

Epiphanies of an Invisible weave

essay

by Jenny Sunesson, 2022

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Preface (2023)

Epiphanies of an Invisible weave is an essay written during the processes of two different, yet overlapping, projects; the research project FACT stage one, and the solar driven, sound art project UNDER.

The essay explores the specific capacities and possibilities of sound and listening *through the specific mode of field recording*, which is the sonic modality that I have exploring for more than 20 years.

The essay aims to shed some light on the site-related, political, and hidden potentials of sound as it examines the possibilities of *(re)-learning through listening* in relation to both human and more-than-human explorations and possible “epiphanies”, imagining openings beyond stereotypical knowing.

/Jenny Sunesson

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I lay on my back in the middle of a furiously green patch.

A ray of sunlight peeks through a slight rift in the treetops above, painting a pale circle of light around my body.

The feather moss underneath me, dense, like a home knitted blanket.

Around me, I hear only the crackling barrier of brittle, dead wood.

In the dusk outside the clearing, mute trunks are standing in far too tight a grid.

Colonies of fungi and white bone debris glimmer through the coniferous quilt of needles.

The spruce plantation is a dead-like, yet brutally beautiful place that most living organisms avoid. However, there are some exceptions.

Its fungal habitat is impressively colourful with its rich display of *fly agaric*, *false saffron milk cap* and *darkening brittlegill*.

The rare, stinking “scaly tooth fungus”, *sarcodon squamosus*, whose powerful blue colour is used for dyeing clothes, apparently also thrives in this oligotrophic, dystopian habitat.

It also functions as an acoustic barrier against the nature reserve a few kilometres away.

Here, inside the plantation, life outside may appear different, as sounds are filtered through the compact wall of symmetrically lined and shaped spruce trunks.

Normally, sounds travel endlessly far outdoors and disintegrate from lack of walls and structures that absorb the sound waves. Low frequencies disappear entirely or partially. But in an old, truly dense forest, or in a “failed” plantation such as this one, something else happens.

The greater the tree density, the higher the fidelity, since the cylindrical trunks and their coarse and irregular tiers of bark absorb far more ranges of frequency.

This is a frightening, alluring and peculiar place I have grown to love.

I listen to the extreme silence.

My listening approach is adapted from thinker and sound artist Pauline Oliveros’ Zen-inspired methods; Deep listening, (1) which builds on “zooming in” and “zooming out” of different details of the soundscape. The goal is to experience all the details as both parts and the whole *simultaneously*, which for me, also serves to drop anchor and sharpen the senses.

Far away I hear a woodpecker pecking frantically in the mixed forest. Several layers of swooshing, faint leaf rattle, branch creaking, and a darker, more distant hum of an aeroplane

that passed minutes ago, mix, and compose an atmosphere that makes the remaining leaves in the dense clusters of aspen shrubs tinkle like thin silver spoons against fine china.

A large corvid encircles the plantation. Occasionally it crows out nearby me as if observing me from its hiding place.

The animals relate, because at times the chitter of birds comes closer, as though inspecting my struggle against the vehement mosquito attacks.

The impact of the plantation has my body moving languidly and walking slowly, to each step consider.

When I cautiously settle my ear to the ground, I hear my pulse.

“Acoustic loggers”

The sound installation UNDER is an auto-ethnographic investigation of the 6 000-acre nature area “Florana” in northern Upland, and which I am conducting using solar power technology. When I first begin working on the project, my idea is for the forest to “record itself” through solar powered, acoustic loggers, for whatever duration the sun manages to run the equipment. On a conceptual level, this is a completely acceptable idea which is grounded in a desire to avoid my constant documenting, as I through different microphones and technologies “capture and filter” the world into being.

Within the visual arts, dance, and choreography, I have heard the word “capture” used to describe a practice of striving to seize the essence of different phenomena and objects, which in the “worst case” scenario contributes to a calcification “of their immanent essential values”; attributes which are assumed to objectively represent them in a general manner.

