

## DEEP LISTENING PIECES

The range of notational practices employed to present my work as a composer includes conventional staff notation, graphic notation, metaphors, prose, oral instruction and recorded media. Sonic Meditations are notated through prose instructions or recipes. The notations for Sonic Meditations were presented in written form only after many trials with oral instructions given to many different people. Even though Sonic Meditations are in print, I often vary or revise the wording I use to transmit the instructions in new situations.

Such instructions are intended to set an attention process in motion within a participant and among the group that can deepen gradually with repeated experience. A definitive performance is not expected as each performance can vary considerably even though the integrity of the guidelines will not be disturbed and the piece will be recognizable each time.

The central concern in all my prose or oral instructions is to provide attention strategies for the participants. Attention strategies are nothing more than ways of listening and responding in consideration of oneself, others and the environment.

—Pauline Oliveros, 2003

**The following selection of Deep Listening Pieces is taken from a variety of sources, situations and places.**

29

## **Sound Cycles (1994)**

by Stan Hoffman

### **Preparation**

Each participant chooses a sound to make during the piece. Always use the same sound throughout the piece. Sit in a large circle.

### **Leader**

Stand just inside the circle of participants holding a small gong or hand bell. Begin the piece by striking the gong twice and then walking slowly around the circle. The next two times you pass the point from which you started, strike the gong once. When you arrive at the starting point again, strike the gong three times to end the piece.

### **Participants**

First cycle—Alone: intend to sound separate from any other sound. Second cycle—Dialog: intend to sound immediately before or after another sound. Third cycle—Together: intend to sound along with another sound, sustaining your sound for a long time.

### **Suggestions and Variations**

The first cycle works best if there are not too many people attempting to sound alone. If you have a lot of participants you can either have only some sound during the first cycle or perhaps double the number of cycles, assigning different participants to different alone cycles.

The group could agree on some theme or guideline for selecting sounds. When this piece was first done at the Deep Listening retreat in Washington (June 1995), the participants were given written parts which specified a sound (for example: deer, sun, sky, and everyone's favorite fern), how many times to sound during each cycle, and whether to sound alone, in dialog, or together. This is a good way to handle larger numbers of participants. It also increases concentration because you don't know ahead of time what the intentions of the other participants are as to when to sound or with what intention.

## **Collective Environmental Composition (1975)**

by Pauline Oliveros (1975/1996)

Each participant explores an environment to find a listening place with something interesting to hear and listens for a while.

Each participant invites the other participants to hear their found listening place. There may be one or more places with contrasting sounds.

Each participant finds a way to enhance, nullify or otherwise interact with the sound or sounds that the group goes to hear.

Each participant finds a way to connect all the sounds, either literally, metaphorically or graphically.

A performance agreement is negotiated.

## **Earth: Sensing/Listening/Sounding (1992)**

by Pauline Oliveros

Make a circle with a group. Lie on the ground or floor on your back with your head towards the center of the room.

Can you imagine letting go of anything that you don't need?

As you feel the support of the ground or floor underneath, can you imagine sensing the weight of your body as it subtly shifts in response to the pull of gravity?

Can you imagine sensing the subtlest vibrations of the ground or floor that is supporting you?

Can you imagine your body merging with the ground or floor?

Can you imagine listening to all that is sounding as if your body were the whole earth? There might be the sounds of your own thoughts or of your body, natural sounds of birds or animals, voices, sounds of electrical appliances and machines. Some sounds might be very faint, some very intense, some continuous, and some intermittent. As you are listening globally, can you imagine that you can use any sound that you hear as a cue either to relax your body more deeply or to energize it?

As you sense the results of this exercise, can you imagine including more and more of the whole field of sound in your listening? (Near sounds, far sounds, internal sounds, remembered sounds, imagined sounds.)

As you become more and more able to use any sound, whether faint, ordinary or intense to relax or energize the body, can you imagine becoming increasingly aware of all the sounds possible to hear in any moment?

Can you imagine allowing yourself to express the sound of your breath as you continue your global listening and deeper breathing?

Can you imagine expressing any sound that comes naturally with your voice?

Can you imagine continuing this Sonic Meditation by sensing, listening, breathing and sounding?

Can you imagine that you are sound?

## **Deep Listening Through The Millennium (1998)**

by Pauline Oliveros

The purpose of this synergistic project is to promote and encourage listening in as many countries as possible in unusual ways or any ways that are creative. It is an invitation to contemplate the nature of listening over a three-year time span (1999 to 2001): to listen to change—listen in order to change—listen for change.

