

BREAK DOWN

Workbook #3

Sonic
Meditations:
Immersive
Ecological
Entanglement

Volume 1

BKDN BKDN is a long term effort to individually and collectively de-industrialize our sense of self, and build civil society responses and infrastructure that helps us endure collapse. We use camps in rural settings, workshops in large cities, publications, and a developing vocabulary, to shift away from petroleum culture.

**Breakdown Break Down
Workbook #3, Volume 1
November 2017**

This is the third in a series of workbooks published by BKDN BKDN Press. The series is to help focus discussions and efforts to shift the ways in which you talk about and practice ecological awareness in everyday situations.

Sonic Meditations: Immersive Ecological Entanglement

The third BKDN BKDN workbook is for facilitating Deep Listening sonic meditations with others to individually and collectively experience immersive ecological entanglement. The publication is a tools for sinking in to relationships you have with the world around you, helping to bypass the ways you have been taught to limit or ignore the subtleties of the more-than-human world you are immersed in. This workbook has been developed over the past decade through many experiments in Deep Listening sessions that I have facilitated. Since first being exposed to Deep Listening, I was interested in how

it could create empathies with the environment that I was not capable of before.

DEEP LISTENING

Deep Listening is listening in every possible way to everything possible to hear no matter what you are doing. Such intense listening includes the sounds of daily life, of nature, or one's own thoughts as well as musical sounds. Deep Listening represents a heightened state of awareness and connects to all that there is. As a composer I make my music through Deep Listening.

–Pauline Oliveros, composer & musician

Pauline Oliveros (1932-2016) was a pioneering electronic musician and composer.

She founded Deep Listening and developed it over 40 years with many other people in a continually growing international community. She founded the The Center for Deep Listening, in Troy, NY, which offers certification courses in Deep Listening. I spent a year getting certified in Deep Listening, and continue to facilitate sessions, primarily at conservation sites.

Pauline often told the story about when she started first teaching. It was at a conservatory. Her students were learning to be classical musicians. She noticed that they would perform, but would not listen to each other. She developed techniques to get them to pay closer attention to the sounds they were making, how the sounds behaved, and how the sounds impacted their fellow students and the spaces they

performed in. These initial efforts eventually were explored and developed into what is now called Deep Listening.

COMPONENTS OF DEEP LISTENING

The three main components of Deep Listening are: listening, moving and dreaming. A student of Deep Listening is trained to learn to listen and develop awareness in these three areas. From the beginning, one is taught to understand the difference between hearing (passively receiving sound) and listening (actively giving one's attention to what is sounding—that is, what is making sound). This publication focuses on the aspects of Deep Listening

that include the combination of listening and moving.

SENDING AND RECEIVING SOUND

Sound is either being sent or received. You often experience both simultaneously. You are constantly experiencing situations where your surroundings are sending many sounds while you receive them and send your own back. A common situation is when I am talking to a friend, I am sending sound, and we are both receiving it in order to make meaning or understand the purpose of the sound.

SILENCE AND SOUND

There is no sound without silence; the inverse is also true: there is no silence without sound. They are two intermingled states that rely on each other for us to make sense of what is sounding or being received around us. One can listen to sound just as easily as one can listen to silence. Sounds and silences have particular shapes, durations, tones, and other qualities that one can discern when giving close attention. An easy way to demonstrate the presence of silence is to have someone stand in front of you and to clap your hands around her showing all the silences that were waiting to receive the clapping. Another example that helps you understand how much silence you are constantly hearing, if not listening to, is to

look at clouds floating way overhead and to imaging fireworks exploding in their midst. You would be able to immediately locate the sound. For this sound to have an understandable location, duration, and strong presence, you must have already been listening to giant spaces of silence. If they were not silent, then you would not have been able to have heard or located the firework.

SONIC MEDITATIONS

Deep Listening investigates silences and sounds through the use of Sonic Meditations. Sonic meditations are written or spoken instructions that anyone can do to explore listening. Sonic meditations are highly impactful for group work over

a long period of time with regular meetings. Any persons who are willing to commit themselves can participate. Sonic meditations help focus your listening on limitless explorations of what is sounding.

