

Co-dreaming Climates: Public Space for More-Than-Human Socialities

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CO-DREAMING CLIMATES: Public Space for More-Than-Human Socialities

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Keywords

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Abstract

In the face of ongoing but unevenly distributed planetary catastrophe and, in the words of Patricia Reed, an urgent need to "make inhabitable worlds in common", I argue for listening as a mode of urban spatial practice that offers the opportunity to remake our relations with more-than-human others. Recent work in sound studies has explored the potential of listening to create mutuality, dissent and agency; here I am interested in how pedagogical tools can be designed to support these more radical modes of listening. Weaving essay writing with transcribed audio from a webtool that deploys field recordings and from staged conversations around food, I share experiments drawn from collaborations over the past two years. This is work developed as an architectural researcher, working with performance makers, sonic artists, urban curators, natural scientists, and community and cultural organisations who are seeking to make public space for climate. Through this transdisciplinary praxis, listening is deployed to produce personal and social affects, space for political encounter, and attunement to ecological relations. In coming together to listen, we sought to create spaces for co-dreaming climates, where climate is understood as in crisis, as atmosphere, and as potentiality.

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How might situated practices of listening produce public space for climate justice?

In the face of an urgent need to learn how to "make inhabitable worlds in common" (Reed, 2021) I argue for the employment of the sonic as a mode of relational and spatial practice that offers the opportunity to rethink and remake our relations with more-than-human others (AM Kanngieser, 2020). Patricia Reeds' work on Planetarity (Reed, 2020) stresses the need to think of our interdependencies at the scale of the earth, but simultaneously poses a challenge to the notion of the Anthropocene which, in its location of responsibility with 'the human', jumps to the scale of the species, without being clear that it is certain humans who are more responsible for the intertwined crisies that we face today (Wynter, 2003, Yusoff, 2018). In response to this challenge, which demands an explicit engagement with questions of climate justice (Demos, 2020) and the extension of notions of spatial agency (Awan et al, 2008) beyond the human, we co-design modes and tools of sensitisation and attunement that seek to enable greater collective climate "respons-ability" (Haraway, 2017).

This paper sets out two experiments in assembling publics around questions of climate, drawn from my work from 2020-23, that employ different forms of listening. In co-designing

What is described here is part of a wider ecology of feminist spatial practices, locating across the city of Sheffield, and into other places; Berlin, Belgrade, through long-term collaborations, which for me are underpinned by an interest in commoning. To common is to seek to develop approaches that challenge exclusions, displacements, and enclosures, and support the development of new subjectivities, and practices of care and mutuality (Stavrides, 2014), (Leontidou, 2017), (Urban Commons Research Collective, 2022). Historically commoning requires, and denotes, a close and practiced understanding of the climate, the

this work, I was interested in how political, ecological, cultural and social forms of listening

might be practiced, in relation to questions of climate crisis.

flora and fauna, and the community as a complex and evolving entity. Commons historian, Peter Linebaugh argues that the history of commons is closely intertwined with the history of ecological systems and the ways in which human communities have interacted with and shaped their environments (Linebaugh, 2009). He contends that commoning, or the practice of managing shared resources and spaces, has historically been closely linked to ecological knowledge and practices. This opens the question, of how we can become aware of and in tune with these complex life ways.

Weaving transcribed audio and essay I will share experiments drawn from my transdisciplinary work as an architectural researcher, working with a performance maker, sonic artists, urban curators, natural scientists, and community and cultural organisations that document the assembling of publics around questions of climate crisis. In this body of work, the sonic is deployed 'as a means for enabling new conceptualizations of the public sphere and expressions of emancipatory practices' (La Belle, 2020). These two projects, a web-tool used in conjunction with practices of embodied listening and a performative research project that instigates dialogue and polylogue. Each engages with questions of how space for public conversation and learning around climate crisis might be produced, in ways that are connected to, and grow from the particularities of their urban context.

Experiments in Listening in the City

Through engaging in the sonic as a spatial practice, I wished to explore how it may enable a greater recognition of our interdependence and offer insight into ways of living-in-common. Entering the field of sound studies as an architectural designer, I was interested in how listening makes space and relations, of the everyday. Jean-Luc Nancy reminds us that listening is not a passive activity, but one that actively shapes our perception of the world,

arguing for its power to create a sense of community and shared experience. For Nancy, this implies a responsibility to be open to the other, to be open to the world, to be open to the self (Nancy, 2007). The implication of this appeal is to engage with listening as a practice; that you must learn different ways of doing it.