This attitude dominates most forms of field recordings and sound recordings wherein microphones and other technology are carefully tested to capture the “immanent essence” of materials as faithfully as possible. I want to get as far away from this as possible.

Consequently, I am trying to work in an “opposite” manner.

I have on several previous occasions worked according to strict conceptual frameworks that let *chance* direct me onto new paths and reassemble my practice. I reason that the idea of solar powered “loggers”, who via light sensors allow the sun and not the hour — our invented time, dictate the recording — is a good start. An exploration of the forest as a sonic space beyond the many clichés created by us, modern humans, who no longer engage with nature daily. Contemporary mankind, spearheaded by the middle class, has instead constructed an idea of an interaction restricted by the clock and productive activities, or at times a

sentimental glorification in which we exclusively *look* at the forest, from lamplit jogging paths, outdoor gyms, comfortable tree house hotels and bathing excursions. (2)

A Forest in Transformation

To grasp the entire expanse of the nature area, I focus on three different internal types of terrain, clear cuts, old growth forest, and spruce plantation, as a patchwork.

According to this metric, Florarna is not essentially different from Swedish forests in general, and it dawns on me how rapidly the Swedish forest has transformed – and is consistently being transformed.

In a location which these days is surrounded by dark spruce plantation we find the remains of the miner's croft Rönnavik with a small barnyard. A sense of gloom is not far off when one gazes down the pallid rows of trees inside the plantation. But one needs only go back about as far as the mid 20th century to visit the now so present spruce plantation instead manifested as sharecropper grounds – according to the local guide Stefan Skoglund, with whom I am collaborating for the UNDER project.

The Swedish forest is not a constant, but rather a constantly changing hybrid forest. I am also struck by how many “failed” clearcuts and spruce plantations there are here.

A failed clearcut simply signifies that the plants planted by the forestry company have not taken root. The forestry company has either been lax about the preparatory work or simply miscalculated the actual conditions of the area.

Instead, other unwanted vegetation rapidly takes over. Shrubs of aspen and birch pierce and suffocate the grounds. The forestry company can under those circumstances leave the area to its fate over a long time. In which space the clearcut's very own bio habitat emerges. And the forest has once again shifted.

The same thing applies to a failed spruce plantation where the tree spacing is too tight or the forestry company has forgotten to cull. Such a plantation becomes very dark and without floor vegetation, which has difficulty growing in the dark and in the profoundly acidified soil. The lack of light deprives the spruce trees of their growth.

Spruce in such plantations are powdery dry, grey, and labouring their slender, desperately green top plumes to the sky. Overcrowded spruce die entirely or partly, and at times plantations are simply left to their fate for a long time, as the lumber is deemed third-rate. Another example of this type of transformation is the many hundred-year strong, logistical network of supply roads servicing the old mining societies. According to Stefan, the heavy mine loads have hard-packed the ground, over such a long time, and so severely, that it is unable to rise again. Very few things can grow here. After years of gathering water, the furrow instead transforms into a shallow, wide creek that people wanting to enter the reservation are forced to traverse.

Lengthy wooden rods that are lined up tightly next to each other offer a slim, wobbly possibility across the shallow water and I balance my steps upon them to reach “the Old Hut”, which is my destination today.

The Interaction of Listening

The spring sun is blazing seductively upon an old tree stump, and it crosses my mind that I can charge the two sun panels strapped to my rucksack.

I am on the perimeter between industrial forest and nature reserve, and I can see that parts of the forest are old here. Very old spruce, that at this point practically only exist in nature reserves, are normally slender, pointy, and strong, exactly as old people are in places where they have had to struggle for their survival. The spruce branches slope steeply, the gravitational force appears to suck them slowly and mercilessly downward, downward. A heavy, thick feeling hits me through the sizzle, and I plop myself down on the tree stump. The spring water has caught some speed in the furrow and percolates rhythmically while an easy-breeze occasionally plays the slender olden-trunks against one another like squeaky fiddlesticks.