SONIC ENVIRONMENTS

Sound occurs in a setting, a sonic environment, or soundscape—first articulated by Murray Schafer, a composer and naturalist. Sometimes sound travels from one sonic environment to another; I have facilitated sonic meditations on the edges of, for example, a wetland and forest so those listening can begin to understand how the sound moves differently through, and between each area. The features of those environments contribute to how

the sound moves through them—sounds bounce off hard surfaces or get absorbed by dense structures. There are an infinite number of sonic environment permutations that you will encounter. Sonic meditations can sensitize us to how sound is traveling through or being muted by the spaces you share with it.

ACOUSTIC ECOLOGY

It is our birthright to listen, quietly and undisturbed, to the natural environment and take whatever meanings we may. Long before the noises of mankind, there were only the sounds of the natural world. Our ears evolved perfectly tuned to hear these sounds—sounds that far exceed the range of human speech or even our most ambitious musical performances: a passing

breeze that indicates a weather change, the first birdsongs of spring heralding a greening of the land and a return to growth and prosperity, an approaching storm promising relief from a drought, and the shifting tide reminding us of the celestial ballet. All of these experiences connect us back to the land and to our evolutionary past.

—Gordon Hempton, acoustic ecologist

Acoustic Ecology is the practice of understanding our environment through giving close attention to sound and what it can tell us about the relationships we are experiencing. It has consistently informed my engagement with Deep Listening. Acoustic ecology gives you a way to hear what the land, sea, or other sonic environment is saying so you may gauge the

health of a landscape. Acoustic ecology is a way to focus on things like reducing and eliminating human noise intrusion and other interruptions of relationships that have developed a balance for millions of years before our appearance as a species. Murray Schafer first defined the field of acoustic ecology in his book *The Tuning of the World* (1977).

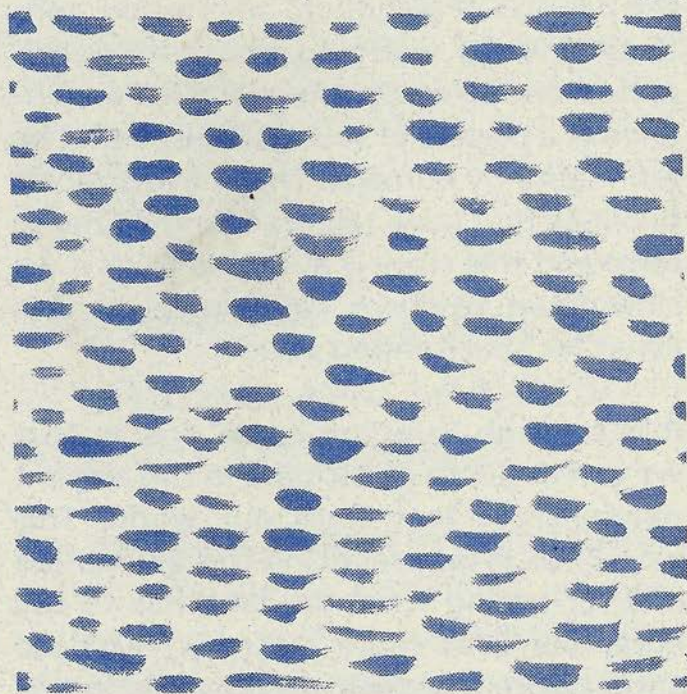
THE LAND IS ALWAYS SPEAKING. THE LAND IS ALWAYS LISTENING.

One can hear land speak through its plethora of inhabitants, formations, weather patterns, and all of their interrelationships. The ancient partnership of the sea and a

rocky shore sings of its ancient formation. These are relationships that have taken millions of years to develop, informed by the process of evolution, adaptation, continental drift, warming and cooling climates, and so much more. The full experience of a particular soundscape cannot be fabricated by humans. They have specific qualities that have taken so long a time to form and this story is available to us if we slow down, sit down, calm ourselves, and listen for an extended period.

It is through listening more deeply that we can begin to participate in the ancient relationships that form our world. This workbook is for practicing this awareness and for letting what the land has to say enter our lives more robustly. Facilitate and explore the sonic meditations in this

booklet with others. Develop your own sonic meditations and ways of listening to what the land and earth around has to tell.