Sound Art Collective Ultra Red argue that listening is a crucial skill that can be used to challenge power structures and create social change, as it can help us sense power dynamics and social inequalities. By choosing to pay attention, we can unlearn certain preconceptions, and dominant readings of social context (Ultra Red, 2012). Movements such as 'slow radio', require an investment of labour, and through this, seek to develop a deeper engagement with sound (Lacey, 2022 p118). In The Force of Listening, Lucia Farinati & Claudia Firth draw on feminist histories of consciousness raising, to emphasise political dimensions of listening,

"How can listening be understood as a practice that might activate a space and a time which is not purely theoretical, experiential or perceptual, but intrinsically social and political for the reason that it sustains an 'other-doing'?" (Firth and Farinati, 2017, p20)

This directional listening is about a sustained attention to one-another, in ways that build subjectivities and capacities. It is dependent on a commitment to others, and to engage in an emerging dynamic relationship to the concerns at hand. In her essay, Listening, Empathy and Difference, Lucia Farinati points out that these approaches to listening are a journey towards solidarity, based on respect, rather than empathy or care (Farinati, 2022), (Di Cori, 2017). Listening, when deployed to offer space for politics implies listening across difference, and is therefore, not always agreeable, or easy.

Listening has taken an increasing prominent role within urban scholarship in recent years, in order to understand cultures of place. The roots of many of these recent practices, can be found in the work of Murray Schaffer and Hildegard Westerkamp who, in their desire to explore our perceptions towards the environment and living beings, instigated the World

Soundscape Project (Westerkamp, 1994), (Traux, 2015). Its aim was to reframe the conversation around 'noise pollution', to ask us to think about the soundscape in its entirety, as something unique to a location. Westerkamp went on to develop urban soundwalks, as an embodied and mobile practice of paying attention (Westerkamp, 1996). In the Acoustic City, Matthew Gandy and BJ Nilsen bring together essays and field recordings that speak to an interest situated at the intersection of architecture, acoustic ecology, and the study of urban soundscapes (Gandy and Nilsen, 2014). They wished to draw attention to the distinct qualities of the acoustic environment found in cities both in soundscapes, the politics of urban noise, and practices of acoustic flânerie and the capturing sonic environments through recording. Gallagher and Prior emphasise the role of listening, audio recording and playback to examine how sound and music are implicated in "construction and mediation of urban, rural, public and private environments, the production of identity and difference, and the exercise of power through space" (Gallagher and Prior, 2014). Sandra Jasper investigates the specific sound cultures and "acoustic ecologies", that emerge in the interplay between music, urban location, and sound (Jasper, 2018), (Jasper, 2020). These situated everyday practices, explore notions of indeterminacy, and contingency, alongside longer cultural practices.

The sonic plays an important role in shaping our perception and experience of space, and our more-than-human relations. Design Anthropologist, Shannon Mattern claims sound as a key aspect of the "atmospheric commons" (Mattern, 2015). In framing our shared experience of sound in this way, Mattern draws our attention to how we each should take responsibility for our role as soundmakers. In later work, she goes on to extend this thought and explicitly explore the implications for an ethics of ecological care:

"If [...] we listen to the city at macro scale, as an ecology of diverse lifeforms and resources and habitats, we might recognize a dynamic, vital system to be stewarded for future generations of humans and other species." (Mattern, 2020)

Sound has a vital role in interrelations of an ecosystem, for example, birds will create 'an acoustic niche', defined temporally, spatially, but also sonically- and humans are increasingly taking the available range— for example if the sounds of a new road occupy a certain frequency, the birds will need to adjust their mating or warning calls in ways that have physiological effects, for example by requiring different vibrations that demand greater calorie input (Skulski, 2021). Through such an understanding, we can see the crucial role of the sonic, not just in processes of aural communication, or the production of affects, but in the making of worlds. Such sonic theorists and practitioners invite us to develop situations and practices of listening that enable us to understand and be in the world with a greater ecological sensibility.