Whatever you are doing could be a part of this project if you are listening. Participation could mean sharing your perceptions on this list as we are already doing, or engaging in a project that you could share.

For example, I have begun early with *Ear Piece* last month in Germany. *Ear Piece* consists of thirteen questions, which explore the difference between hearing and listening. An interviewer asks the questions in their native language, recording questions, answers and ambiances. The material is edited and mixed with another recorded ambience to create a radio piece.

### **Note**

*Ear Piece* was commissioned by Studio Akustische Kunst and produced at WDR in Cologne by Klaus Schoening. I want to do this piece in as many countries as I can in the appropriate language of each country. Maybe I'll have a big mix down in 2001.

## **Ear Piece (1998)**

by Pauline Oliveros (1998)

- 1) Are you listening now?
  - 2) Are you listening to what you are now hearing?
  - 3) Are you hearing while you listen?
  - 4) Are you listening while you are hearing?
  - 5) Do you remember the last sound you heard before this question?
  - 6) What will you hear in the near future?
  - 7) Can you hear now and also listen to your memory of an old sound?
  - 8) What causes you to listen?
  - 9) Do you hear yourself in your daily life?
  - 10) Do you have healthy ears?
  - 11) If you could hear any sound you want, what would it be?
  - 12) Are you listening to sounds now or just hearing them?
  - 13) What sound is most meaningful to you?
- © Copyright 1998 Deep Listening Publications

## **Environmental Dialogue (1996 Revision)**

by Pauline Oliveros (1975/1996)

Each person finds a place to be, either near to or distant from the others, either indoors or out-of-doors. The meditation begins by each person observing his or her own breathing. As each person becomes aware of the field of sounds from the environment, each person individually and gradually begins to reinforce the pitch of any one of the sound sources that has attracted their attention. The sound source is reinforced vocally, mentally or with an instrument. If one loses touch with the sound source, then wait quietly for another. Reinforce means to strengthen or to sustain by merging one's own pitch with the sound source. If the pitch of the sound source is out of vocal or instrumental range, then it is to be reinforced mentally.

The result of this meditation will probably produce a resonance of the environment. Some of the sounds will be too short to reinforce. Some will disappear as soon as the reinforcement begins. It is fine to wait and listen.

*Note: When people gather together for an event, it is a wonderful opportunity to create vocal and instrumental sound experiences that can be performed by everyone. In many traditions vocalizing is used to bring about deep breathing, which promotes the flow of oxygen to the brain. Getting oxygen to the brain can be refreshing, releasing and a good preparation for listening. Sonic Meditations by Pauline Oliveros, Smith Publications, is a collection of participatory pieces 1971-1989 intended to provide both trained and untrained musicians with the opportunity to participate together in sound oriented music which can be made simply and spontaneously. Environmental Dialogue is from this collection and is offered here in the Rotunda to help resonate the Capitol here in Sacramento California.*

## **We Could (1980)**

(November 9, 1980)

When a group is together, each person (after a focus is established, or not) finishes a sentence beginning with "WE COULD..." in as many ways as possible. Time could be limited, or open-ended. The sentences could be recorded or not. The group could vote on subsequent action according to the sentences, or just enjoy imagining what they could be doing.

## **We Are Together Because (1980)**

(November 9, 1980)

When a group is together, each person finishes the sentence "WE ARE

TOGETHER BECAUSE...” in as many ways as possible. When there is consensus on the essentials of the group, then each person finishes the sentence “WE ARE TOGETHER LIKE...” (using a natural analogy or metaphor).

## **Any Piece of Music (1980)**

(November 9, 1980)

Everyone answers the following questions in as many ways as possible:

1) If you could write any piece of music, what would you write? Assume that no kind of restraint exists, i.e. time, money, existence of resources or technology etc. 2) How would you achieve it?

## **Deep Listening Meditations—Egypt (1999)**

by Pauline Oliveros (March 1999)

The following meditations were composed especially for the March process journey to Egypt led by Ione with Andrea Goodman, Alessandro Ashanti and Pauline Oliveros. It was intended that there would be one listening meditation given each day. The meditations should be done one at a time.

Imagine a sound that you want to hear. During a designated time, such as a day or night, take note of when and where you hear the sound.

From the field of sound that you are hearing, select a sound. Focus on it and amplify it with your imagination. Continue to hold and amplify the sound, even if the real sound has stopped. When you are done, scan your body/mind and notate your feelings.

Listen to any sound as if it had never been heard before.

Listening—I am sound. (Try listening to the words in different ways).

If you are looking—what are you listening to or for?

Focus on a sound that attracts your attention. Imagine a new or different context or field for that sound.

