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## “Dissolving your Ear Plugs”

### The Unheard in Pauline Oliveros' Deep Listening Practice

Feminist experimental musician and composer, electronic music pioneer, accordion player, performer, and educator, Pauline Oliveros (1932–2016) was certainly a multifaceted artist. Yet a consistent and singular conception of listening spans her entire body of work, and this article proposes to revisit its significance by engaging with psychoanalytic theory and practice. There is a story Oliveros enjoyed telling, something of an origin myth at the root of her practice. As a gift for her twenty-first birthday, she received a tape recorder, which she decided to place on the window sill of her San Francisco apartment to record her sonic environment. Listening to the recording for the first time, she was "surprised to find sounds on the tape that [she] had not heard consciously."<sup>1</sup> This awareness that we never hear the same thing twice would become the main focus of her work: she decided to make listening a daily practice and imposed the following rule on herself: "listen to everything all the time and remind yourself when you are not listening."<sup>2</sup> This rule was going to form the basis of what she would later call Deep Listening.

This anecdote illustrates her intuition that inherent in the act of listening, there is always something that cannot be heard. It is not a question of keeping this "unheard" at bay, nor attempting to hear it. It is always *already there*; it is what listening *is*. In other words, for Pauline Oliveros, "deeply" listening to sounds means being attuned to — being physically and subjectively in touch with — the *as-yet-unheard*. Listening is never all-powerful; it consists of a continually reiterated lack.

In Oliveros' approach, listening — understood as a space formed by the unheard — has a purpose: that of a possible psychological transformation. "Deep listening is active," she writes, "what is heard is changed by listening and it, in turn, changes the listener. I call how we process what we hear the 'listening effect'.<sup>3</sup> For the composer, paying attention to unheard sounds therefore has an effect on the sub-

ject. It naturally follows that the unheard is not merely tied to the limits of perception (what the ear is unable to hear), but far more so to subjective limitations (what the individual refuses to hear). This taking into consideration of the subjective dimension of listening invites comparison with psychoanalytic technique and its approach to listening, whose aim is also a psychic shift. As far as we know, Oliveros herself never explicitly made a reference to psychoanalysis in her writings, even though she sometimes collaborated with psychologists as part of certain collective and interdisciplinary projects.<sup>4</sup> The connection we propose here is obviously not an attempt to establish a term-by-term comparison between Oliveros' work and psychoanalysis, but to create a dialogue likely to shed light on the processes at work in these two practices; and also to deepen our understanding of how complex listening really is. How does the conception of listening articulated by Oliveros question and/or resonate with the psychoanalytic approach to listening? Can psychoanalytic technique and practice help us make sense of this unheard explored by Oliveros? And conversely, can Deep Listening lead to a different understanding of listening as practiced in psychoanalysis?

The parallel between the listening approaches deployed in Oliveros' work and psychoanalysis are not as obvious as one might initially think. In psychoanalysis, unlike in Oliveros' practice, psychic transformation happens to the person speaking and not the one listening. Psychoanalytic therapy is above all healing through speech: the analysand speaks freely (engaging in free association) to his or her analyst, who listens with a level of attention Freud qualifies as "evenly-suspended". Moreover, where Oliveros' listening relates to sounds, all kinds of sounds, psychoanalytic therapy deals with, at least at first glance, language, speech, sounds that are already organized. Without denying these differences, the confrontation

between Deep Listening and listening as part of psychoanalysis will enable us to take a different look at each of these practices. In the first section, we will focus on the framework Oliveros creates in her *Sonic Meditations* in an attempt to make sense of this as-yet-unheard which seems to define her conception of listening. The second section will deal with the nature of sounds in Oliveros' work and in psychoanalytic practice, an issue which will lead us to bring this as-yet-unheard back to the body, a body made up of affects, but inseparable from language.

### Listening Towards the Unheard

Pauline Oliveros coined the term "Deep Listening" in 1988 after a collective music improvisation session in an underground water tank in Port Townsend, Washington. In response to the literal depth of the improvisation space, she writes:

"Deep Listening involves going below the surface of what is heard, expanding to the whole field of sound while finding focus. This is the way to connect with the acoustic environment, all that inhabits it, and all that there is."<sup>5</sup>

In this case, then, Deep Listening is an invitation to try and hear beyond what is immediately perceived, a continuous process that applies to all of the relationships generated by the situation: relationship to music, to the physical space of the tank, to oneself, to the other musicians, etc. It implies an acute awareness of the fact that there is always more to hear, that the unheard is an inherent part of listening.

Even if the term does not appear in Oliveros' writings until 1988, the practice of Deep Listening had been part of every aspect of her work from the very beginning. First, in a general way, improvisation, which had been central to her practice since her first electronic music compositions, implies a permanent attention to the musical matter in a state of becoming, and the establishment of a performative relationship to sound. More specifically, in the late 1950s, Oliveros developed an interest in "timbral shapes and changes, the complementary opposite of chordal or harmonic changes", which is expressed in her electronic music, like in her pieces for accordion, consist-

ing of slow improvisations around notes held for long periods of time ("long sustained tones").<sup>6</sup> In Oliveros' words, these improvisations allow us to hear "the beauty of the subtle shifts in timbre and the ambiguity of an apparently static phenomenon."<sup>7</sup> There again, the artist invites the listener to listen more "deeply," that is, to grasp the infinite transformations in the sonic texture beyond the codified system of classical harmony.

