

# The Improvisation Studies Reader

## Spontaneous Acts

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## 6 Deep Listening Meditations: Egypt (1999)

Pauline Oliveros

The following "meditation" is a prime example of Pauline Oliveros' principle of Deep Listening: where listening is key to living. In her long career, Oliveros has gone from being a pioneer of tape and electronic music to the founder of the Deep Listening Institute in Kingston, NY. Born in Houston, Texas, she studied music in Houston and San Francisco, where she participated in collectively devised musics in the 1950s and was a founding member of the San Francisco Tape Music Center. When the Center moved to Mills College in Oakland, Oliveros became the first director of what is now called the Center for Contemporary Music. Her ideas of "sonic awareness," an acknowledgement of the many ways that sound shapes and permeates the human landscape, were the basis of "Sonic Meditations" that were the precursors to the Deep Listening projects. Oliveros' books include *Sounding the Margins: Collected Writings 1992–2009*, *Initiation Dream*, *Software for People*, *The Roots the Moment*, and *Deep Listening: A Composer's Sound Practice*. Accordionist, pioneer of electronic music and an adventurous composer, she has collaborated with several generations of improvisers including Terry Riley, Roscoe Mitchell, Anne Bourne, and Jesse Stewart.

Key words: USA; new music; interdisciplinary; electronics; collaboration

The following meditations were composed especially for the March process journey to Egypt led by Ione with Andrea Goodman, Alessandro Ashanti and Pauline Oliveros. It was intended that there would be one listening meditation given each day. The meditations should be done one at a time.

Imagine a sound that you want to hear. During a designated time, such as a day or night, take note of when and where you hear the sound.

From the field of sound that you are hearing, select a sound. Focus on it and amplify it with your imagination. Continue to hold and amplify the sound, even if the real sound has stopped. When you are done, scan your body/mind and notate your feelings.

Listen to any sound as if it had never been heard before.

Listening—I am sound. (Try listening to the words in different ways).

If you are looking—what are you listening to or for?

Focus on a sound that attracts your attention. Imagine a new or different context or field for that sound.

Listen all day to you  
Where does sound co  
Imagine that your ear  
20khz. What could y  
Can you find an unu  
If you are feeling so  
Listen for a heart so  
In a group or crowd  
What is the longest s  
What is the sound of  
the field sound of th  
do you tune in or ou  
Center through what  
If you could ride the  
Are sounds going ou  
Imaginary improvisa  
Sounds are coming a  
Where have you hea  
As you listen, the pa  
is sounding. The rel  
As you listen, the er

Listen all day to your own footsteps.

Where does sound come from?

Imagine that your ears have extended range above and below the normal range of 16hz to 20khz. What could you be hearing?

Can you find an unusual melody?

If you are feeling sound, where does it center or circulate in your body—psyche?

Listen for a heart sound. (Affective)

In a group or crowd can you hear with their ears?

What is the longest sound you heard today?

What is the sound of our group—of belonging—of not belonging? How do you listen to the field sound of the group? What does the leader listen for? The group member? How do you tune in or out?

Center through what is sounding.

If you could ride the waves of your favorite sound, where would it take you?

Are sounds going out or coming in?

Imaginary improvisation: You are holding the possibility of making the first sound.

Sounds are coming and going and yet creating a field of sound.

Where have you heard the most sounds? The most variety? The most diverse?

As you listen, the particles of sound (phonons) decide to be heard. Listening affects what is sounding. The relationship is symbiotic.

As you listen, the environment is enlivened. This is the listening effect.

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Oliveros' principle of Deep Listening has gone from the original field music in Houston to devised musics in the Houston Music Center. When she became the first director of the Center, her ideas of "sonic field music and sonic Meditations" that she developed in her books include *Field Music*, *Software*, *A Composer's Sound*, and *Adventurous composer*, including Terry Riley,

collaboration

arch process journey to Pauline Oliveros. It was each day. The meditations

, such as a day or night,

focus on it and amplify it, even if the real sound is subtle to your feelings.

(ways).

different context or field