I tell myself that I could mic up some of the old screechy trunks that hang their heads over the creek, with my nice, new contact microphones, while I sit here waiting to charge the batteries that run my recorders. I also take the opportunity to dip some hydrophones into the creek, connect the two pairs of headphones, slip out the sleeping mat and I lay there listening as I adjust gain levels, lo-cuts, and limiters.

Carefully, I squeeze the contact microphones between the trunks and add some assistance by way of duct tape to keep things fixed.

Listen. Wait. Listen.

Time passes, minutes are rapidly dissolved into hours, and I note that the solar panel is half in shade. Every now and then, the trunks rub against one another in the wind, squeak, creak, *ioooåå, ioopåååååå!* they wail.

I reflect on how they have grown this way, voluntarily or involuntarily, entwined as they are. In some places, not even a finger can be pressed between the trunks. They have no air, no integrity growing in such a manner. But the lethargy is at the same time the very reason why they have become wirily tenacious enough to survive in this location.

I stroke my hand over the bark. *Rooooooooooom!*

More carefully. *Scchhhhhhh...*

Investigating and interacting with the trees through listening is like peeking inside their bodies. I can experience and visualise their inner layers, their moistness and density.

Dry, brittle segments oscillate in angular treble, almost insufferably, while more moist and thick layers further down emit heavy, muted bass tones. I also perceive the wind via its layers and can fathom its velocity and direction. As it grabs the branches, their material sings, and hums across a wide, atonal scale. I feel a great respect and connection to these trees, this place, this habitat.

I remain on the sleeping mat for a long time. The sun has practically sunk down into the moss and the damp is beginning to make me cold in my boots, reaching in beneath my clothes even though I am wearing wool socks – and I know that it is time to go home.

But suddenly, I hear a faint, odd ratcheting from one of my hydrophones.

Some kind of scratching, trampling, clattering in a steady rhythm of small feet, like from a smaller battalion of tin soldiers on patrol. I turn up the volume in the headphones as I rope with the long cable feverishly to find the source. At first, I see nothing, but then I understand: thousands of ants are with considerable determination using the human crossing bridge to traverse the waterway. Every dry patch is straight up teeming with ants. It looks like an exodus. They use detours; over, under, fiddling here and there, to reach the other side of the wide water furrow without soaking their socks. At times they halt, scan, and speed off again; a specimen or two even plunge into the stream and get dragged with it. They seriously desire to get to the other side.

This, somewhere, is the point at which I abandon the idea of acoustic loggers and my potential neutrality. I am a part of this forest, this world, and it is through listening interaction that I communicate with it, and learn about it, and myself.

The Inner Life of Matter

My artistic field recording practice probably has most kinship with that represented by the British sound pioneer Jez Riley French. Within such practice, the machine is used as an assistant and a filter, through which a “listening exploration” is achieved, and within which anything might happen. Jez himself listens for hours on end, via his self-made contact microphones, without necessarily even pressing “record”.

When I listen in this way, with maximum mental and bodily synch, it is like entering myself and another world, simultaneously. It is physically tiring and mentally downright exhausting. Upon exiting such a listening spiral, I often feel elated and happy, euphoric even – but also very, very tired. Occasionally, I am left with a minor, gnawing sense of there having been “more to explore” down there, which I must abandon. Life continues regardless and returns to normalcy. However, I have the privilege of carrying with me what I have just experienced, into it.

What I feel while engaging in this way, is that I am drained, that I want to quit, but am not able.

When I am in that state of mind, it is as though the materials around me speak to me, blink at me with one eye, a fleeting glimpse of their internal souls.

In such situations, the temptation to move closer and listen to “only this as well”, is overwhelming, even though the hours keep slipping away. After all, the specific humidity of the air, the season, temperature, and the sounds, the exact position of the movement of matter, on precisely this day, at just this specific moment, will never be the same again.

Sometimes I induce this state of mind when I experience trouble with ideas, works or ongoing projects that I am unable to resolve. In these cases, I need to do something to “invoke by distraction”, an opening, for example by walking or running. It does not work to just sit oneself down and think.