Listen all day to your own footsteps.

Where does sound come from?

Imagine that your ears have extended range above and below the normal range of 16hz to 20khz. What could you be hearing?

Can you find an unusual melody?

If you are feeling sound, where does it center or circulate in your body—psyche?

Listen for a heart sound. (Affective)

In a group or crowd can you hear with their ears? What is the longest sound you heard today?

What is the sound of our group—of belonging—of not belonging? How do you listen to the field sound of the group? What does the leader listen for? The group member? How do you tune in or out?

Center through what is sounding.

If you could ride the waves of your favorite sound, where would it take you?

Are sounds going out or coming in?

Imaginary improvisation: You are holding the possibility of making the first sound.

Sounds are coming and going and yet creating a field of sound.

Where have you heard the most sounds? The most variety? The most diverse?

As you listen, the particles of sound (phonons) decide to be heard. Listening affects what is sounding. The relationship is symbiotic.

As you listen, the environment is enlivened. This is the listening effect. © Copyright 1999 Deep Listening Publications

## **The Heart Chant (2001)**

by Pauline Oliveros

Stand together in a circle with feet about shoulder-width apart and knees a little soft.

Warm up your hands by rubbing palms together until you feel the heat.

Place your right hand over your own heart. Place your left hand on the back of your left hand partner (back of the heart).

After a few natural breaths sing/chant/intone “AH” on any pitch that will resonate your heart. Sense the energy of your own heart and that of your partner over the course of several breaths.

Can you imagine that the heart energies are joining together for healing yourself and others?

Can you imagine heart energies traveling out into the universe as a healing for all victims and toward the end of violence?

When *The Heart Chant* ends, gradually release your palms and bring them forward parallel in front of you. Sense the energy between the palms as if there were a sphere or ball that can be moved around. Then bring your palms to your own center, fold them over and store the energy.

## **A Series of Mini Pieces (1992)**

(May 15, 1992, San Diego)

Only the performer knows that she is performing.

Throughout the semester, these pieces are done in connection with meditations. The performances are a series of examples.

All encounters are to be considered as performances. Principles prevail. What are those principles? What are the examples?

1. Always be moving toward a goal. Always be actually doing something. Never be aimless.
2. Always speak your native language (determine what that is).
3. Always observe your state of mind behind what you do or say.

## **New Sonic Meditation (1977)**

Over a specified time have a randomized cue (or cue synched with a slowly recurring bio-rhythm) and meditators respond with sound on cue.

## **The New Sound Meditation (1989)**

Listen

During any one breath

Make a sound

*Breathe*

Listen outwardly for a sound

*Breathe*

Make exactly the sound that someone else has made

*Breathe*

Listen inwardly

*Breathe*

Make a new sound that no one else has made

*Breathe*

Continue this cycle until there are no more new sounds.

## **Old Sound, New Sound, Borrowed Sound Blue, for voices (1994)**

by Pauline Oliveros

Old sound—A sound that you remember from a long time ago.

New Sound—A sound that you have never made before.

Borrowed sound—A sound that you borrow from someone else.

Blue sound—A sound that is blue for you.

First listen inwardly to find your sound to be expressed vocally. Voice each kind of sound—old, new, borrowed, blue—from one to three times within a time frame of about five minutes. Pace yourself by listening to every one and everything. Find a time for each of your sounds. Voice your sound just before, just after or together with some



other person's sound. The piece is finished when everyone has used all of his or her sounds not more than three times each.

For Kingston Composers concert  
September 29, 1994  
Basel

## **Open Field (1980)**

When a sight, sound, movement, or place attracts your attention during your daily life, consider that moment an “art experience”. Find a way to record an impression of this momentary “art experience” using any appropriate means or media. Share these experiences with each other and make them available to others.

## **Sonic Tonic (1992)**

Several performers develop ways through subjective and objective testing to express what tone or sound, or combination of tones or sounds as well as a color or colors, masks and costumes is most beneficial for a particular person. Beneficial means that which produces a feeling of well-being in a person. The performers demonstrate an inviting process to the audience.

Individual audience members are invited to participate in a way facilitated by the performers, which results in an orchestration of individual portraits enhanced by sound, special lighting, masks and costumes in a gradually changing tableaux.

## **Rhythms (1996)**

What is the meter/tempo of your normal walk?  
How often do you blink?  
What is the current tempo of your breathing?  
What is the current tempo of your heart rate?  
What other rhythms do you hear if you listen?  
What is your relationship to all of the rhythms that you can perceive at once?

