

# 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.

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"<sup>1</sup> while "wanting to embody and be embodied by sound."

Our ears perception on sound(s) has been permanently and helplessly conditioned by the global aesthetics of

the ways we hear and listen; we listen through the "sonic protocol"<sup>2</sup> of a conditioned ear and body.

Moreover, technologies used in recording, production, distributing, editing, and broadcasting sound, are powerful means to monopolize and alter our ability to listen but also to broaden and enrich our sonic knowledge constellation.

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 becomes 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 collectively ready to expand our hearing, challenge prejudices, geographies, canons, sensationalism, discrimination, exoticism, and other expectations?

Through a series of encounters, each involving a curated auditory experience on radio and in a form of a live performance we engage with the process of "ostranenie"<sup>3</sup> (defamiliarization) to normative listening. Consequently, each session will be a conscious inquiry into how our listening is and has been shaped, constructed or altered through filters of society, politics, economics, cultures, narratives and their afferent mediums. The sessions become a collective exercise in which we ask artists, moderators, listeners, and ourselves – as an art and radio space – to (un)train and (re)train, (de)construct and (re)construct the process of normative hearing and give space for non-normative listening.

Both, the physical and the mental apparatus of radio can indeed reflect and reshape the way we relate to the world through sound – much like the effect Frantz Fanon has detected in the broadcasts of the *Voice of Algeria*:

What we have witnessed is a radical transformation of the means of perception, of the very world of perception. Of Algeria it is true to say that there never was, with respect to the

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

<sup>3</sup> Term coined by Jennifer Stoever-Ackerman

radio, a pattern of listening habits, of audience reaction. Insofar as mental processes are concerned, the technique had virtually to be invented.

By commissioning new works and echoing rare archival body of works broadcasted on public radio and premiered in an art space, Deutschlandfunk Kultur becomes the “instant, immaterial and transportable exhibition”<sup>4</sup> space that suggests listening in-between radio frequencies, and lines of time and language.

To contextualize how we listen to the world today we also need to replay the past of abounding sonic references. We will rhetorically navigate through archives of maverick composers in the attempt to re-index their contributions, to create other possible genealogies and narratives.

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” “sonic” histories. 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 borrow Kodwo Eshun’s observation 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.”<sup>5</sup>

The proposed format arises as a fundamental inquiry into modes and possibilities of listening. We feel an urgency to reconsider and rephrase postcolonial discourses as well as explore the relations with new hybrid-contemporary sound identities and the polycultural times.

In the attempt to **UNTRAIN THE EAR**, we suggest an alternative way to listen to music, sound and noise through the program of the **UNTRAINING THE EAR : LISTENING SESSIONS ; SAVVY** Contemporary becomes a live listening station and Deutschlandfunk Kultur becomes an exploratory sonorous “exhibition space”<sup>6</sup> which invites audiences to an inquiry into sound cultures.

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4 *Radio as Exhibition Space*, Doreen Mende. In: *Re-Inventing Radio, aspects of radio as Art*, Revolver, 2008

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

6 *Ibid* 4.

LISTENING SESSIONS 2017–2019

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