When I wander and simultaneously focus intently on a specific problem or a hard nut to crack, thoughts normally flitter off to some other place after some time. And then, suddenly, the most peculiar, alternative threads, images, fragments of all matter of possible and impossible solutions or alternatives pop up in my head. Not seldomly, I record the material directly into my phone. This has helped me many times.

Wandering, walking in various forms is an established artistic method, perhaps most known from the Situationists and psychogeography's "flâneries" and the term "derive" (drifting). The methodology of drifting involves both playful and constructive behaviour. It differs completely from the classical notions of *travelling or walking* in that it allows the human consciousness to randomly "collide" with the environments and ambiances the body confronts as it moves forward through them.

For me, this kind of attentive consciousness is very close to phenomenology's intentionality. Things or organisms come to life through me, as I direct my full and exploratory awareness towards them. Through my thinking and feeling, I might catch a glimpse of their absolute essence, just in that fleeting moment.

Perhaps there are also overlaps with hermeneutics and the "genuine productivity of events" that Hans-Georg Gadamer discusses in the book "Truth and Method". (3) Gadamer describes how new knowledge arises in the tension between "the familiar" (what we already know) and "the unfamiliar" (what we expose ourselves to as unknown). It is *in the collision* and in the temporal space between the two that our knowledge of reality can expand:

"This in-between is the real space of hermeneutics," Gadamer argues. (3)

I believe that all humans have this consciousness within them.

It wants to surface.

But it requires a substantial amount of "nothingness" to be present, which is an unusual luxury in the established normality. Having the opportunity to pull those brakes, *to just be*, is a form of extravagance in our time that I wish everyone could experience.

Things Speak to Me

I think back to my childhood and remember two events where a connection "with things" through the mode of listening became apparent.

The first one happened during a camping trip with the scouts.

It is a late autumn evening, probably in October, and there is a chill in the air. I am 13 or 14 years old. I am wearing green military pants that I bought at the surplus store, and a hand-knit sweater.

In my belt, there is a Mora knife in a brown leather sheath that I received for my birthday, with a sticker that reads "Sunesson" and my address on it. A large campfire is blazing outside the shelter where we will sleep, illuminating the logs around which the scout kids chatter, rosy-cheeked and warm, wrapped in their campfire blankets.

When I leave the warmth of the campfire and step out into the darkness, I can hardly see anything. The cold and darkness hit me, like a wall.

I remember closing my eyes to adjust, taking a few hesitant steps into the darkness.

I feel my way with my feet, and to my surprise, it goes well. I cautiously reach out with my hands, sharpening my hearing to navigate. I listen to the cold air rushing against my warm cheeks and the spruce branches brushing against the canvas of my military pants.

The spruce and pine needles and branches breaking under my boots send small echoes against the rocky hills. Strangely, I do not feel scared in the darkness without a flashlight. Instead, I sense the forest's mighty presence. Like a calm, reliable, constant being.

The second event (or number of events, that merged into one) happens when I am around 16 years old. It is the early 90s, and I have been to the House club "Academus" in Gothenburg, where my friend L. and I can get in without showing ID.

The rave culture is gaining momentum, and at Academus, we dance like the background dancers in the videos for Snap's "Mary Had a Little Boy" and "The Power" until our patchwork shirts are drenched in sweat. Outside, lighter, airier trance beats gradually sneak into the playlists at the various underground clubs around town.

When we get off night bus 795, L. and I always walk together to the viaduct on the outskirts of the suburban concrete. We hold each other's hands, and for a moment, we share the silence. Then we run, each in our own direction, into the summer night.

The light fog hovers over the Lindome River. The inexplicable footpaths crisscross, interrupted here and there by vast, grassy fields. An abandoned roundabout with a feeble berry bush in the centre, as decoration.

The summer sky is gigantic, wide, and bright in shades of pink and purple. The pale, yellow sunrays peek through, and the seagulls deliver their first morning cries.