Basic preparation for facilitating a sonic meditation:

NOTE: Here is a suggested process to help people transition to a state where they have the concentration needed to engage a sonic meditation fully. It helps them to calm themselves and prepare for giving attention to the instructions of a sonic meditation. It is similar to traditional meditation in many ways, but asks the listener to focus on their immersion in various

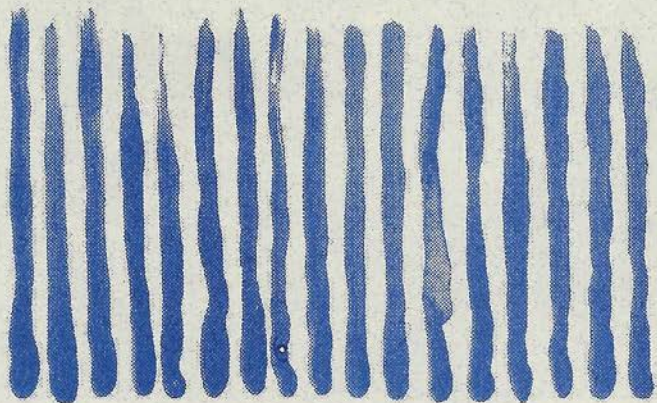
sonic phenomena rather than on personal perfection or enlightenment.

- ❖ Sit in a comfortable position.
- ❖ Mentally scan your body and relax your muscles and any tension you find.
- ❖ Feel and understand the weight of your body.
- ❖ Imagine roots extending from your sitz bones down to a water source below.

- ❖ Relax your spine. Give your attention to how it connects your lower body to your head.
- ❖ Feel your head gently floating at the top of your spine.
- ❖ Imagine a string extending from the top of your head to a distant object like a cloud or star.



- ❖ Take 3 deep breaths, breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth, making your exhalation audible.
- ❖ Transition to a specific sonic meditation.



A quiet place outdoors has no physical borders or limits to perception. One can commonly hear for miles and listen even farther.

—Gordon Hempton, *One Square Inch of Silence*

Introductory Sonic Meditation: Global & Focal Sound

The following sonic meditation provides you with a strong foundation for

understanding the difference between the kinds of attention you can give to sound and listening. I use this every time I facilitate a Deep Listening session with people who have not done this work before.

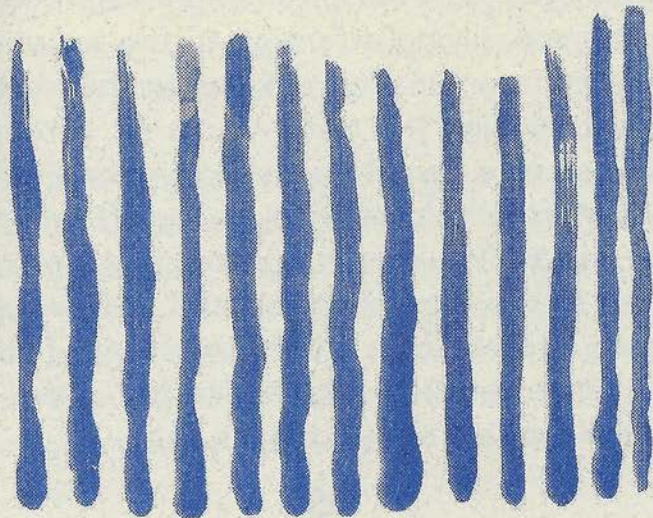
Participants are invited to give their attention to “global” and “focal” sound. Global sound is everything in a sonic environment that is sounding. Focal sound is a specific sound that is occurring in that same environment. You can listen to an entire landscape, everything that is sounding for miles around you, and hold all the sound in your attention. You have evolved with incredible perceptual capacities that are so limited by modern, industrial hardscapes and organizations of life, that you do not use them to the

fullest extent possible.

Facilitate this sonic meditation long enough for listeners to experience the immersion and transformation it offers; a minimum of 30 minutes is suggested.

- ❖ Begin with the basic preparation for a sonic meditation outlined above.
- ❖ You are invited to give your attention to the global sound in this sonic environment by listening to everything that is sounding.
- ❖ When an individual sound comes to your attention, follow it until it ends.

- ❖ When the focal sound ends, return to the global sound.
- ❖ Continue to move back and forth between global and focal sounds.