In the early 1970s, at the University of California San Diego (UCSD), Pauline Oliveros created the Women's Ensemble, a collective of women musicians originally dedicated to improvisation, both vocal and instrumental, focused on timbral variations.<sup>8</sup> "After a long period of working together," Oliveros describes, "a profound change occurred: we began to allow changes to occur involuntarily, or without conscious effort, while sustaining a sound voluntarily."<sup>9</sup> Within the group, this awareness marked the passage from *producing* to *listening* to the ever more subtle transformations in sonic matter. After that, the Women's Ensemble devoted itself to the exploration of listening processes through the regular practice of *Sonic Meditations*.

The *Sonic Meditations* take the form of textual scores whose ambition is no longer to guide how the music is performed, but to offer "attentional strategies," ways for the participants to listen to their surroundings, themselves, and others.<sup>10</sup> These scores as collected in a publication Oliveros made in 1974 were born out of a collective process.<sup>11</sup> During the weekly sessions that took place in her house in Leucadia, California, Oliveros would invite members of the Women's Ensemble to improvise according to her suggestions; these improvisations and the resulting discussions informed the definitive writing down of the scores, which could then be performed by anyone, whether they were musicians or not. The *Meditations*, Oliveros specifies, are "intended for group work over a long period of time with regular meetings."<sup>12</sup>

For example, what follows is the first *Sonic Meditation*, called *Teach Yourself to Fly*:

"Any number of persons sit in a circle facing the center. Illuminate the space with dim blue light. Begin by simply observing your own breathing.

Always be an observer. Gradually allow your breathing to become audible. Then gradually introduce your voice. Allow your vocal cords to vibrate in any mode which occurs naturally. Allow the intensity to increase very slowly. Continue as long as possible naturally, and until all others are quiet, always observing your own breath cycle.

Variation: Translate voice to an instrument."

*Teach Yourself to Fly* allows us to bring to light some of the defining features of the *Meditations* as a whole. The circular layout is a symbol of unity and equality between the performers. Participants are invited to pay attention to different kinds of sounds (inner and outer, personal and collective, continuous and intermittent, etc.) by mobilizing various modes of listening. Indeed, the gradual introduction of the voice invites the performers to listen to the sounds produced collectively at the same time as they remain concentrated on their breathing. Like in many of the *Sonic Meditations*, this one allows participants to practice synchronizing a mode of focused attention and wider awareness related to the subject's state of receptiveness. Finally, in *On Sonic Meditation*, a text she published in 1973, Oliveros emphasizes her interest in "the musical as well as social and psychological results" of this *Meditation*.<sup>13</sup> She draws attention to the fact that the musical texture they produce "resembles ocean waves" but also to "the resulting awareness of [her] body in a relaxed mode, the fresh receptivity to external sound and the discovery of unused vocal or instrumental range and qualities."<sup>14</sup>

With her *Sonic Meditations*, Oliveros positions the practice of Deep Listening within a collective framework. It is impossible for us here to tackle Oliveros' entire body of work (for example her orchestra pieces, though they do involve collective listening processes). However, it seems important to note that starting in the 1970s, she kept creating contexts for engaging in Deep Listening in group settings on a regular basis. In 1985, she founded the Pauline Oliveros Foundation (later renamed Deep Listening Foundation), acting as a platform for the creation of new works, but also for the dissemination of her educational ideas. To this end, she organized a number of Deep Listening workshops, including, starting in 1991, an annual week-

long retreat in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in New Mexico, in collaboration with author and director Lone, and choreographer Héloïse Gold. These workshops contribute to the formation of a community of Deep Listeners. Everyone, musician or not, shares a collective listening experience which, when practiced regularly, can lead to "changes in physiology and psychology from known and unknown tensions to relaxations which gradually become permanent."<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Oliveros has repeatedly stressed the therapeutic dimension of her collective approach to listening. In her introduction to the *Sonic Meditations* publication, for example, she insists on the fact that the subject's transformation (she uses the word "healing") can arise from, and in relation to, the other:

"Healing can occur in relation to the above activities when 1) individuals feel the common bond with others through a shared experience. 2) when one's inner experience is made manifest and accepted by others. 3) when one is aware of and in tune with one's surroundings. 4) when one's memories, or values, are integrated with the present and understood by others."<sup>16</sup>

Through this particular function of listening — as a process of subjective transformation — we find a connection with the listening technique found in psychoanalysis. What are the common features of these two types of listening? And what does this notion of listening in psychoanalysis consist of exactly? How does it resonate with Oliveros' work?