The warm asphalt responds softly beneath my Converse sneakers as I run on light feet with the airflow, a thick and muted pulse along my body. The solitary sound lingers beneath the concrete viaducts. In the distance, a train gives a signal, and a few deer stare at me with their dark, moist eyes before they dart away.

The scent of honeysuckle, berries, and roses in the villa gardens mixes with the memory of the airy electronic tones and the temporary deafness from the insanely loud volume inside my tired head.

Euphoria and fear. The suddenly intense sensation of something else, beyond this place.

Sound as “Narrative Imagination”

There are many, different ways to approach listening. However, my work has increasingly focused on sound and listening as methods for exploration, understanding, alternative communication, and social interaction among different groups of people, places, and organisms.

It is about listening as a kind of *unifying practice* that allows us to slow down, take note, and interact with the environment, organisms, and people around us in an alternative way.

This may challenge simplified, stereotypical perceptions. Inside our heads, we all create different images influenced by who we are, defined by our previous experiences.

Such listening implies a shift toward a particular receptivity, perhaps even a state of *hyper-awareness*, a mode often described as “hyper vigilance”.

In a time marked by distance and growing lethargy, and a suppressed silence from people, organisms, and environments existing outside of the power structures, but also by extreme output in the form of talk and more talk, accompanied by a visual shockwave of fake images and videos, the need to listen to each other has never been greater. Perhaps we find ourselves right now in the kind of clamorous dystopia where billions of mobile phones fill even the slightest pause, as philosopher Gemma Corradi Fiumara warned us about already back in 1995.

“We have lost the ability to listen; we have inherited a limited, half-cut concept of language,” she claims. (4)

This also resonates with the thoughts of philosopher Hans Skjervheim, writing about the symptoms of modern society. His concerns regarding the transformation of the modern individual from a *three-way communicating, empathetic subject* into “*a one-way communicating thing*” describe a time when the engagement we need to understand “the other” has become thin or even disappeared, and where, at worst, we fall victim to “an objectivism” where we reduce each other to simplified stereotypes.

“By objectifying the other, one attacks their freedom. One makes the other a fact in the world of things. In this way, one can gain dominance over the other,” Skjervheim argues. (5)

Skjervheim's dystopia is, just like Fiumara's, frighteningly like our time, where emotions, morals, and values are daily equated with facts. The problem with this constant one-way communication is its aggressive focus on blaming "the others".

From a listening perspective, which, according to Skjervheim, is built on a compassionate triad, no one is without blame.

From such a standpoint, we are all parts of the same problem.

We all bear responsibility and should, therefore, activate ourselves, based on our conditions, to rethink and reconstruct ourselves, and thereby the world we live in. Such listening is an active act, a kind of world-building activism, according to art theorist Mika Hannula. (6)

The sound researcher Huw Hallam, also discusses how antagonism, born out of non-listening and apathetic indifference, erodes human relationships. How our deafness to, for instance, the effects of climate change, leads to ecological degradation at the very core of human diversity. And how ignorance and indifference towards increasing segregation lay the foundation for the complete acceptance of capitalist narratives, leaving large groups on the outside and causing polarisation, and hostility between people and environments. (7)

There are also parallels with Martha Nussbaum's reasoning based on Diogenes' idea "the world citizen". This sympathetic notion is based on the idea that a truly democratic world is built on the premise that everyone, not just a few, are listening "world citizens".

Such citizens relate to the world with great empathy, humility, knowledge, and respect.

They engage with the whole world and its various cultures, not just the nearest, and familiar ones. (8)

It is the task of society to contribute to the creation of such world citizens through education, for example. However, an unequal society only promotes the creation of a few privileged world citizens.

From my perspective, art also has a specific societal responsibility. The responsibility of art cannot be demanded through its performance; it cannot be defined or quantified. But it means that artists, as professionals and individuals in this world, have an important role and responsibility in their own, unique way.

For me, art is a kind of "Socratic practice" with a special ability to pose questions instead of providing answers, to open for uncomfortable dialogues that scratch the fine surface.