Commoning Climates

In trying to grasp climate crisis as a public problem, I have found the term planetarity useful to think with. It is a term originally offered by Gayatri Spivak, in response to what she called "planet speak"—the notion that many environmentalists and environmental discourses consider the planet as a continuous natural space, rather than a distinctly, and differentiated political one (Spivak, 1997). In her work that explores the ways that colonialism and imperialism have shaped the relationship between the Global North and the Global South, Spivak argues that the Global North's exploitation of the natural resources and labour of colonised peoples has led to environmental devastation and the ongoing oppression of marginalized and racialised communities. She is prompting us to put questions of social, economic and ecological justice at the heart of any work around climate, and to pay attention to power relations and asymmetries of responsibility and affect, and the knowledges of resistance and refusal such marginalised positions offer.

Artist and writer Patricia Reed takes up the term planetarity more recently,

"Planetarity [can be understood] as more than mere sum of earthly interwoven substances and processes but drawing on co-shaped by diverse practices; scientific, conceptual, technological, socio-political through which planetarity becomes intelligible as a multidimensional minutely knitted web of localities, co-shaped by the political practices and the self-understanding of humans. [...] Not only an object of scientific knowing but subject to the manifest know-how of coexistence." (Reed, 2020).

Reed argues here that climate crisis requires us to engage with scientific knowledge, and its various tools and methods for sensing and studying the earth in its complexity, in ways that are often counterinitiative, and can be understood at the scale of the earth. Yet, she simultaneously reminds us that the local and the particular is vital, and scientific understandings must be connected with situated knowledges; what feminist thinkers call 'know-how', learning how to 'live with' on a broken planet. In this way, planetarity seeks a way to build links between scientific knowledge and socio-political responsibilities.

So as a public question, we can understand that climate is one that is often depoliticised and individualised, how can we come together in ways that acknowledge and challenge this framing? In 'Against the Anthropocene,' TJ Demos argues that images play a crucial role in shaping our understanding of the Anthropocene and the environmental crisis and he is critical of the way that images of the Anthropocene often focus on spectacular and dramatic events, such as melting ice caps and natural disasters, rather than the more commonplace and systemic forms of environmental degradation that are caused by capitalist development and colonialism (Demos, 2017). He argues that such imagery can distract from the political and economic roots of the crisis and obscure the ways in which it disproportionately affects marginalized communities. Demos advocates for the role of artistic practices here, drawing our attention to how images are produced, by which tools, which models and with whose imaginaries.

In 'Listening to noise and silence', (2010) Simone Voegelin says: "Seeing always happens in a meta-position, away from the seen, however close. And this distance enables a detachment and objectivity, that presents itself as truth. [...] By contrast hearing is full of doubt. [...] Hearing does not offer a meta position, there is no place where I am not simultaneously with the heard. [...] I cannot hear it if I am not immersed in the auditory object, which is not its source but sound as sound itself." Whilst inspired by this connection of listening to indeterminacy, my interest in engaging with the sonic as a spatial practice is not driven by a wish to re-inscribe a simplistic binary between image and sound-rather, in drawing on Demos' work, I wish to acknowledge that in their predominantly visual representations, science and the media tend to naturalize and depoliticize the environmental crisis, depicting it as a neutral and objective phenomenon caused by human activity in general, rather than specific political and economic systems. To explore the sonic in relation to developing public and collective engagement with climate crisis is to seek to develop modes that are not final, determined or complete, and in doing so demand an effort to explore, and question as a collective and ongoing process of shared learning. Through the projects outlined we are seeking to explore how sound might offer other ways of collectively sensing, noticing and understanding the everyday manifestations of this shared, but unevenly felt crisis and changing planet.

Listening as spatial practice

ark-sheffield, is a performative research projectⁱ which structured different forms of conversation in sites of social eating across the city of Sheffield over the course of three months: the intimacy of dialogues; convivially, over shared food with new people; informally whilst salvaging or co-building; and through polyvocality on stage. Sonic Acts of Noticing is

a web-platform that seeks to support sensitisation to acts care and interdependence through establishing textually augmented practices of listening to field recordings. Whilst I write about these two projects discretely in greater depth with their co-authors elsewhere (Udall, Orlek, and De Little, Forthcoming) and (Payne, Udall and De Little, Forthcoming), I wished to make space to reflect *across* this body of work from an architectural disciplinary perspective, and specifically as situated struggles for climate justice within two different cities—Berlin, Germany and Sheffield, UK. In Berlin, with Sonic Acts of Noticing we worked with curators, pedagogues, custodians of a natureculture learning site, students, artists and activists concerned with developing ecological sensitivities. We followed the course of the canal and the River Spree, weaving through the parks, streets and squares of Neukolnn, and coming together on the generous balcony of an arts centre in a former pumping station on the river's bank. In Sheffield we occupied former factories repurposed as community spaces, on the edge of the city centre, re-establishing long-standing relationships with organisations that used different shared food cultures as an infrastructuring of care within an unequal city.

