken" or "harkening" (what is "*Lauschen*" or "*Horchen*" in German language and means a very careful and attentive quality of listening). This requires a stance of awareness and sensitivity of my mind, body, thoughts and feelings. In my work with adolescents, the interpersonal space for communication, the scope for playing, relationship and encounter often seem to be empty and fragile, especially at the beginning of a therapeutic process, when every nearness causes fear and emotions have to be protected and strictly controlled. By means of listening into the silence, I am able to allow and endure this time of not-knowing or, to say it in Bion's terms: this state of "negative capability". Through my unintentional listening attitude it may be possible to create an atmosphere in which the adolescents dare and trust themselves to perceive and express their own impulses, wishes and needs.

Listening sometimes also means to recognize when I am not able to listen – probably then it's time to stop, to make pauses, to set borders or find retreat. Listening means being mindful of the moment, being aware of the present and being ready for the "not yet audible" which may reveal in silence.

**the 360 degree listening sphere**  
**Struan Leslie**

The application of listening for me is about much more than sound and hearing. I use the idea of listening as a metaphor to connect to the tangible as well as the abstract in the environment. In the same way as we might list ether as a sixth element or time as the fourth dimension, so listening extends our thinking beyond the 5 senses and broadens the idea of hearing. We might talk about it as 'awareness' as in the in the work of fifth-century Indian Philosopher Bhartrhari, where listening

embraces the sensory, perceptual and linguistic. To this I would add the kinetic both of the self and beyond.

Listening begins with the self. In the context of my work "The 360degree Body", listening extends out through the kinesphere into the spatial context thereby defining itself as interpersonal, transpersonal and moving through layers or grades of proxemics. As this happens the listening, the sensing, encompasses more and more of that environment. From your own somatic markers in relation to your body (tempo, rhythm, etc.,) these then begin to encompass those which are more acutely adjacent to your body, perhaps on the outside of your exterior. From here then listening increasingly further outwards and that resonating and sounding inwards. And so the 360 degree listening sphere of the body develops as it grows and extends.

We have of course come to non-consciously own this listening knowledge as a result of our lived experience. The point is to be present with that knowledge in order to be able to apply and holistically utilise it as one of many tools in a practice. In order to do this, the development of this exteroception, sensitivity to stimuli originating outside the body, has to be explicit. Yes, we all have a 360degree body and yes, we live, work and facilitate with that. However, having an explicit embodiment of that knowledge means that one can apply it in the context of the work being undertaken, noticing the elements that are useful in the practice of dance, acting or painting or creating urban spaces. So 'listening' leads to 'hearing' with greater specificity and can enable an accurate projection of that which is to be heard in the listening.

My practice as a transdisciplinary artist and teacher, draws on my experience in all areas of genre in performance and theories of kinetic cognition and pedagogy and aims to make this nonconscious explicit at every juncture bringing it into the conscious.

*listening to my own sounds*  
Karin Mössler

When working as a music therapist listening for me means to be present, using all my senses to perceive what is expressed.

For me, moving into a state of being, allowing me to be in the presence of the actual (music therapy) situation is one conscious move towards careful listening. It is a process of preparation, a process of attuning my body to whatever might come. This attunement can be facilitated by listening to my own sounds in music or in silence as well as listening to my own thoughts that are allowed just to move without thinking them.

*listening for the space inside*  
Line Horneland

*what would it take  
to be filled with light  
split  
divide  
in the middle  
open and become  
nothing*

*everything*  
*what would it take for my scream to become*  
*one*  
*with the silence*

how can quietude be found through sound? How can the sounding voice be both familiar, neutral enough and open up to something both known and forgotten in the human mind/body/bodymind... how can vocalsapes provide *sound* frameworks for the listener's material to reconcile?

...listening my way into soundscapes that in turn seek to provide a vertical listening situation for the listener...

...seeking the in-between, well aware nothing is there. But rather than *something*, what could be found by exploring *nothing*, to strip away rather than to add? can listening situations be created, that enhance openness, a kind of welcoming neutrality, and the possibility to become aware of self rather than a piece of art in *itself*. ...paradoxical activity, but could there be material to explore in-between both-and, *and* neither-nor?

...a kind of search for depth in the sound that makes it possible to stay detached for a long time while listening, to dwell in the soundscape as a situation...to create anew while listening...

Is my listening guiding my sounding rather than my sounding feeding my listening? Listening as a kind of awareness.....listening for the space inside of the body, what is there that wants to be he(a)rd? – what is there, how am I sounding?

***listening as valuing***  
Maren Metell

Within the music café project - a weekly social and musical space for families with disabled children aged between 0 and 3 - listening has been about giving attention to all kind of expressions from all people involved. The aim is to make everyone heard. This involves acknowledging that there have been expressions that nobody listened to and other expressions or stories that were uncomfortable to listen to.

