

UNTRAINING THE EAR: LISTENING SESSIONS

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CONCEPT

Being exposed to multiverse sounds that reach our ears on a daily basis, it has become challenging to discern between the two discrete functions of the ear: the state of hearing and the state of listening.

Hearing represents the primary sense organ – hearing happens involuntarily. Listening is a voluntary process that through training and experience produces culture.

Pauline Oliveros, *Deep Listening*, 2005

With UNTRAINING THE EAR: LISTENING SESSIONS we propose exercises to decipher sound beyond its contextual affiliation of geography, genre, and valences of identity. It is an attempt to press II [pause] to the daily storm of sonic vibrations, and voice a call to examine and explore the auditory beyond the hearing and start to LISTEN.

Our exposure to new sounds, noises and auditory cues designed to attract our attention increased dramatically with the onset of the industrial revolution. However, in the proud spirit of progress and innovation, we surrounded ourselves with a stream of sounds that continue to proliferate our soundscapes: a cacophony of rumbling traffic, ever-buzzing electrical grids, (dis)functional sounds, electronics and more.

This observation extends to music that surrounds us: the pumping bass of passing cars, chatter, prattle, babble of news, looping background music from shops and cafés, hissing beats that emerge from nearby headphones on our daily commute.

All these sounds coalesce into a mundane symphony that our ears normalize and ignore, but nevertheless, they sneak into our subconscious.

Ears, being sensitive organs, are constantly exposed to the never-ending pressure of sound waves banging against its drums. The ear is unlike the eye which “can be closed at will; the ear is always open,” as underscored by Murray Schafer.¹

Additionally, the resonant body is a sensitive listening organ and an extension of the sensitive listening ear. The body too listens through vibration, intensity of

frequencies and contact with other bodies. Alexander G. Weheliye uses Ralph Ellison’s novel *Invisible Man* as an analogy of extended listening through the body and the longing of the “Invisible Man” who is seeking an enhanced listening process through “his flesh as an eardrum”² while “wanting to embody and be embodied by sound”.

Moreover, the perception of all sounds has been permanently and helplessly conditioned by the global aesthetics of the ways we hear and listen, we listen through the “sonic protocol”³ of a conditioned ear and body. Also, the technology to produce, record, distribute, edit, and broadcast sound, has become a very powerful tool that can easily be used to monopolize and alter our ability to listen.

UNTRAINING THE EAR: LISTENING SESSIONS become an attempt to bring a pause to this storm of frequencies and vibrations to explore what we are willing to listen to. We wonder, are we ready to expand our hearing and challenge prejudices, geographies, canons, sensationalism, discrimination, exoticism, and other expectations?

It is a herald, for change is inscribed in noise faster than it transforms society... Listening to music is listening to all noise, realizing that its appropriation and control is a reflection of power, that is essentially political.

Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, 1985

UNTRAINING THE EAR: LISTENING SESSIONS is a series of encounters, each involving a curated auditory experience at SAVVY Contemporary which suggests a voyage into a specific mode of listening proposed by an artist. Artists will be invited to take part of SAVVY’s sonic exploration and understanding of sound based exercise-performance and an allegorical conversation appertaining to the theme of choice. Collectively, in order to understand, to question and possibly contextualize how we listen to the world today we (the space, the performers, the moderators and the audience) will sonically and rhetorically navigate through the proposed theme(s) to hear beyond our ears.

¹ *Ear Cleaning: Notes for an Experimental Music Course*, R. Murray Schafer, 1967
² *Phonographies*, Alexander G. Weheliye, 1999

³ Term coined by Jennifer Stoever-Ackerman

Each session will be a conscious inquiry into the process of listening, an inquiry into how our listening is shaped, constructed or altered through filters of society, politics, economics, cultures and narratives. The sessions become a collective exercise in which, through a discussion and a performance, we ask the artists, moderators, listeners, and ourselves – as an art space – to (un)train and (re)train, (de)construct and (re)construct the process of normative hearing and give space for non-normative listening.

The unfolding process of the series will allow us to navigate through, explore within – and reflect on various topics. We will touch upon the re-representation of the marginalized and suppressed sounds, voices and noises. We will champion *her* and *their* stories by amplifying nonlinear and non-binary sounds and noises. We will question and challenge the power and politics of sound technologies, production aesthetics and the precepts/ presets within the global narratives. The sessions will allow us to re-represent and re-position musics from the world.

With UNTRAINING THE EAR: LISTENING SESSIONS we lend Kodwo Eshun observation⁴ of hip hop's fascination with horror films and the effects of the detachment of sound from its source and extrapolate this case through other sound causalities: "You start to attribute invisible causes to those invisible sounds, you start to attribute sounds not to effects and not to instruments but to invisible demons, to inanimate objects, to inanimate machines."

The proposed format arises as a fundamental inquiry into modes and possibilities of listening. We feel an urgency to reconsider and rephrase post-colonial discourses as well as explore the relations with new hybrid-contemporary sound identities and the polycultural times. Consequently, an inclusive future where mutual respect, learning and admiration which drives the world forward, is not a utopian claim.

In the attempt to untrain the ear, we suggest an alternative way to listen to music, sound and noise through the introduction of this regular program of the UNTRAINING THE EAR: LISTENING SESSIONS. SAVVY Contemporary becomes a live listening station, an exploratory sonorous exhibition and invites audiences to an inquiry into sound cultures.

4 Abstract Culture, Swarm 3, Issue 12, Abducted by Audio, Kodwo Eshun, 1997

LISTENING SESSIONS 2017–2018

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