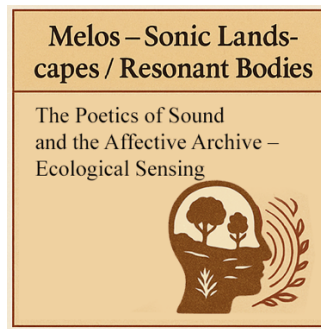


**Ecology of Memory:
Transgenerational Ecopoetics in Multimedia
by Madam Neverstop.**



Week 2: Melos – Sonic Landscapes / Resonant Bodies

Theme: The Poetics of Sound and the Affective Archive – Ecological Sensing

Theoretical Focus:

We shift from the visual to the auditory, asking how ecological memory is stored and transmitted through sound. Drawing on Gibbs' claim that "emotional memory constitutes the largest part of our memory" and Angela Impey's work on *Sound, Memory, and Dis/Placement*, we understand melos—following Bristow—as a rhythmic, embodied poetics. Sound becomes both archive and intervention. Sourcing inspiration from the archive of the *Poetic Phonotheque* offer models for how voice, ambient noise, and inherited melodies may act as rewilded testimony.

Practices:

- Field recording of local environmental sounds (streams, animals, machines, urban silence)
- Story-circle: sharing intergenerational lullabies, songs, or sonic traditions
- Readings and listening activities from various artists' sound-based work and examples from the Poetic Phonotheque.

Exercise:

Create an eco-sonic collage or sound-poem combining voice, field recordings, and archival fragments. Explore affect and memory through resonance and rhythm, drawing from Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to understand listening as an act of relational pedagogy.

'M'elody – melos

What might a rhythm analysis of the Environmental Humanities look like? What pitch and tonal colours might we elect from or add to our memories? Surprisingly we might go back to an idea of total history. Much of this essay has drawn from the analysis of Elspeth Probyn, and it is vital to turn to her research with the idea of history in mind. Probyn on Marcel Mauss: "Habit is an important tenet in Mauss' striving to comprehend 'l'homme total,' a vision of a sociological accounting for the totality that joins 'the local connectedness of form and content ... the tangible aspect of human life ... in relation to the body and its material experience, the techniques of work, and the rhythmic enactment of ritual and symbolic performance.'" Might we offer something similar in our environmental accounting? Might this move require the coexistence of the empirical and the poetic, the recorded and the oral, the symbolic and subsymbolic—informing and challenging each other? This type of outreach might set the stage for an aesthetic committed to observation and thus dedicated to motion, invention.

We might return to dynamic fields of experience.

– Tom Bristow, *Living Lexicon* for the Environmental Humanities.

A Conversation on Deep Listening by Elizabeth Torres (Madam Neverstop)

“For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.”
-Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed.

Dear friend,

There is much I want us to discuss, and so much urgency in getting to work, that I feel I must remember to tell my body to be still, and pay attention. I must learn to listen. Truly. What is it that the heart wants to say? What is happening around me that brings me to this point, to this need, to this memory? What is happening in the world right now in relation to how I am feeling, and how are my thoughts, my emotions, my movements and my creative output responding to this information? What is it that the heart really wants to say?

As we navigate through the complexities of our emotions and experiences, it is important to consider the broader context in which we find ourselves. The world around us is constantly changing, and these changes can have a profound impact on our inner landscape. By paying attention to the external events and circumstances that shape our lives, we can better understand the connections between our inner and outer worlds. This awareness allows us to respond more authentically and creatively to the challenges and opportunities that arise.

The past 5 years, I have truly and unintentionally become an archivist. I started the Poetic Phonotheque during the pandemic, by asking the poets in my network to send me a voice recording in any language of one of their poems. On the first week alone, I received around 100 poems. The archive now hosts thousands of multimedia poems, in audio and video, from all over the world and in many languages, as a living testimony of our need to document, narrate and pass on the stories all around us.

But the story of the Poetic Phonotheque, starts much earlier than that. As a child in Bogotá, Colombia, I often found myself drawn to the *Casa de Poesía Silva*, a cultural haven where poets gathered to share their work. This enchanting place housed a library filled with literary classics, a bookshop, and a phonotheque—a dedicated room, complete with a receptionist, where one could sit and listen to cassette recordings of poets from bygone eras. With headphones on, I would immerse myself in the voices of the past.

My frequent visits to this sanctuary taught me the profound significance of reading poetry aloud. I learned the art of intonation, the rhythm of breathing, the power of silence, and the inherent musicality of words. Yet, there was an even deeper lesson to be gleaned: the phonotheque was a portal to another world, where the wisdom of elders was preserved and shared through their spoken words. These auditory memories held such importance that, 25 years after leaving Colombia, I felt compelled to create a phonotheque for future generations.

As part of this course, I extend an invitation to you to navigate the [Phonotheque](#), be inspired by it, and consider submitting a piece too. It could be what you create in this lesson, or by the end of the course.

We understand melos as a rhythmic, embodied poetics. Sound becomes both archive and intervention. Angela Impey, in her work *Sound, Memory, and Dis/Placement*, eloquently states that “the sonic qualities of physical spaces and the affective aspects of sound and music-making influence how experiences are remembered at particular historical and geographical junctures.” This highlights the profound impact that sound has on our memory and how it can shape our understanding of the world around us.