Listening has not been limited to the auditory sense, especially as a few of the children communicate through body expressions. I think of listening as valuing and appreciating people's presence and expression.

***a space we create by listening***  
Sveinung Sundfør Sivertsen and Ragnhild Nabben

The future creating workshop has three phases. The first phase is dedicated to criticising everything that is wrong about the situation as it is today. Everyone is allowed to say whatever they want so long as it is purely negative. However, no one is permitted to criticise the criticisms of other. Everyone listens, and all are listened to.

The purely negative phase is followed by a thoroughly utopian one. Having a clear picture of just how crap things are, we are free to imagine how wonderful they could be. The same rules apply: Everyone gets to imagine whatever they want, and no one is permitted to criticise the utopian ideas of others.

Having thus a clear picture of what's wrong with the situation today, and pictures of what it could, ideally, be like, the last phase of the workshop asks a simple question: What steps can we, the participants, take to bring reality closer to the dream?

And so, the work of creating the future we want can begin. It begins by giving each other space to express both our negativity and our creativity; a space we create by listening.

***what else is possible***  
**Wolfgang Schmid**

Listening to  
sound and silence  
in music therapy.  
A listening in doing and a doing in listening.  
A listening through,  
beyond the actual musicking to  
what else is possible

***I am completely focused***  
**Katja Gottschewski**

To me, listening as a music therapist means that I use my musical training and experience to observe the musical qualities of the sounds a client is making (whether they are intentionally making music or not). In a less strict sense of the word "listen", I would say that this can include observing the musical qualities of other forms of expression, e.g. rhythmical movements. Listening as a music therapist also means that I am completely focused on what is happening and refrain from immediate interpretations or judgement.

**Dialogues on Doing and Undoing Disciplines**

***to create multiple truths***  
**Xueli Tan**

*Interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary* – these terms floated around my sense of “being with others” when I was working in various medical hospitals across the United States for the last 20 years. In 2014, I began using the word “*interactionality*.” Although one might argue that it is not a real word, I find “*interactionality*” to be highly suited for what I pull together in my research work. I first thought of the word “*intersectionality*” – but it somehow does not fully convey fluidity and dynamic interactions and interdependence, as “*intersectionality*” seems to suggest linear relationships that intersect at specific points at a given time, i.e., linearity coming together into axes. My curiosities in music preferences, music characteristics, music therapy, pain perception and management, health outcomes, personalities, behavioral coping styles, social justice, equity, gender, cultural humility and responsiveness, decolonization, numbers (statistics), pictures (photos), power, privilege and oppression, and storytelling come together in messy bits – in my mind, they are all at once having uncharted boundaries yet overlapping nuances that relate, interact, and synergize to create multiple truths.

*we are no polymath*  
*Karsten Specht*

I've been working in interdisciplinary teams throughout my whole career. In a way, it reflects the complexity of the brain since, as we dig deeper into the complexity of the brain and the human mind, we need different academic disciplines for getting an idea of what is going on – and we are still scratching at the surface. Interdisciplinarity also acknowledges that we are no polymath. Working in interdisciplinary teams means that we have to accept and respect the competence and academic opinion of the other disciplines and that we have to work collaboratively for the same goal. This is a fruitful process since the same problem is often seen from different perspectives and different prior knowledge, expectations, and hypotheses. Potential issues for one team member might be an easy task for another. The different viewpoints may help to disentangle hidden pattern in the data. It is also stimulating to dig into other disciplines, and to learn new perspectives and concepts. However, one big challenge in all interdisciplinary work is to find a common system of terms and concepts. The same term or the same concept might mean different things in different disciplines or are used in a different context. This can (and typically does) easily become a source of substantial misunderstanding. So, one of the first steps in an interdisciplinary team is to clarify what is the common ground, what are the terms and concepts that will be used in the project, and whether they mean the same. Consequently, it requires for all team members a kind of flexibility to „rethink“ and „translate“ their concept and terms, such that everyone can follow.

*My words. Their words*  
*Simon Gilbertson*

My work. My life. My words. Their words. My motility. Our motility. My thoughts. Our discourse. The disciplining. The interloping. The claiming. The releasing. The orientation. The navigation. The un/interdisciplining. The unending fragmentary assaults upon multiplicity's inseparability.

The words, such as interdisciplinary and interdisciplinarity, that I use to consider my work are filter-inherited and most seldomly me-created. My working words, my work in the silent and audible improvisation of cohabitating in the aftermath of injury and trauma asks who can, and is willing to scurry forwards one microanalysis in nano-timing. The scurry towards and around a phenomena is per definition phenomenising. Thus a collective scurry in company with human and non-human heightens the depths of known fragmentation and phenomenological quantum-adhesion. In my usage, interdisciplinarity is a technology of the ethics of ecological self-awareness. It is a technology of ante-fragmentation, an offering and call to collectively return to that which exists before. It is a call to care.