In his essay entitled *Listening*, Roland Barthes analyzes the profound influence of psychoanalysis on the evolution of listening in the modern era. He defines three types of listening: an alerting listening (no different from animals), a deciphering listening (that is, the act of recognizing what exists), and a type of listening he calls "modern." In his opinion, modern listening has gone through a radical shift thanks to the advent of psychoanalysis. This listening involves the interaction of at least two individuals and leads to an infinite renewal of meanings. Psychoanalytic thinking thickens the concept of listening not only by considering an intersubjective space "where 'I am listening' also means 'listen to me'," but also by taking into account

transference in listening, which can no longer be assessed "without the determination of the unconscious."<sup>17</sup> Indeed, in psychoanalysis, the act of listening and its effects are only considered through this notion of transference.<sup>18</sup> The psychoanalytic framework, which enables the emergence of unconscious conflicts and their possible displacement, only operates through the intersubjective relationship of transference between analysand and psychoanalyst.

It is through the framework she establishes with her *Sonic Meditations* that Pauline Oliveros gets the closest to psychoanalytic technique and its concerns. By "framework," we mean her insistence that the practice of Deep Listening occurs within a group, and in a defined space and time specific to each *Meditation*. According to her, these sessions need to consist of regular meetings, ideally over a long period of time. Setting, rigor, and repetition are fundamental concepts used in psychoanalytic technique. As Sigmund Freud explains in *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*: "Our therapy is necessarily long and drawn-out, its impact takes an incredibly long time to take effect."<sup>19</sup> It is precisely because its impact takes an incredibly long time to take effect that Freud and his contemporaries insist on the importance of a proper setting for psychoanalysis (space and time), a rigorous process, and repeated sessions. It is not a question of talking just for talking, but talking within a space where those words can be heard. In other words, there are conditions required for something to be heard, even in silence. In the opening of his first seminar, *Freud's Papers on Technique*, Jacques Lacan writes: "Phenomenologically, the analytic situation is a structure, that is to say that it is only through that that certain phenomena are isolable, separable."<sup>20</sup> The psychoanalytic situation, that is, its framework and technique, enable the emergence of psychic phenomena, allowing them to emerge and be transformed. There is no truth in psychoanalysis outside the analytic stage.

Moreover, the *Sonic Meditations* framework implies a relationship to the other, being open to plurality (through the idea of a group but also through the presence of text-based scores that imply an author and a performer, at the very least). From the opening lines of *Freud's Papers on Technique*, Lacan estab-

lishes the fundamental fact that psychoanalysis can only take place with an other, and that this intersubjective relationship involves more than two. He writes: "it is a recognized fact that in analysis the analysand is not alone. There are two of us — and not only two."<sup>21</sup> There are not only two in psychoanalysis because the unconscious is also present: that of the analysand but also that of the analyst. Thus, the door is open to a type of listening that consists in more than a sealed off face-to-face conversation, since it also considers temporal and social factors that shape the unconscious.

Several *Sonic Meditations* are designed to allow participants to experience constant shifts of meaning through the repetition of attentive listening. Take for example *Meditation XII*, entitled *One Word*, in which Oliveros asks the participant: "Choose one word. Dwell silently on this word. When you are ready, explore every sound in this word extremely slowly, repeatedly. Gradually, imperceptibly bring the word up to normal speed, then continue until you are repeating the word as fast as possible. Continue at top speed until 'it stops'." Or the twenty-fifth and final *Meditation*, entitled *Your Name: The Signature Meditation*, which revisits the principle of the previous one, but this time writing down and visualizing one's own name. Finally, *Meditation XVII Re Cognition*, which invites participants to "Listen to a sound until you no longer recognize it," perfectly sums up these considerations. Its title, where the word "recognition" is split in two, evokes what Barthes describes as the passage from an understanding of listening as recognition, that is as an interpretation of signs with an a priori existence, to a "modern" understanding which could be said to be based on "re-cognition." Re-cognition in the sense that, since knowledge is always partial, you are constantly knowing anew through repetition and in relation to an other.

The shifting of meaning through repetition is also central to psychoanalytic technique. It is by and through repetition during the analysis session that something of the subject's unconscious is expressed. Behind the analysand's unconscious repetition hides his or her deep-rooted resistance to the intolerable emergence of drives. In other words, it is through repetition that repression is enacted. Repetition is there-

fore an obstacle to analytic work while also being the root of its practice. What is repeated is the unknown at the core of the individual. To be more specific, nothing is ever strictly repeated; there is always a difference, a shift in what appears to be the same. And it is to that movement that the analytic work draws attention. It is precisely because there is repetition that we can perceive the deviations, the transformations and transpositions, that something "always other" can be grasped.

Consequently, looking at analysis allows us to understand Oliveros' intuition that you need to repeat the act of listening within a daily practice to refine your attention enough to get as close as possible to what cannot be heard — not by making inaudible sounds audible (audible from a subjective point of view of course), but by emphasizing that listening is always necessarily relational and transference, which precludes any possibility of truth. It is through repetition that a new sound emerges every time, and through the memory of that sound — a repetition that conceals as much as it reveals — that a subjective shift can happen.