This mainly involves small nuances and shifts, but sometimes the experience can be sudden, transformative, and even life changing. Art is a risky business that society, in some way, must dare to trust.

Based on this reasoning, Nussbaum argues for the political potential of art, and its absolute freedom. She also warns against all tendencies toward conservative “formalism” where the significance of form and aesthetics takes precedence over content. (9)

Nussbaum highlights the importance of art and storytelling in our ability to engage in “narrative imagination”, a kind of empathy-building that develops as we immerse ourselves in the lives and experiences of others. Nussbaum argues that “narrative imagination” not only makes us feel greater sympathy for our fellow humans and enemies, but also makes us less angry and more inclined to forgive. She refers to the Stoic thinker Marcus Aurelius in this context.

” Marcus Aurelius made a further claim on behalf of narrative imagination: he argued that it contributes to retributive anger. He means that when we can imagine why someone has come to act in a way that might generally provoke an angry response, we will be less inclined to demonize the person, to think of him as purely evil and alien”. (10)

How Can Sound and Listening Then Serve as Forms of “Narrative Imagination” and Contribute to the Creation of “World Citizens”?

The artistic materiality of “sound” is a fluid, abstract, and relatively unexplored medium, and as such, it may possess ethical properties worth exploring through listening.

In his essay, “Politics, Identity, and Public Space”, (6) Mika Hannula reflects on what he specifically calls “the ethics of listening”, coined by sociologist Les Back in the book “The Art of Listening” written in 2007.

He quotes Les Back: ‘

“(The ethics of listening is...) a form of listening that challenges the listener’s preconceptions and positions while, at the same time, it engages critically with content of what is being said and heard. It also means, entering a difficult and challenging dialogue with one’s enemies as well as one’s allies”. (11)

Listening as Sonic Activism

I find myself at Region Uppsala's Community College in Ultuna. I am there as a researcher, working on my artistic research project "FACT stage one", which stands for "Fragmenturgy ACtion Tool". It is a case study within the framework of developing a model for sonic activism.

It is the first time that I am conducting research in a community college context.

The educational structure is unfamiliar and challenging for me. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic is ongoing, and the participants (as the students are referred to) are sporadically present. The teachers are often seen searching for them in the school's white-walled group rooms. Maintaining continuity in the project feels almost impossible, but Christina, the educator who has been instrumental in the collaboration, provides crucial support.

The students enrolled in the general curriculum are a group of individuals who (for various reasons) lack high school qualifications and are working to catch up at the community college.

Some participants have learning difficulties or other forms of disabilities, and some have arrived in Sweden as refugees.

One participant, K., is an unaccompanied minor refugee with trauma from the migration. According to the teacher, K. does not interact much during regular lessons and can sometimes disappear for extended periods.

It is ethically problematic and a pedagogical challenge.

Positive Silence, Noisy Spaces?

The day we are about to engage in our first sound interaction, does not start well.

We get started late, and T., who is sitting in the back, seems irritated. They inform me that the sounds I am playing are terrible. T. is sensitive to noise and protest that it "hurts the ears like hell".

We begin with a "sonic mapping" of the school building, a place they all know well.

The purpose of the exercise is to notice the place in a "different way" through listening to it as a sounding place.

The exercise begins by everyone choosing a location in the school building that we listen to together, one by one. Then, those who chose the location explain why they chose it, from a sonic perspective. This usually leads to excellent discussions and reflections, as it does now.

However, I notice that the discussions are not the most important thing. Instead, what seems most significant, is that even those who do not usually stand out, are given a place where they are listened to, without having to perform or *do* anything special. Even T. chooses a place, the kitchen. They do not say anything about it; they just stand there but look happy and engaged.

The two participants who often work together, P. and L., choose the yoga room, a dimly lit room filled with unused yoga mats and cushions that the school purchased at some point and then forgot about. The yoga mats, cushions, acoustic panels on the ceiling, and all the other padded materials in the room, dampen the sound. Some old curtains hang half asleep and contribute to the muffled acoustics in there.