We, a constellation of artists, activists and researchers, take part in processes that hope to foster care, solidarity, and support other ways of sustaining ourselves and one another. This iterative and convivial development, moving between different emergent groups and contexts, and shifting positions (in my case as architectural professional, academic and pedagogue— and as citizen, learner, and practitioner), is to take part in a process of weaving spaces for informal learning and developing capacities for the work of collectively remaking the city. Through situating this firmly in the everyday it supports "commonplace theorising" (Lisiak, 2022). Some of the work happens within or from a higher educational institutional context, and other work starts elsewhere, but all is concerned with how public space is made for engaging in climate as a struggle for justice.

"Did I forget, never know, not look- or just not care?" (Haraway, 2017, p11).

How do you learn to learn, how do you learn to care about climate? How do you hold things in mind— not just as individual, but with others, elsewhere as well as on your doorstep? How do you gain collective forms of agency in the face of something so overwhelming as climate crisis? For Donna Haraway the process of gaining response-ability is linked to the idea of autopoiesis- "making-with" — acknowledging that anything is always made with diverse others (human and more-than-human), but also, crucially, response-ability requires deliberately engaging in creative uncertainty— as practice— the passing back and forth and "[...] passion and action, detachment and attachment" (Haraway, 2016). So, for me, setting up these relays between projects, peoples, emergent situations, becomes a useful way to think about climate in public— as a shared crisis, we can each grasp and pass on, and receive back, in ways that are transformed and potentially transform us. These projects are in progress, and here I will share some of the ways that practices of listening were supported and the agencies they offered by drawing on the work of sound studies scholars and practitioners that informed their development.

Sonic acts of noticing: careful listening

Sonic Acts of Noticing is a web-tool that hosts field recordings and brings them into relation with textual artefacts temporally coded to the audio, in ways that augment and dissonate listening. As they listen, the user can also interact with these texts by either closing them or adding them to a library, which is then downloadable as a timecoded and referenced pdf archive of a visit to the site. The first iteration of the website held field recordings produced as part of Studio Polpoⁱⁱ's the 'High Street of Exchanges' installation for the Venice Biennale Architecture Pavilion, which were recorded on pavements, a social centre and

barbers and hairdressers in the city of Sheffield. In the context of an architectural profession where the visual dominates and is often deployed to sell property or increase value, we were curious about how listening may enable us to engage with highstreets otherwise. We started form a position that recognised high streets as an infrastructure of mutuality and care (Hall, 2021), (Hall, et al, 2015).



Sonic Acts of Noticing at Floating University, Driving the Human Festival, Radialsystem Berlin © Camille Blake

The website was developed through shared practices of listening and re-listening to the field recordings, and engaging in collective and personal journaling, essay writing and transcription of what was heard. We have subsequently tested and further developed the tool with collaborators in different contexts, including London, Langsett, Belgrade, and Berlin. In Berlin we worked at floating university, as part of the Driving the Human Festival. Located in the urban centre of Berlin, floating university, is a natureculture learning site (Floating eV. 2020), which is situated on a rainwater retention pool that was the runoff from Tempelhof airport and was filled with concrete by the US army after the war. It is still part of the water

Architecture Platform, *Sonic Acts of Noticing* collaborated with Gilly Karjevsky and Rosario Telavi of feminist collective *Soft Agency* to trace water and walk with it. We collectively engaged in listening sensitisation exercises, led by Alex De Little, and informed by the scores of Paulene Oliveros, who, in later life became interested in composing "situations for listening" (Oliveros, 2010; 1974). We wove along the waterways, and listened with hydrophones, geophones, and an ambient zoom mic, the audio shared with those who we walked with via silent disco headsets. The rumbles and vibrations of a metal bridge combined with trickles of the water the ran below it, and the squeals and chatter of families laying in the park. We came across memories of protests for granting asylum, music (live), swans (very alive, diving for the hydrophones mistakenly thinking they were food), playing, and fighting.