It is interesting to note that while listening is central to psychoanalytic work, strictly speaking, listening is not directly thought of as a psychoanalytic concept (there is no entry for listening in psychoanalytic dictionaries for instance). Transference replaces it. Rather than talking about "listening techniques," we talk about the "handling of transference." Transference is "the act of projecting meaning above, beyond, elsewhere,"<sup>22</sup> as defined by Monique David-Ménard, but it is also the first repetition, the "transposing of desires onto the therapy and onto the analyst."<sup>23</sup> This way of defining transference is reminiscent of the notion of listening formulated by Roland Barthes, who explains:

"Listening includes in its field not only the unconscious in the topical sense of the term but also, so to speak, its lay forms: the implicit, the indirect, the supplementary, the delayed. Listening grants access to all forms of polysemy, of overdetermination, of superimposition."<sup>24</sup>

Where Barthes talks about listening, psychoanalysis talks about transference. In a way then, transference occurs through listening, but even more so, listening is a form of transference. And it is towards this type of listening that Pauline Oliveros leads us: a daily, repetitive listening, which searches for variations in timbre, rhythm and texture from an intersubjective, social, and environmental perspective.

Thus the "determination of the unconscious" (as Barthes called it), which modifies our understanding of listening, resonates with Oliveros' insight that the "unheard" is central to the act of listening. Could we consider that there is something *as-yet-unheard* both in Oliveros and in the way psychoanalysis understands the unconscious?

Looking at psychoanalysis allowed us to gain a different understanding of Oliveros' conception of listening. Conversely, what does the framework established in the *Sonic Meditations* offer us with respect to psychoanalysis? By creating a collective context for listening where everyone present participates as an active performer, Oliveros upsets the traditional separation between composer, performer and audience as found in Western music. As she explained in a 1993 interview, "instead of composing the content, I was composing the outside form and giving people tools to participate in the creative process."<sup>25</sup> In psychoanalysis, unlike in Oliveros' work, places are not interchangeable; the act of listening presupposes a certain dissymetry. And transference acts as both the sign and safeguard against this unevenness. Nonetheless, through the notion of listening, shifts are made possible, as Barthes explains when he emphasizes that with psychoanalysis:

"The roles implied by the act of listening no longer have the same fixity as in the past; there is no longer, on one side, someone who speaks, gives himself away, confesses, and, on the other, someone who listens, keeps silence, judges, and sanctions; this does not mean that the analyst, for instance, speaks as much as his or her analysand; it is because, as has been said, listening is active, it assumes the responsibility of taking its place in the interplay of desire, of

which all language is the theatre: we must repeat, *listening speaks*.<sup>26</sup>

However, while Roland Barthes notes that the relationship the analyst carries on with the analysand is not one of dominance and power, but a relation of transference requiring that the analyst take part in active listening, he does not emphasize the importance of listening for the analysand. Listening always remains on the side of the analyst. The hierarchy between the analyst and the analysand and between listening and speaking is deconstructed but listening does not go both ways. The analysand's listening has not been considered by psychoanalytic theory. Indeed, in analysis, there is a tendency to say that the therapeutic effect comes from being listened to. Yet the originality of what Pauline Oliveros proposes is the shift from therapy through speaking to therapy through listening. Taking Oliveros' proposal seriously — the idea that psychological transformation can come from careful attention to sounds — enables us to rethink what is already present in analytic therapy but is not emphasized in psychoanalytic theory: the fact that speaking is not enough, you also have to listen to yourself to get as close as possible to the unconscious. Of course, it is not a matter of listening to yourself in the sense of complacent narcissism and self-identification — in other words, being too certain of yourself and your relationships to others — but rather of a listening that leads to the "*shimmering* of signifiers [...] without ever arresting their meaning."<sup>27</sup>

We could then reformulate Barthes' stipulation above as follows: "there is no longer, on one side someone who speaks, gives himself away, confesses, and, on the other, someone who listens, keeps silence, judges and sanctions ; this does not mean that the [*analysand*], for instance, [*listens*] as much as the [*analyst*]," but that the patient's listening is no less necessary when it comes to the expression of his or her unconscious desire.<sup>28</sup> Analysands listen to their own slips of the tongue, repetitions, variations in meaning, inner and outer sounds. They listen to the material and literal dimension of their speech which can sometimes distort their intended meaning, producing a feeling of alienation. They are also attentive to the analyst's breathing, movements, the environment in which their

sounds are received; that is, everything that makes up the sonic landscape of the analysis session and which is potentially interpreted as a sign, response, renewal of meaning. This listening to the texture and rhythm of the sounds occurs in relation to the analyst; it requires a transference relationship.

### The Affected Sound

Meditation XXII:

"Think of some familiar sound. Listen to it mentally. Try to find a metaphor for this sound.

What are the real and imaginary possible contexts for this sound? How many ways does or could this sound affect you? Or how do you feel about it? What is its effect upon you? How can this sound be described?

As a group meditation; sit in a circle. Find a sound common to all, then ask the above questions one by one. Allow plenty of time between each question. When all of the questions have been asked, the group shares their answers.

