

Senses and the Soundscape

The composer Pauline Oliveros developed a practice in the 1970s called deep listening. Oliveros states that there are different modes of listening: passive and active, or directional and focused. This is a weeklong exercise that adapts some of Oliveros methods to explore listening to familiar spaces and engaging all of the senses. Listening is not something done in isolation; rather we experience space as a fully embodied sensory engagement. This exercise explores the part that listening with intent can have on all our sensory modalities.

The participant should engage over six days in 10 minutes of deep listening. Find a space that you are comfortable sitting or standing in, a cafe, park, library, street, hallway, doorway, etc. Then set a timer on a clock for ten minutes, take two slow deep breaths, and then listen to the space. First listen to particulars in the space, individual sounds, then, widen your listening to take in all the sounds of the space. Move slowly between the wide and narrow listening. Then think about the smells, the feel of a breeze on your skin, and the potential feel of the surrounding surfaces on your skin.

After, take two more deep breaths and find somewhere to sit and think for a while, then write about the sounds that you heard, what they meant to you, if they were sounds that belonged to the space, if the sounds surprised you or were part of the familiar sounds of that space. Then, analyze the other sensory experiences, if they had any impact on what you heard, if they connected or disconnected you to the listening experience.

The recording part of the exercise: Take a day to walk a familiar space, preferably a city or town, map a route beforehand, then for one hour record this journey including your own commentary about the sights, smells and other sensory experiences you encounter that link to the sounds you hear. Are the sensory triggers, do sights, sounds and smells connect you to memory.

A second optional exercise is to listen back to your recording and create a graphic score of this sensory journey. This can be used for future performances of your sensory journey.