

The Fluid Transformation of Our Relation

The rhythmical vibrations of air which I sense as a sound, is invisible to my eyes. I can sometimes see the source of that sound but not always. Still, there's no doubt that I am touched by these vibrations, even if I can't see them. They are there even if we refuse to see them. Invisibility doesn't mean that they aren't there. With a fleeting and unstable nature they make their presence known while escaping attempts of naming.

The sound isn't something you can take and hold in your hand. You can't possess it. It doesn't belong to you. You have no sole ownership over it. Rather, we share this space. The sound and you and I share the same space.

When a sound appears, it instantly disappears. What is left to observe isn't anymore the sound; when I begin to tell you of what I heard, that sound which we talk about is long gone. I am left with my memory of it as it lingers in my mind and body. Maybe what I heard wasn't ever mine to have anyway. I want to tell you about this sound that I heard, but I can only speak from what I remember.

A tree fell in the forest and I wasn't there to hear it.

But the birds heard it,
and the vibrations were felt by the trees.

When I think of the sound of the tree that fell, I am reminded of the trees that were cut down close to where I live to make space for another apartment building. I am reminded of the sound that the machines make when they cut down trees in the Amazon forest, to clear land to produce soy that is transported across the Atlantic and fed to cows which are slaughtered and sold in the supermarket around the corner of where you and I live.

Whatever I listen to, I listen with my ears, my body and my mind. My whole being is a membrane that resonates by the touch of sound. But it isn't entirely that simple, because I'm not solid and fixed. I'm fluid. From moment to moment, I'm a little bit different. I'm in a constant flux. I'm changed by what I hear and all I hear is changed by the way I listen. Listening then is a

conversation, a relation that happens between what I hear and me. A relation in which I have a responsibility to acknowledge the fluid transformation of our relation. This is my place of listening. When I listen, I listen from this place.

So then, to speak to you about the experience of sound and listening, it is an attempt to put words to the invisible and ephemeral, the relational and messy, the ambiguous, forever changing but definitely sensible experience, which are all characteristics of sonic experience.

When we speak together and learn from these characteristics, what might we learn about coming together and being together? Might relating to each other from this place of listening help us to find ways to speak about complex or uncertain ideas? Might the messiness of listening translate into a heightened sensitivity towards complexities that otherwise might be hard to describe? Might speaking from the perspective of a listener afford us with a sensitivity that can guide difficult and complex conversations?

And I wonder; what happens when we mobilise this approach and turn it towards socio-political issues? Can we be listeners that are not only reflective but also critical? Can we find ways to incorporate strategies for change that has roots in listening?