004A +↑×

The bubbles sound tiny;
Where are we?; bees;
Cycling by a river; window
while storm; Water is
probably overflowing;
headache; Boiler room;
Soothing; Falling; Small
straws; formula 1; Food
bank; Rush; Finally out;
Family; Are we listening
while chatting; crows
migrating; Nonhuman
others are here; duck!!; yay

'Where are we?' Sonic Acts of Noticing: Floating to Radialsystem, Sonic Acts of Noticing Together with *Soft Agency* we made what is known as a 'parasitic reader'ⁱⁱⁱ on the theme of water, which had hyrdrofeminist texts, poetry, excerpts of radio shows, and storytelling. People were invited to read aloud, as they found the moment, and to share stories and histories of the places that we encountered. The extended field recording then became part of the web-tool. We then gathered at a cultural venue, and engaged in a bodily sensitisation exercise, and a collective re-listened to the audio weave, journaling what it was we were hearing, paying attention together. The shared journaling became text that emerged on screen temporally coded to the audio, randomly layering on screen, but manipulable by the web-tool visitor.

3. FLOATING TO RADIALSYSTEM 03:52 EXIT



Body of Water in Undufful Daughters: Mobilizing Future Concepts, Bodies and Subjectivities in Ferminst Thought and Practice, Eds. Henriette Gunkel, ChrysanthiNigianni and Fanny Söderbäck. Ind

'Even while' Sonic Acts of Noticing: Floating to Radialsystem, Sonic Acts of Noticing

ArkSheffield: social and cultural production of space

Ark-sheffield, is a project that is being developed with community and cultural organisations throughout the city of Sheffield, UK^{iv}. We became interested in what it means to start a conversation in a particular place—in what kinds of practices of discussion already existed in that context, what ways of speaking about climate might emerge from the histories of that site, and what kinds of knowledges were produced through bringing people together to hear one another. We wished to resist essentialist or outsider views of different communities in the city, and invited challenge to perceived lack of 'climate literacy', making space for

people to explore how it might bear on their lives, and what their agencies or concerns may be. It could be understood to be an investigation into the "[...] participatory and polyphonic potential of communal sonic practices [...]" (Voegelin and Wright, p35).

We co-hosted meals with many; diaspora African and Caribbean community organisers, refugee kitchens, radical social centres using food waste, inner city farms, cafes training people to chef who have been in the criminal justice system or experience severe mental health issues. In the face of rising inequality, exclusion and dispossession, each organisation was engaged in critical care work and trying to build the city otherwise. Each had different cooking and eating, different atmospheres and constituencies. Together, we then started to cross-pollinate the conversations across the sites- building exchanges, and even friendships, but sometimes also encountering resistances and discomfort. This worked by inviting people and bringing audio from one place to another. People from the meals were then brought together in unlikely pairings, and we made an audio weave of their twenty-minute intimate conversations. The performance was hosted at the Crucible Theatre with an audience of 400. Those on stage were those who had taken part in the dialogues. Post listening to the dialogues, our prompts elicited discussion from the participants, where they spoke about what they had heard with one another and to the wider audience, and, at this moment of mass assembly, to reflect upon 'what now?'

Emre 25:19

What now? What now?

that's a good question.

Emre 25:41

It's a good combination of words, what and now, because the future takes shape now; our decisions collective actions, is shaping the future... so what, what do we do about it? I guess we need to open more spaces of conversation,

Emre 26:29

...like this expand these collectives expand these alliances, coalitions. And this what now takes, takes shape, in different territories. And so, you're from Greece. Yeah, living in Sheffield. I'm from Cyprus, living in Sheffield. So, what this question What now? needs to be tackled in different geographies, different territories as well?

Stasha 28:58

And it's the thing that sometimes that that phrase that came out of the BLM Movement, it was the first time I heard it. Emre, it said I understand that I will never understand. But I stand with you.

That really resonated with me because no matter how much you try and see something from another person's point of view you don't.

Emre 29:33

You know there's always that gap?

Stasha 29:34

Yes. But the fact that you're trying to, and you say that I'm going to be an active ally to you, I think is very important.

