

Silence

Divergent Listening in the Anthropocene

GRANT CUTLER, *Independent Artist*

Divergent listening describes a listening practice which seeks to raise consciousness or expand on our understanding of reality through the perception of sound. The multichannel sound installation, 'Silence', offers a space of quiet reflection, a place to ask questions, share, or rest. It is a room to imagine a more inclusive future, a world of resilience, energized by the clamorous singing of countless life forms. The installation invites participants to immerse themselves in the soundscapes of dozens of endangered natural environments and reflect on the change that an enhanced listening practice might bring to their own lives, work, and environments.



The extremely rapid loss of biodiversity as a consequence of industrialization and climate change represents a reality-bending catastrophe. How will we return from such a departure from sustainable living? What voices will we choose to guide us?

Divergent listening describes any listening practice which seeks to raise consciousness or expand on our understanding of reality through the perception of sound. I am suggesting that listening is a tool for recognizing reality outside of the human-centered paradigm. At this moment of mass environmental collapse, when our current system is so obviously not serving our best interests, I believe it an increasingly valuable action to question this paradigm.

Values of progress, production, and efficiency have laid waste to the environments which sustain and nourish us, not only physically but spiritually. Listening – a deep, slow, receptivity – is in order to begin to understand how we might operate as a community of beings who share a world, locked in collaboration, rather than as isolated and alienated individuals connected by nothing but competitive consumerism and the myth of scarcity. This is a moment for potential reconciliation, and listening to our environments, and to each other, will be fundamental in healing the scars left by global capitalism.

My primary interest with this project lies in exposing Western-culture’s sweeping, yet largely overlooked, destruction of soundscapes: the voices of complex lifeworlds. What can the shifting sonic landscape tell us about how we might approach a more sustainable future? How might prioritizing intentional listening practices aid in developing a more holistic relationship with earth’s environments? Can we reroute our energy toward more bio-inclusive living? What damage might be undone when we decolonize our sonic landscapes?



Silence is a non-durational multi-channel sound installation created from hundreds of hours of field recordings collected in endangered soundscapes throughout the world. The audio has been assembled to create a composition which pulls the background to the foreground: an attempt to de-center human hubris and highlight natural soundscapes on the edge of extinction.

The aftermath of environmental destruction is often quiet, sometimes even silent, as the life-affirming sounds of the living constituents have been removed as a matter of course. *Silence* offers a space of quiet reflection, a place to ask questions, share, or rest. The softness of the sounds is not meant to represent the complacency that has allowed this turmoil to continue, but rather it is an invitation to meditate on this state of affairs. It is a room to imagine a more inclusive future, a world of resilience, energized by the clamorous singing of countless life-forms.

Resilience is about adaptation, evolution, and creativity. Repairing the relationship with our natural ecosystems demands a paradigm shift – decentering human “progress” in favor of a more holistic approach to living within our environments; focusing on authentic connections rather than illusory divides. Can we re-learn the language of our ecosystems?

Listening is how we place our affections into the world. It helps us develop compassion, empathy, and understanding for our own being, our communities, and our environments. How might *divergent listening* ease our return to generosity and kindness for ourselves, our neighbors, and our shared world? Can we challenge ourselves to pause, take a breath, and listen before we react?