Variations: Try the same meditation with

1. an imaginary sound
2. a live sound
3. a remembered sound"

This *Meditation* is particularly representative of the understanding of listening put forward by Oliveros; it also reflects the different natures of the sounds conjured up by her *Meditations* as a whole. Indeed, Oliveros invites performers to repeat the exercise using a familiar sound, an imaginary sound, a "live" sound, and a "remembered" sound. In other words, she not only urges participants to pay a sustained attention to their immediate sonic environment, but also to think about sounds that are intimately related to their psychological life and thus often emotionally charged. Moreover, through the list of questions she asks, she leads the performers to place those sounds in contexts that are meaningful to them and to pay attention to the physical, psychological, and emotional effects they produce. In short, Oliveros is interested in the way sounds act upon the subject. For her, listening is an active process, one that is profoundly embodied — we listen with our bodies as much as with our ears. It has the ability to affect both body and mind (which

are, of course, inseparable). "As a musician," she writes, "I am interested in the sensual nature of sound, its power of synchronization, coordination, release and change."<sup>29</sup> In her practice then, sound is *affected*, in the sense that it is imbued with a personal and emotional charge, but also in the sense that it affects the listeners in many ways.

It is through this "affected" character of sound that Oliveros' practice is fundamentally different from that of John Cage, who had a decisive influence on an entire generation of New Music composers.<sup>30</sup> With Cage, Oliveros shares the idea of a work open to transformation, in particular through the participation of performers who are granted a vast freedom of interpretation, especially thanks to the use of text-based scores containing very little by way of prescriptive instructions. As Oliveros writes, "[my music] is interactive in the sense that the participants take a share in creating the work rather than limit themselves to merely interpreting pitches and rhythms."<sup>31</sup> Moreover, her inclusive approach to listening echoes that of Cage, in *4'33"*, for example, where the listener is invited to pay musical attention to all sounds, indiscriminately.<sup>32</sup> But where Cage is primarily interested in the external soundscape, Oliveros is more focused on interiority and the manner in which sounds have the power to transform (and be transformed by) individuals and interpersonal relationships. In addition, unlike the works of Cage, performing Oliveros' scores leaves less room to chance and more to the feelings and intuition of the performers.

In his article entitled *No Depth: A Call for Shallow Listening*, artist and critic Seth Kim-Cohen argues that both Cage and Oliveros are searching for a pure sound, that is, a sound both disconnected from its socio-historical context and beyond the reach of language (by "language," Kim-Cohen means any kind of meaning system, structure, set of conventions). About Deep Listening, he writes:

"Deep listening suggests something to be quarried, something at the bottom, a bedrock, an ore, a materiality that contains riches. Oliveros, working along Cagean lines imagines that sounds-in-themselves are deeply valuable entit-

ies, imbued with eternally rewarding sensual and experiential qualities."<sup>33</sup>

For Kim-Cohen, Cage and Oliveros' focus on the experiential and sensorial qualities of sound means that they neglect to consider that sonic experience is mediated by power relations within socio-historical contexts and that listening has the capacity to "intervene and to effect the sites at play in the sonic work."<sup>34</sup> As a result, he calls for an alternative model of listening that he describes as "shallow" in direct contradistinction to his vision of Oliveros' Deep Listening.

We have already seen that the sounds Oliveros is interested in are not pure sounds but rather affected sounds, that is, sounds inseparable from the physical and psychological experience of the person who is listening. Because this subjective experience necessarily involves language and is related to specific socio-cultural contexts, it seems impossible for us to claim, as does Kim-Cohen, that for Oliveros, sound is both apolitical and outside language. Attention to the materiality of sound and the taking into account of the sensory and embodied nature of listening in no way prevents Oliveros from considering the linguistic, social, and political dimensions of sound.

In the *Sonic Meditations*, sound is inherently pervaded by language on many levels. First, simply because listening is guided by a text-based score, which, as in *Meditation XXII* mentioned above, sometimes invites the performer to put certain sounds into words ("How can this sound be described," asks Oliveros in this *Meditation*), or to verbally share his or her responses and experience with the group. Second, when Oliveros invites participants to "think of some familiar sound" or to produce sounds that are imaginary or related to personal memories, images and words very often blend into the sonic matter. Through this invitation, she creates an awareness of the fact that, when "thinking of a sound" or "listening to it mentally", one cannot easily separate the sensory experience from linguistic thinking.

More fundamentally, the *Meditations* reflect the idea that sounds, even those most distinct from language, are a product of culture and cannot escape meaning systems and shared conventions. "What was the original sound of your voice before you learned to sound

the way you sound now?" Oliveros asks, for example, in a *Meditation* entitled *Your Voice*. By the same token, choosing a "familiar sound" or "a sound common to all" in *Meditation XXII* is likely a way of stimulating thought about what is cultural or conversely truly personal in the manner in which we receive a sound. In this context, the invitation to think about how sounds affect those who listen takes on a more political dimension: how do we become aware of the manipulative power of sounds independently of the content they convey?

