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Are You Ready for a Wet Live-In?

Explorations into Listening

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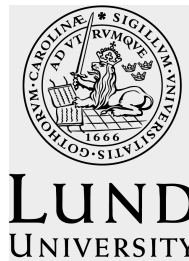
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Are You Ready for a Wet Live-In?

Explorations into Listening

Janna Holmstedt



DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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To be defended at Umeå Academy of Fine Arts, Umeå University, 6 October, 2017, at 13:00 (1 pm.), in Flexhallen on Bildmuseet's lower floor, Östra Strandgatan 30B, 903 33 Umeå.

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Title and subtitle: Are You Ready for a Wet Live-In? Explorations into Listening		
<p>Abstract:</p> <p>Listen. If I ask you to listen, what is it that I ask of you—that you will understand, or perhaps obey? Or is it some sort of readiness that is requested? What occurs with a body in the act of listening? How do sound and voice structure audio-visual-spatial relations in concrete situations?</p> <p>This doctoral thesis in fine arts consists of six artworks and an essay that documents the research process, or rather, acts as a travelogue as it stages and narrates a series of journeys into a predominantly sonic ecology. One entry into this field is offered by the animal “voice” and attempts to teach animals to speak human language. The first journey concerns a specific case where humanoid sounds were found to emanate from an unlikely source—the blowhole of a dolphin. Another point of entry is offered by the acousmatic voice, a voice split from its body, and more specifically, my encounter with the disembodied voice of Steve Buscemi in a prison in Philadelphia. This listening experience triggered a fascination with, and an inquiry into, the voices that exist alongside us, the parasitic relation that audio technology makes possible, and the way an accompanying voice changes one’s perceptions and even one’s behavior. In the case of both the animal and the acousmatic, the seemingly trivial act of attending to a voice quickly opens up a complex space of embodied entanglements with the potential to challenge much of what we take for granted. At the heart of my inquiry is a series of artworks made between 2012 and 2016, which constitute a third journey: the performance <i>Limit-Cruisers</i> (#1 <i>Sphere</i>), the praxis session <i>Limit-Cruisers</i> (#2 <i>Crowd</i>), the installations <i>Therapy in Junkspace</i>, <i>Fluorescent You</i>, and “<i>Then, ere the bark above their shoulders grew</i>,” and the lecture performance <i>Articulations from the Orifice</i> (<i>The Dry and the Wet</i>).</p> <p>The relationship between what is seen and heard is being explored and renegotiated in the arts and beyond. We are increasingly addressed by prerecorded and synthetic voices in both public and private spaces. Simultaneously, our notions of human communication are challenged and complicated by recent research in animal communication. My work attempts to address the shifts and complexities embodied in these developments. The three journeys are deeply entwined with theoretical inquiries into human-animal relationships, technology, and the philosophy of sound. In the essay, I consider as well how other artistic practices are exploring this same complex space. What I put forward is a materialist and concrete approach to listening understood as a situated practice. Listening is both a form of co-habitation and an ecology. In and through listening, I claim, one could be said to perform in concert with the things heard while at the same time being changed by them.</p>		
Keywords: artistic research, listening, situated practices, sound in art, expanded art, expanded scenography, media ecology, acousmatic orality, a/orality, storytelling, interspecies communication, more-than-human relations, co-habitation, sensorial estrangement, posthumanism, parasites, play, technology, dolphins, sonic sensibility, transliteracy, voice, performativity, new materialism, Michel Serres, Karen Barad, John Lilly, oceans, wet live-in		
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