VARIATIONS ON GLOBAL & FOCAL SOUND:

This form of sonic meditation can be tuned to an infinite number of things you would want to give attention to. You can listen to the shapes and qualities of the silences surrounding you. You can tune the sonic mediation to ecological awareness both concrete—giving attention to the sounds that different leaves make when the wind goes through the trees—and a bit harder to perceive, but still provocative for what listeners will experience—giving attention to the sounds of particulates and pollution in the air. I have found it helpful to read a few quotes and to tell stories that will help sensitize listeners to the experience they are about to have.

Silent Walks

Pauline Oliveros would start our class meetings by asking us, “What is sounding?” in the environment we were in. She would end the meetings and bid us farewell with, “Always listening.” These two bookends to our sessions together sensitized us to the sonic environment around us and encouraged us to practice listening in our daily lives.

Silent walks are a good way to explore a forest, wetland, or other wild space in a concentrated way while moving through it. They are good for getting from one site for a sonic meditation to another. I have used them as a gentle way to prepare groups that are eager yet a bit uncertain

about what Deep Listening might entail. Taking a silent walk is a powerful experience with a group of people. Adding Deep Listening work to this experience can help listeners sink into the place where they will do additional sonic meditations.

SILENT WALK VARIATIONS

#1

This walk can be done without an introduction to Deep Listening or a beginning sonic mediation. It is good for situations where you need to walk for a period of time to a site where you can begin your work with a group.

- ❖ You are invited to take a silent walk.
- ❖ Give attention to the sonic environments you pass through.
- ❖ Feel the weight of your body.
- ❖ Take 3 deep breaths with audible exhalation.
- ❖ Walk silently giving attention to whatever is sounding.

#2

I have facilitated walks with instructions like the ones that follow. I do it with listeners that have had an introduction to Deep Listening and have gone through their first concentrated sonic meditation. They are sensitized to global and focal sound and ready to explore their new found awareness. The group will be excited to repeat the successes of the first exercise and to see how it plays out in a walk.

- ❖ Standing up, do the basic preparation for a sonic meditation outlined above.
- ❖ Listen with your entire body moving back and forth from global to focal sound.
- ❖ Keep your eyes open and in soft focus.
- ❖ Walk silently to the next destination.

#3

You can modify the silent walk in variation #2 in many ways. I have asked people to walk at half the speed they would normally walk. You can also use a mantra or repeated phrasing; this helps calm the mind and the normal wandering it will do during any sonic meditation. It allows sounds to enter consciousness and adds a surprising dimension to the experience for listeners.

- ❖ Standing up, do the basic preparation for a sonic meditation outlined above.
- ❖ Use the following mantra as you walk: On inhale, “What is Sounding?”; On exhale, “Always Listening.”
- ❖ Walk at half the speed you normally would.
- ❖ Walk silently to the next destination.

Extreme Slow Walking

This sonic meditation has been adapted from a much loved and often used Deep Listening exercise. When I introduce it, I emphasize that it is a way of intimately exploring the complex relationships between your body and the micro climates you are always moving through when under your own power. It is this profound tuning to place that we lose first when we speed our bodies up with the use of fossil fuels. Regaining this kind of tuning to place is a key step in reverse the devastating effects of the petroleum-based life you inhabit.

Below is the original meditation from Pauline Oliveros quoted at length with some changes.

The Exercise:

Moving as slowly as possible, step forward with the heel to the ground first. Let the weight of the body shift along the outside edge of the foot to the small toe and across to the large toe.

As the weight of the body fully aligns with that foot, begin the transition of shifting the other foot.

Small steps are recommended as balance may be challenged.

Maintain good posture with shoulders

relaxed and head erect.

Breathe deeply and in sync with your movements.

Commentary:

The purpose of this exercise is to challenge your normal patterns or rhythm of walking so that you can learn to reconnect with very subtle energies in the body as the weight shifts from side to side in an extremely slow walk.

Deep Listening: A Composer's Sound Practice

By Pauline Oliveros

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Deep Listening Publications

2005

George Monbiot, author and journalist with the *Guardian* newspaper, implores everyone to talk about “climate breakdown” rather than climate change. The climate is always changing. What you are witnessing is the systems in the climate breaking down.

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