Oliveros' interest in the social and political dimension of sound is also expressed through her radical criticism of the place women have in Western music, both in her work and in her writings. In 1970, she published a groundbreaking article in the *New York Times* entitled "And Don't Call Them Lady Composers" in which she asks the rhetorical question that historian Linda Nochlin will ask a year later with respect to the art world: "Why have there been no 'great' women composers?"<sup>35</sup> Like Nochlin, she answers by describing the social factors that prevent women from having a possible career in music, but also by contesting the idea of "greatness" itself, to advocate for more inclusive and collaborative creation models. She writes: "It doesn't matter that not all composers are great composers; it matters that this activity is encouraged among all the population, that we communicate with each other in non-destructive ways."<sup>36</sup> Moreover, in other contexts, Oliveros has for example argued that the exclusion of women from music production resulted in the devaluation of an intuitive approach (historically associated with women) to composition in favor of a more abstract and rational approach (historically associated with men).<sup>37</sup> Or that improvisation between women allowed for a less competitive attitude with "less emphasis on technical mastery and more concern for sounds weaving into shared textures."<sup>38</sup>

The creation of the Women's Ensemble at the University of California San Diego is one of the ways Oliveros responded to this other form of "unheard sounds", that of music created by women. She writes:

"I was aware, very painfully aware, that many women were left out of music-making. And I was on a faculty which was all male, and many

of the wives of the faculty were musicians, but they were simply not included in professional activity... So in any case, I formed this group of women feeling that it was necessary to give a forum of some kind where women could express their music, or themselves, together; to build some kind of an understanding of who they were in relationship to this field."<sup>39</sup>

In addition, as feminist scholar Martha Mockus pointed out, the *Sonic Meditations* themselves "can function as sonic feminism, a musical form of feminist activism" to the extent that they challenge the conventions of Western music (and the ideologies they support), rely on inclusive organizational principles, and "offer a deeply politicized opportunity for women to explore their minds and bodies in sound."<sup>40</sup> In particular, Mockus compared the *Sonic Meditations* to the feminist consciousness-raising groups that emerged in the United States in the late 1960s. As a space for reciprocal speaking and listening, the vocation of these women-only groups was raising awareness of the systemic oppression of women within patriarchal societies through the sharing of personal experiences. For Mockus, "Oliveros's *Sonic Meditations* are a form of feminist consciousness-raising, offering participants provocative opportunities to question dominant notions of music, talent, sound, ability and musical authority, etc."<sup>41</sup> In other words, they invite us to question the manner in which sound is not pure but is affected by political factors, especially those related to gender.

Thus, Oliveros' work contradicts the ideal of a sound beyond language and disconnected from social and political realities. At the same time as it draws attention to the affective nature of sound (of any sound, inner or outer), it demonstrates that sound cannot be disentangled from linguistic and social experience. In the *Sonic Meditations*, Oliveros invites participants to become attuned to traces of these sounds which, as we have seen, can only be grasped within a relational and repeated framework. Her conception of listening makes it possible to think about the impact of sound on the bodies of the listeners. It is this listening that allows the subject to free him or herself from certain constraints and inabilities (the root of their psychic suf-

fering) and to glimpse their normative and subjective constructs. However, in order for sound to be endowed with the power to shift psychic barriers, this sound needs to be part of the construction of the subject. What place can sound have in the process of psychic construction? Indeed, psychoanalytic therapy involves, at first glance at least, words and the voice — in other words sound that has already been transformed. How do sounds interact with bodies, and rearrange unconscious drives?

Let's begin by mentioning that psychoanalytic therapies put a lot of emphasis on silence (to what is said without words); thus, there is actually a sound in analysis that does not assume the form of a signifier. Psychoanalyst Pierre Fedida stresses the importance of silence as a container conducive to listening.<sup>42</sup> Bodily, ambient, unconscious sounds move across psychoanalytic space and are caught in the process of transference. They are produced by surroundings, memory, and by present bodies. But what are they traces of within the process of subjective construction?

Colette Soler, contemporary psychoanalyst and Jacques Lacan reader, writes the following about sound and its importance during early childhood:

"The child's babble — or 'lallation' as Lacan puts it — that echoes the mother's chatter attests to a conjunction between sound and satisfaction, which is prior to the acquisition of any and all linguistic syntax or semantics [...] since lallation is not language. Lallation is not learned; it envelops the infant with its sounds, rhythms, silent eclipses, and so on."<sup>43</sup>

The "lallation" Lacan speaks of, this babbling child language (made of sound and satisfaction) is speech as separated from a syntactical and phrasal organization and as belonging, *natively*, to *jouissance*. Consequently, "lallation" is not language, but is not located outside language either; it is a non-ordered, pulsional form of language. Thus, this ambient, external sound, free of meaning creates a singular satisfaction in the little individual who grasps it; it is because the sound is imbued with satisfaction that, at the very moment it is heard, it becomes affected and thus eludes listening

(because once the sound is entangled with an affective charge, it becomes impossible for the subject to distinguish what in it touches him or her). From the outset, the sound becomes personal and collective, heard and beyond any hearing. This "lallation" thus constructed by the little one, remains active in the subject's personal relationship with language. It emerges through sonic traces and forms the subject's erogenous body.

In the child's playing, there is an enjoyment, always *repeated*, in the production of nonsensical sounds. These sonic traces, lost during the acquisition of language, of the grammatical standard and spelling rigor, are the ones sought out over the course of analysis sessions. That is, traces of the first time the subject's drives were satisfied, which conditioned the subject's relationship to the other and to his or her *jouissance*. In other words, "its traces constitute the nucleus of the unconscious that is most real, most outside of meaning."<sup>44</sup> Thus the unconscious is made of affected sounds that form the subject's "being-in-the-world". Very quickly for a young child, sounds affected in such a way, outside of meaning, find support in words. These sounds find their place within words. Colette Soler further writes:

"For each of us, the weight of words thus remains anchored to the joint eroticization of the body and sounds from the moment of our entry into the sea of language; these sounds do not have the same import for each of us, not merely as regards meaning but as regards satisfaction."<sup>45</sup>

Not only do these sounds get caught in words, they also determine the individual's subjective interpretation of these words.

