

*To Whom / What / When / Why / Which Do We Listen?*

As is fitting for *openwork's* inaugural issue, the essays, artworks, poetry, and conversations that follow are marked by an extraordinarily productive incommensurability when it comes to dealing with a conceptual conceit as unwieldy, quotidian and ideologically malleable as listening. Emerging in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020, these essays span a bewildering array of disciplines—from the Sonic Insurgency Research Group's interrogation of Chicago property law and Alex Borkowski's archeological approach to Daphne Oram's radical oeuvre, to the interdisciplinary research into multimodal listening experiences of Lauren Hayes et. al. and Hadi Bastani and Navid Soltani's ethnographic listening to the planned town of Ekbatan in Iran.

Indeed, the question must be posed whether 'listening' is capable of tying this luminous array of scholarship and artistic inquiry together in a productive way. In some sense, this issue is a radical testament to our desire to resist the urge to get beyond listening in a substantially caring and critical way—especially in a 21st-century context where our entangled futures seem to preempt the entanglement of our past.

And yet, serious pressure is exerted on listening nonetheless, especially when it comes to attempts to devise conceptual apparatuses capable of describing listening along universal lines. If anything, conceptual migrations abound throughout the issue, allowing serious consideration for the stakes of listening across the variously crumbling, solidifying and veiled boundaries. There is a sense of urgency here too, for example, as Kamari Carter draws listening into the contemporary arena of the emergency signal. In the artist's 2019 sculpture *Landline, Lifeline*, four rotary telephones replay 911 calls. Your choice to connect discreet narratives of callers and responders implicates you in their scenario as an uncomfortable eavesdropper, as Carter explains in an interview with Julian Day.

In sound studies and associated disciplines, concepts of listening have evolved over recent decades—from the philosophically grounded theories of the 1990s, to the media archeology and sound in art perspectives of this early 21st-century, towards more attenuated understandings that look, or rather listen, more sociopolitically towards concepts of forensic listening, attunement, listening to and amending historic erasures and sonic justice. While this issue could never have been encyclopedic in its samplings of this broader trajectory, we hope that it offers a provocative rebuke to the popular notion that listening must ground its productivity in preemptive, point-blank deployments of concepts alone. Above all else, these extraordinary works allow us to listen to what continues on after preemptions unseen, unheard, and inconceivable.

–*Listening* Issue Editors  
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