There are questions. So many questions. So much noise inside and outside us. We must learn that the path leads us not to answers, but to deeper questions. For this reason, this week I invite you to reflect on “Listening Questions” by Pauline Oliveros, whose work and listening practice has taught us that deep listening is an act of profound engagement. Oliveros encourages us to listen beyond the surface, to the layers of sound that carry emotional and historical weight. Her practice teaches us to be present, to tune into the subtleties of our sonic environment, and to embrace the questions that arise from this attentive listening.

In this week, your practice will lead you to explore the depths of your sonic environment and the memories it holds. By engaging with the sounds around you, you will uncover layers of meaning and connection that might have previously gone unnoticed. This practice will help you develop a deeper understanding of how sound can act as both an archive and an intervention, preserving and transforming ecological memory.

As an exercise, rather than write (or in addition to writing), you will create an eco-sonic collage or sound-poem. This creative piece will combine your voice, field recordings, and archival fragments to explore the affective and mnemonic qualities of sound. By doing so, you will engage with the principles of deep listening. Through this exercise, you will not only document the sounds that shape your ecological memory but also reflect on how these sounds influence your thoughts, emotions, and creative output.

As we embark on this journey of exploring melos, let us remember that sound is not just a passive backdrop to our lives, but an active participant in the creation and preservation of memory.

*Madam
Neverstop*

LISTENING QUESTIONS

“The world of possibilities is sound”

- 1 What is your earliest memory of sound? How do you feel about it now?
- 2 When do you notice your breath?
- 3 What is attention?
- 4 Can you imagine composing or improvising a piece based on breath rhythms?
- 5 What sound reminds you of home?
- 6 Do you listen for sound in your dreams? What do you hear? How does it affect you?
- 7 The distinguished historian, William H. McNeil, has recently argued in his book *Keeping Together in Time* that “coordinated rhythmical activity is fundamental to life in society.” Can you imagine tracking a rhythm pattern in your daily life and writing about it?
- 8 Can you imagine a rhythm pattern for the rhythm circle with your own form of notation?
- 9 Can you imagine composing or improvising a piece for voices using attention patterns?
- 10 What is sound?
- 11 What is listening?
- 12 What action(s) is usually synchronized with sound?
- 13 When do you feel sound in your body?
- 14 What sound fascinates you?
- 15 What is a soundscape?
- 16 What are you hearing right now? How is it changing?
- 17 How many sounds can you hear all at once?
- 18 How far away can you hear sounds?
- 19 Are you sure that you are hearing every thing that there is to hear?
- 20 What more could you hear if you had bigger ears? (or smaller)
- 21 Can you hear more sounds if you are quiet? How many more?
- 22 How long can you listen?
- 23 When are you not listening?
- 24 Can you not listen when something is sounding?
- 25 Try not listening to anything. What happens?
- 26 How can you not listen if your ears never close?
- 27 What meaning does any sound have for you?
- 28 What is your favorite sound? How is it made? When can you hear it? Are you hearing it now?
- 29 What is the soundscape of the space you are now occupying?
- 30 How is the soundscape shaped? or what makes a soundscape?
- 31 What is the soundscape of your neighborhood?
- 32 What is the soundscape of your city?
- 33 How many different soundscapes can you imagine?
- 34 What would you like to have in your own soundscape?
- 35 What would you record to represent your soundscape?
- 36 What sound makes you speculative?
- 37 What sound gives you chills?
- 38 What sound ruffles your scalp?
- 39 What sound changes your breathing?
- 40 What sound would you like whispered in your ear?

Pauline Oliveros.

Practices:

1. Field Recording:

- Individually record local environmental sounds such as streams, animals, machines, and urban silence. Pay attention to the nuances and variations in these sounds, and consider how they contribute to the ecological memory of the place. You can do these recordings by using a hand-held digital recorder if you have one, or the voice recording app that is already in your cellphone. I personally like to use a cassette recorder for this, because of the crispiness in the sounds and how beautifully they are transformed by the tape, and then I connect the tape recorder and transfer it, or do a second round of recording from the analog tape recorder to a digital recorder or computer. Play around with this and let yourself be surprised by what sounds allow us to feel, how they transport us.

2. Personal Sonic Archive:

- Create a personal archive of intergenerational lullabies, songs, or sonic traditions that represent your transgenerational map of memories. That which was passed on to you by the elders, or that which you pass on to others as part of your culture. You can do this in writing, as a list, or as a playlist, or by recording bits and pieces.
- Reflect on how these sounds have been passed down through generations and their significance in preserving ecological memory. In your Memory Journal, write down these discoveries, and any other reflection and memory that came to mind along the way.

Exercise: Once you've played with this for long enough you will discover that you have an amalgam of stories to tell using these sounds, or using them as inspiration. Create an eco-sonic collage or sound-poem that combines your voice, field recordings, and archival fragments. This can be connected to the poem you wrote in the previous lesson, or something completely new, or a response, or a continuation.

Explore affect and memory through resonance and rhythm, drawing from Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to understand listening as an act of relational pedagogy. Use the sounds you have recorded and the stories in your personal sonic archive as inspiration for your collage or poem.

Visit the Poetic Phonotheque:

www.poeticphonotheque.com

SUBMISSION FOR WEEK 2.

Submit an audiopoem and a written reflection of this lesson's progress to

www.poeticphonotheque.com 😊