Teacher Aron chooses a similar environment, the library, because it is a quiet and calm place with positive memories and books that he likes. Between stressful classes, he often retreats there to catch his breath. In the silence among the rows of neatly arranged books on solid, wooden shelves, he finds peace, and I notice that several other participants nod in agreement.

Next up is S.

They confidently cruise toward the loudest place in the entire building, the main artery itself. The old-fashioned entrance is impressive with its three floors and historic marble stairs, without any sound cushioning in the ceiling. The place is defined by a cold resonance as the sound bounces off all the hard surfaces, producing a continuous, sharp buzz of voices and echoing footsteps.

Since S. uses a wheelchair, they often wait for the accessible transportation in the ground floor lobby. Unfortunately, the disability transportation in Uppsala is often so late that “their butt goes numb” before the taxi arrives. Still, S. chose this location as their favorite.

“I hate the library because I hate books, and I hate the silence!” S. exclaims. “But here, there is always sound and life. I am always around people when I sit here and wait. Most people who pass by, stop and say hello and chat for a few minutes. It is definitely my favourite place at the school!”

A Voice Beyond Language

After lunch, the work intensifies as participants conduct detailed studies of the locations they chose through field recordings, using mobile phones or simple recorders. When the recordings

are complete, we create a sounding reconstruction containing all the sound fragments, a kind of collective sound web, together in a large room.

Everyone connects their mobile phones and a speaker, and listen, wait, listen, and adjust the volume and timing to incorporate their personal sounds into the collective work.

I call this ritual or model “*fragmenturgy*”, (12) and although I have performed the exercise many times with different groups, something new always emerges. It takes several attempts to get a good flow going since several participants have difficulty listening and synchronising their sounds with those of others. However, this does not seem to apply to K. They have moved around extensively and recorded lots of rumbling sounds on the borrowed recorder. K. waits, listens, waits, listens, and waits for the right moment. With great concentration, they let the powerful sounds ebb and flow while delicately adjusting the speakers’ volume. One of the two participants, who always work together, takes note of K.’s flow and nods appreciatively in their direction.

In her book “Poetic Justice”, and the chapter “Poets as Judges”, philosopher Martha Nussbaum continues her discussion of *narrative imagination*. As often, she highlights the poet Walt Whitman as an example of art’s democratising, and perhaps pedagogical, potential to give minority perspectives *a voice*, a kind of poetic equality, as exemplified by T., S., and K. above. (13)

Through the sound exercise, the group gains insight into S.’s perspective on noise and silence. In the case of K., sound may become a voice; *a materiality beyond language*, that they do not usually possess within the group.

Through sound, S.’s and K.’s perspectives may produce an alternative platform where they can be heard, upsetting our idea of “how things are”. Such sonic rituals may provide us with an expanded understanding of how different people relate to the same place from a sonic perspective that is unexpected, to the majority in the group.

An Invisible Piece of Fabric

I am back where I started, in the spruce plantation in Florarna. Well, not exactly where I started. I am in another spruce plantation nearby, as the specific plantation I chose for UNDER, has just been thinned.

It is the end of May 2022, and I am showing the work for the last time, perhaps forever.

The sound installation UNDER consists of a solar-powered 16-channel surround rig, predominantly created from recordings made with contact microphones underground. Many of the sounds originate from organisms whose sounds cannot be perceived by the naked ear.

Anna, a friend of mine from a boisterous London suburb, describes her experience of the sound installation as “a trip without the hangover afterwards”. As an explanation, she waves her hand and points to the underbelly of a decaying, fallen spruce tree. There, in a cavity, she shows me an almost invisible spider web that floats slowly in the air, and occasionally shimmers, when the light falls on its delicate weave.

The web is remarkably different from “ordinary spider webs”. It has an unusually thin, yet dense, weave. Almost like an invisible piece of fabric.

“Look, it’s like silk! Thin, thin, densely woven silk. I suddenly noticed it, and then I just couldn’t stop looking at it.”

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