Listening as Non-Extractive Technology

Through exploring the lab's overarching theme of 'natural intelligence', I have been drawn to interrogating what we conceive as technology and how a wider perspective might contribute to a shift in online cultures. Considering listening as a non-extractive technology allows space to question existing digital infrastructures and the ways we interact with(in) these spaces. In times of urgent crises such as we are living in today, listening is not presented here as a solution to low-tech advances, but as a speculative lens through which we might give space to alternative capacities of thinking and doing.

In her discussion on the Varia Collective, Christina stated that they had found word of mouth was most significant tool of communication for the collective's research sharing initiatives outside of corporate infrastructures. Reflecting on Christina's suggestion that infrastructures play a part in the way our voices mutate, we must be conscious of both heard and unheard voices in shaping not only definitions of natural intelligence, but online infrastructures themselves. If "every configuration of hearing and sounding implies people, power, and placement",[1] perhaps here whispered secrets become an encrypted file-sharing.

[1] Jonathan Sterne, "Hearing," in *Keywords in Sound*, eds David Novak, Sakakeeny, Matt (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2015), 78.

Reflecting further on the often appropriated practice of Indigenous Australian Songlines, these oral histories are essentially a form of knowledge exchange. Through sharing stories as data and as cartographies of place, the sonic retains its position as an original form of sensorial knowledge exchange – an aural data-transfer not reliant on the digital infrastructures of modernity. This relates also to ideas around 'low-fi' archiving addressed in collaborative roundtable discussions in the lab on 'digital discomfort'. Collective, embodied memories shared through a 'slow tech' and these oral histories present archiving, as Katía posed, as a reactivating of community practice facilitated through listening and storytelling. In listening to marginalised communities that have been practicing an ecological ethics inherently far beyond the more recent (re)turn towards multi-sensorial knowing in the West, we strive towards more inclusive spaces.

[2] Pauline Oliveros, "The Earth Worm Also Sings: A Composer's Practice of Deep Listening," *Leonardo Music Journal* 3 (1993): 35, accessed March 28, 2022, https://doi.org/10.2307/1513267.

"Listening guides my body. Sound is the fiber of my being and of all sentient beings without exception... My ear is an acoustic universe sending and receiving."[2]

The 'Temporal Tendrils of The Metabiont' workshop led by Louis Alderson-Bythell and Greg Orrom Swan, inspired by the Holobiont concept, explored alternative visions of multi-species ecologies "oscillating between digital and physical spaces" as "mysterious amalgamations". Tasked with considering what meta-humanism can teach us about our own reality, I asked: what is embodied knowledge in a digital space? Understanding listening as a technology may ground our corporealities in increasingly online worlds. Pauline Oliveros' practice of 'Deep Listening' details a heightened depth of sensorial knowledge. Through a series of 'sonic mediations' exercised in the form of text scores and workshops, Deep Listening encourages a deep knowing of the interconnections of self and environment. Sitting in the embodied presence of sound therefore affords the design of these systems an alternative way of thinking beyond the logical constraints of that which must be seen and solved.

[3] Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, (North Carolina, United States: Duke University Press, 2016), 20.

Donna Haraway famously wrote that we must learn to "stay with the trouble".[3] Can listening then embody a form of 'staying with'? This speaks to the essence of embracing discomfort again discussed in the digital discomfort roundtable. With concerns around digital hoarding and its contribution to data warming, we discussed a need to relinquish control and instead address the urgency of 'losing' knowledge. Embracing uncertainty and the discomfort that accompanies was discussed adjacent to the unreliability of memory. Instead of bookmarking and hoarding knowledge, what might happen if we were instead to slow down and take time to sit with less but explore this with more depth? Might services be designed around the art of letting go? This is something that Cassie Robinson is exploring through the 'Stewarding Loss' initiative aimed at supporting closure of dying organisations.

Similar to statements made by the Varia Collective, this is of course not to advocate for a purist approach to technological contemplations in the same vein as a sonic naturalism might propose. Listening through and with both analogue and digital technologies enables us to ask further questions of existing and alternative potential online infrastructures and the ecological ethics embedded within such systems. By giving space to that which is outside of ourselves in mutual conversation, listening can serve as a tool to challenge extractivist practices. Listening without intent to respond is a listening to receive, a listening to give reciprocally.

[4] Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet*, (Minnesota, United States: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

The word 'radical' stems from the Latin 'radix', meaning 'root'. If to be radical suggests a 'returning to', might we consider listening as a non-extractive technology that enables a 'returning to' and 'becoming with'[4] a future of regenerative human and more-than-human technologies? Might we consider listening and conversations as alternative cultures of natural intelligence? In a world that is increasingly accustomed to always being connected through online means, perhaps listening provides a non-extractive connectedness.