The frameworks offered by the *Meditations* and psychoanalytic therapy both highlight the relational nature of listening and sound, as well as their transformative ability. Indeed, these frameworks, each in their own way, provide a space and know-how conducive to glimpsing these first sonic traces in order to bring about a shift of their psychic impacts, and renewing meanings *indefinitely*. Here, listening can only be understood through the conception of an as-

-yet-unheard. It is impossible to apprehend a sound completely, whether it is heard, remembered, or imagined. We can never hear everything, because we always maintain a personal, temporal, affected relationship to sound. Which leads us to perceive the loss at the core of both sound and listening, a loss which is always active, producing variations in meaning. There is always something forgotten by the subject when learning the rules of grammar, syntax, social norms that order his or her drives (forgotten sounds but also forgotten ability to listen, to touch, to look, etc.) This is what Pauline Oliveros intuits when she addresses the loss of a primary listening through the machine of language and communication. She supposes the child knows how to listen then forgets. She writes: "as sounds are reified into language and communication – as we learn reading, 'riting, and 'rithmic (taught to the tune of a hickory stick), primary listening recedes..."<sup>46</sup> In other words, not only do the babbling sounds of infancy need to be recovered, but also, Oliveros claims, we need to recover the means to hear them. We need to allow for the possibility of a (sonic-analytic) space where they can resonate and we can re-learn how to listen to them; an affected space (inseparable from the body and the social) where sonic, rhythmic and textual variations are produced to help individuals reach a better state of well-being.

## Endnotes

1. Pauline Oliveros, *Deep Listening: Bridge to Collaboration* (conference paper, 1998) in: *Sounding the Margins: Collected Writings 1992-2009*, ed. Pauline Oliveros, Kingston 2010, p. 28.
2. Oliveros 2010, *Sounding the Margins: Collected Writings 1992-2009*, p. 28.
3. Pauline Oliveros in *Quantum Listening: From Practice to Theory (to Practice Practice)* (MusicWorks Issue #76, 2000), in: Oliveros 2010, *Sounding the Margins: Collected Writings 1992-2009*, p. 74.
4. For instance during "Meditation Project", an exploration of meditation technique in relation to music and musicians that was supported by the Rockefeller Foundation at the Project for Music Experiment at the University of California San Diego. For this project, which took place in 1973, she met 2 hours a day with a group of twenty volunteers and invited practitioners of various disciplines: choreographer Elaine Summers, dancer and T'ai Chi master Al Chung Liang Huang, Karate master and president of the Institute for the Study of Attention, Dr Lebster Ingber, Dr. R. Bickford, from the medical school, who provided a before-and-after EEG sample for each participant, as well as John Forkner, an optical physicist who designed and built a special lighting system. In this context, she invited Dr Ronald Lane of the Muir Counseling Service to act as a consultant psychologist on the project. Here is how Oliveros described his involvement: "Dr Lane provided a battery of tests at the beginning which were repeated at the end of the training in order to monitor possible significant changes in the participants. Also, there were weekly individual personal consciousness scales [...] Dr Lane attended many of the sessions and was also available to any participant on a consulting basis. Several of the participants made use of his services as a result of changes apparently triggered by the training sessions." See Pauline Oliveros, *Meditation Project: A report, in: Software for People: Collected Writings 1963-80*, ed. Pauline Oliveros, Kingston 2015 [= 2nd edition], p.158-164.
5. Pauline Oliveros in Oliveros 2010, *Sounding the Margins: Collected Writings 1992-2009*, p. 77.
6. Pauline Oliveros, *On Sonic Meditation* (Painted Bride Quarterly, Winter 1976, Vol. 3, No.1) in: Oliveros 2015, *Software for People: Collected Writings 1963-80*, p. 145.
7. Oliveros 2015, *Software for People: Collected Writings 1963-80*, p. 148.
8. Among the women involved in the Ensemble were Betty and Shirley Wong (voice), Lin Barron (cello), Bonnie Barnett (voice), Joan George (bass clarinet) and poet Lynn Lonidier (cello).
9. Oliveros 2015, *Software for People: Collected Writings 1963-80*, p. 148-149.
10. In her *Sonic Meditations*, Oliveros replaces conventional musical notation with text scores. This model of the score as a graphic/textual object was initiated by Cage in the 1950s (most famously in his composition 4'33") and developed by others in both the music and visual arts fields. In the visual arts field, it was used by many Fluxus artists to whom Oliveros was close.
11. Pauline Oliveros, *Sonic Meditations*, Baltimore 1974. All the *Meditations* quoted in this article are from this publication/score.
12. Oliveros 1974, *Sonic Meditations*.
13. Oliveros 2015, *Software for People: Collected Writings 1963-80*, p. 156.
14. Oliveros 2015, *Software for People: Collected Writings 1963-80*, p. 156.
15. Oliveros 1974, *Sonic Meditations*.
16. Oliveros 1974, *Sonic Meditations*.
17. Roland Barthes, *Listening*, in: Roland Barthes, *The Reponsability of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art and Representation*, Berkeley 1991, p. 246.
18. We can define transference as an open stage onto which past relations are performed again.
19. Sigmund Freud, *Introduction à la psychanalyse*, Paris 1922, p. 462.
20. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book 1, Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953-1954*, New York 2013, p. 2.
21. Lacan 2013, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book 1, Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953-1954*, p. 2.
22. Monique David-Ménard, *Éloge des hasards dans la vie sexuelle*, Paris 2011, p. 202.
23. David-Ménard 2011, *Éloge des hasards dans la vie sexuelle*, p. 202.
24. Barthes 1991, *The Reponsability of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art and Representation*, p. 258.
25. Pauline Oliveros in Cole Gagne, *Soundpieces 2: Interviews with American Composers*, Metuchen, 1993, p. 221.
26. Barthes 1991, *The Reponsability of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art and Representation*, p. 258-259.
27. Barthes 1991, *The Reponsability of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art and Representation*, p. 259.
28. Here, we reformulate Barthes' sentence quoted above, this time emphasizing the patient's listening. Our changes are in italics and bracketed.
29. Oliveros 2010, *Sounding the Margins: Collected Writings 1992-2009*, p. 73.
30. Oliveros has talked about Cage's influence on several occasions. See for instance her interview in *CageTalk: Dialogues with and about John Cage*, ed. Peter Dickinson, Rochester 2006.
31. Pauline Oliveros, *Interactive Music* (NewMus Music Net, 1995), in: Oliveros 2010, *Sounding the Margins: Collected Writings 1992-2009*, p. 4.
32. 4'33" is a landmark piece that John Cage composed in 1952. The score directs the performer to remain silent during three movements of chance-determined durations. The piece consists of all the sounds of the environment that the listener hears while it is performed. To be precise about what distinguishes the practices of Cage and Oliveros, we must stress that whereas Oliveros explicitly invites all those present to collectively listen to the ambient sound, Cage, who considers the listener autonomous, does not explicitly do so.
33. Seth Kim-Cohen, *Ambience and Other Essays*, London 2016, p. 134.
34. Seth Kim-Cohen 2016, *Ambience and Other Essays*, p. 135.
35. Pauline Oliveros, *And Don't Call Them 'Lady' Composers* (New York Times, September 13, 1970), in: Oliveros 2015, *Software for People: Collected Writings 1963-80*. See also Linda Nochlin, *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?*, in: Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays*, Boulder 1989, p. 145-178.
36. Oliveros 2015, *Software for People: Collected Writings 1963-80*, p. 49.
37. See Pauline Oliveros, *The Contribution of Women Composers*, in: Oliveros 2015, *Software for People: Collected Writings 1963-80*, p. 132-137.
38. Pauline Oliveros, *Harmonic Anatomy: Women in Improvisation, (The Other Side of Nowhere: Jazz, Improvisation, and Communities in Dialogue, 2004)*, in: Oliveros 2010, *Sounding the Margins: Collected Writings 1992-2009*, p. 137.
39. Pauline Oliveros, in an unpublished interview with Anna Feldman, *Interview with Pauline Oliveros 4/25/96* quoted in Martha Mockus,