Emre 29:55

And it's a very creative, creative gap. The difference between people. Yeah. So, protecting the difference, then is quite, quite a struggle that we should continue to have. Yes. So, I think that's, that's one of the issues left out usually in this climate discourses, isn't it? Yes, diversity, diversity, difference, difference of species, but difference in people as well.

Stasha 30:34

That diversity can be our ultimate strength here. It's something I think that because we were not taught. Maybe this is a bit stronger me to say, but I believe that.

Stasha 30:59

we don't necessarily know how to communicate in a healthy way. And out of that emerges, the fact that we think diversity is something to be feared, but it's, it's not. Or something uncomfortable, like to talk about.

Emre 31:20

I mean, going back to the geographies that we come from. I'm from the northern part of Cyprus, so I speak Turkish. But you know that the island is divided by that.

Stasha 31:38

My granddad's from Cyprus? I wanted to tell you Yeah, right. He, he left I think he was from, from Augusta.

Emre 31.53

I am from Augusta!

Stasha Oh, my goodness.

Emre 31:53

Next to the border. Yeah. So that that kind of alliance building between differences becomes much more powerful.

Listening and Planetarity

In writing across these associated but different projects, I wished to make space to reflect on their specific relation to situated struggles for climate justice as material and spatial practices from an architectural disciplinary perspective in order to reflect upon their implications at this critical moment. In these projects listening operates in affective, political and ecological registers. It allows for the knowhow to emerge in relation to climate crisis, that is understood in relation to multispecies lives and lifeways. This body of work explicitly responds to Patricia Reed's recent invocation to "[...] pay attention to the nested scales of coexistence within [the totality of the planetary]" (Reed, 2019).

In Berlin, the walk interwove audio recordings of ambient sounds led by personal curiosity. Walking and gathering in groups fostered different prompted and improvised approaches to listening and sounding, of small constantly shifting configurations of the walkers. The hydrophones, geophones and ambient microphones allowed the drawing out and amplification of ecological and material processes of ground, water, birds, voices, stories, making audible their entanglement. Through forming a listening circle, we came together to speculate on what we had made, heard and understood, as a collective and creative finding out. The Sonic Acts of Noticing web platform augmented and challenged that re-listening process through textual artefact and shared journaling. In ark-Sheffield, we valorised existing skilled and long-established practices of listening, and speaking that existed in different organisations that were seeking to reshape the city. Through hosting the project, we defined spacetime for listening around climate that was not instrumentalised, or didactic, but allowed for plurality, and uncertainty. We challenged the notion that there was a centre of expertise or established place of departure for public conversations about climate crisis, instead, offering situated, distributed and emergent conversations to interconnect. Our 'what

now?', as both a call to action and statement of collective agency, was anchored in this multiply constituted purpose.

Co-dreaming climates: (what listening can do for public space and climate crisis)

Each practice brings together different constituencies, constellations and configurations. Each has different protocols, affordances and potentials, expressed through different genres—computer code, stage settings, co-building, and eating together, each time they can play out differently. In this way, they can be understood as offering other ways of dreaming the future, whilst paying attention to the situated and material realties of those engaging in listening. As Renata Tyszczuk *notes*, "The way a society imagines its future matters, and who gets to do the imagining matters." (Tyszczuk, 2021).

This speculative body of work seeks to convene space that is situated, and punctual, drawing forth the particular and resonant, but also opens to journeys, and (hi)stories from elsewhere, that offer other ways of doing and being together. For us, (and here the 'us' are the various collectives with which this work has been developed) listening has become a way to rethink how publics and the social are composed- to move beyond our assumptions about how things are and what might be possible. Attention is drawn to atmosphere, what can be said, who listens, and who is absent, and interdependencies between human and more than human others. To start by listening is to encounter the landscapes of the city otherwise, and to open up other possible ways of living with one another. In coming together to listen, we sought to create spaces for co-dreaming climates, where climate is understood as in crisis, as atmosphere, and as potentiality. Each mode of sonic practice allowed for different rhythms, intensities, realisations, and stories to unfold. These became the start of imagining the world otherwise. They very much felt like a beginning- still in many ways unformed, and tentative.

They require repetition, and many other hands and ears to shape them. Some of the more difficult processes of listening are yet to come...

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Data

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