## **Scanning—Hearing (1995)**

A group assembles to scan the soundscape by listening. When someone feels the impulse to know what others are hearing, a signal such as standing up or raising a hand is made. The group members share what they are hearing at that moment.

## **Sound Fishes (1992)**

For an orchestra of any instruments.

### **Considerations**

Listening is the basis of sound fishing.

Listening for what has not yet sounded—like a fisherman waiting for a nibble or a bite.

Pull the sound out of the air like a fisherman catching a fish, sensing its size and energy—when you hear the sound,—play it.

Move to another location if there are no nibbles or bites.

There are sounds in the air like sounds in the water.

When the water is clear you might see the fish.

When the air is clear, you might hear the sounds.

November 1992

Fairbanks, Alaska

## **Sound Piece (1998)**

For Charles Boone and his San Francisco Art Institute Class by Pauline Oliveros

In this piece, a sound could come from any sort of sound source. The sound could be shorter or longer, softer or louder, simple or complex but not identifiable as a fragment or phrase of music (from a radio or recording, for example). Each sound used should have its own character. Sounds that are difficult to identify might be more interesting. Sounds that come from unusual sources, methods of activation or locations might have more interest. The sound sources might be visually interesting (or not) and could be staged to enliven the performance space in an interesting audio as well as visual and dramatic design. Sounds could be local or distant with stationary or moving sound sources.

Each person prepares a number of sounds to present within a predetermined duration, i.e. 10 minutes or longer. Each person may have as many or few sound sources as they want. Each person devises their own time scheme and staging for their sounds within the given duration. The piece begins with the first sound and ends when the time is up.

### **Variation**

Sounds are activated before, after or exactly with another performer's sound. The duration of the piece may be predetermined or if time is not limited the piece could go on until the energy is spent.

July 13, 1998

Kingston, New York

## **Teen Age Piece (1980)**

Some concealed—Some in Sight

Long sounds Calls Rung Sounds or Sung Sounds

Short sounds Cheers Repeated Sounds

Partners

June 22, 1980

Sheridan Park, Michigan

Hunter's Calls Rhymes

Insults

## **Urban/ Country Meditations (1988)**

### **Urban**

Listen to a roadway—eyes closed—distinguish size shape make of car by the sound—also speed and health of engine.

### **Country**

Sit by the trees—what kind of tree makes what kind of sound?

## **Cross Overs (1996)**

Sound a word or a sound.

Listen—surprise.

Sound a word as a sound.

Sound a sound as a word.

Sound a sound until it is a word. Sound a word until it is a sound.

Sound a sentence of sounds. Sound a phrase of words.

April 2, 1996

Evanston, Illinois

## **LISTENING QUESTIONS**

*“The world of possibilities is sound”*

- 1 What is your earliest memory of sound? How do you feel about it now?
- 2 When do you notice your breath?
- 3 What is attention?
- 4 Can you imagine composing or improvising a piece based on breath rhythms?
- 5 What sound reminds you of home?
- 6 Do you listen for sound in your dreams? What do you hear? How does it affect you?

7 The distinguished historian, William H. McNeil, has recently argued in his book *Keeping Together in Time* that “coordinated rhythmical activity is fundamental to life in society.”

Can you imagine tracking a rhythm pattern in your daily life and writing about it?

8 Can you imagine a rhythm pattern for the rhythm circle with your own form of notation?

9 Can you imagine composing or improvising a piece for voices using attention patterns?

10 What is sound?

11 What is listening?

12 What action(s) is usually synchronized with sound?

13 When do you feel sound in your body?

14 What sound fascinates you?

15 What is a soundscape?

16 What are you hearing right now? How is it changing?

17 How many sounds can you hear all at once?

18 How far away can you hear sounds?

19 Are you sure that you are hearing every thing that there is to hear?

20 What more could you hear if you had bigger ears? (or smaller)

21 Can you hear more sounds if you are quiet? How many more?

22 How long can you listen?

23 When are you not listening?

24 Can you not listen when something is sounding?

25 Try not listening to anything. What happens?

26 How can you not listen if your ears never close?

27 What meaning does any sound have for you?

28 What is your favorite sound? How is it made? When can you hear it? Are you hearing it now?

29 What is the soundscape of the space you are now occupying?

30 How is the soundscape shaped? or what makes a soundscape?

31 What is the soundscape of your neighborhood?

32 What is the soundscape of your city?

33 How many different soundscapes can you imagine?

34 What would you like to have in your own soundscape?

35 What would you record to represent your soundscape?

36 What sound makes you speculative?

37 What sound gives you chills?

38 What sound ruffles your scalp?

39 What sound changes your breathing?

40 What sound would you like whispered in your ear?