- Sounding Out: Pauline Oliveros and Lesbian Musicality*, London 2008, p. 46.
40. Mockus 2008, *Sounding Out: Pauline Oliveros and Lesbian Musicality*, p. 45-46.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
42. See Pierre Fédida, *L'absence*, Paris 2004.
43. Colette Soler, *Lacanian Affects: The Function of Affect in Lacan's work*, London 2015, p. 110.
44. Soler, *Lacanian Affects: The Function of Affect in Lacan's work*, p. 110.
45. *Ibid.*
46. Pauline Oliveros, *The Nature of Listening* (2008) published for the first time in: Oliveros 2010, *Sounding the Margins: Collected Writings 1992-2009*, p. 248.

Translated from French by Toby Cayouette

## Abstract

This article explores Pauline Oliveros' practice of Deep Listening and argues that it is inherently concerned with the experience of the "unheard". Deep Listening involves "going below the surface of what is heard", not to reach a form of truth or purity of sound but, on the contrary, to constantly reassert that we never hear the same thing twice, that the act of listening is inherently incomplete. In other words, "deeply listening" to sounds means being attuned to – being physically and subjectively in touch with – what we call the "as-yet-unheard".

Because, for Oliveros, Deep Listening has the power to heal – to lead to the psychological transformation of the listener – we attempt to make sense of her conception of listening by creating a dialogue with psychoanalytic theory and the practice of listening. In this context, the unheard is not merely tied to the limits of perception (what the ear is unable to hear), but far more so to the subjective limitations (what the individual refuses to hear).

In the first section, we look at the resonances between the relational frameworks established by Oliveros' *Sonic Meditations* and the psychoanalytic session to explore how the unheard in her practice might be close to a certain way of approaching the unconscious.

The second section deals with the nature of sounds in Oliveros' work and in psychoanalytic practice, an issue which leads us to bring this *as-yet-unheard* back to the body, a body made up of affects, but inseparable from language and socio-political dynamics.

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## Titel

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