TINNITUS, EXCLUSION, RELATIONALITY (BEYOND NORMATE PHENOMENOLOGY)

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Introduction by Jonathan Sterne

Listening is one of the most fraught terms in sound studies, and it does more than its share of work in writing on affect as well. Endless taxonomies of listening proliferate; romantic stories of listening as the path to intersubjectivity (I'm looking at you, Jean-Luc Nancy!) are counteracted by horror stories of listening as a kind of aggression or dominance; claims for the universality of listening have been tempered by scholars in Deaf studies and disability studies, who have challenged the idea of any universal theory of a faculty.

In this wonderful dialogue, two leading thinkers on sound and affect consider the problem of tinnitus as a lived phenomenon, and as an intellectual problem that can advance our understandings of the politics of listening. Marie Thompson is one of my go-to writers in feminist sound studies. Her recent *Beyond Unwanted Sound* is a critique of aesthetic moralism that still exists in some corners of writing on sound—for instance, imbuing an inherent political effect (good or bad) to noise, as well as a preference for a certain pastoral model of ideal sonic culture. The book is also the closest thing I have found to a sound studies textbook that I would want to teach, even though it wasn't intended that way: it provides a grand

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tour of many of the canonical writers and examples used in the field. Marie's (and Annie Goh's) exchange with Christoph Cox in the journal *Parallax* is the fight sound studies needed to have about theories of materialism. With Annie Goh, she co-edited the sonic cyberfeminisms special issue of *Feminist Review.*

Mack Hagood's *Phantom Power* is the best podcast on the sonic arts and humanities you will find. And his recent book *Hush* is a wonderful study of "orphic" technologies, where people fight or modify sonic experiences with sound—"fighting sound with sound" (a brief disclaimer: *Hush* is in a book series I co-edit). But the long section on tinnitus is also a major challenge to theories of affect and disability: what defines suffering from tinnitus is not the volume of phantom sound in the ears, but the hearer's relationship to their own tinnitus. That is not to say suffering from tinnitus can be overcome simply by an attitude change—what Barbara Ehrenrich called the "smile or die" relationship to illness. Instead, it challenges us to understand affect beyond simple intention, in a truly relational frame, even when one is relating to oneself.

–*Jonathan Sterne* (sterneworks.org)

Dialogue

MT: Amongst our many shared interests is the complex auditory symptom of tinnitus. Both relatively common and diverse in its manifestations, tinnitus refers to the conscious perception of sound for which there is no external source. I'm currently working on an Arts and Humanities Research Council project called *Tinnitus, Auditory Knowledge and the Arts,* which explores how the arts might help mediate experiences of tinnitus and the diverse ways it affects people. The project stems from an interest in how the arts – as a set of creative practices interested in subjective, contextual, and affective experiences and encounters – might enrich but also diverge from medicalized understandings of tinnitus. It also seeks to depart from the rather limited artistic modes of expression that are often attached to tinnitus, and the problems of engagement that arise for audiences who themselves have tinnitus. Amongst other things, the standard auditory depiction of tinnitus as a sudden loud blast of high-pitched sound can be quite unpleasant for hearing people with tinnitus. We've been keen to emphasize that there's more to tinnitus than the ear and the sine wave.

As part of the project, we've commissioned two artists to develop new work for an exhibition on tinnitus. We're also hosting a series of online workshops for people with tinnitus, exploring how different arts activities involving drawing, writing, mapping and recording might be used to share different aspects and experiences of tinnitus. This project has also provided an opportunity to build upon some of my previous work on noise, affect, and aesthetic moralism; and to consider how tinnitus and other manifestations of 'auraldiversity' (to use John Drever's term) require a reassessment of some of the dominant tenets about sound and listening. I've recently written a short piece on how 'listening with tinnitus' can challenge normate philosophies of listening, which posit careful, relational and open listening as a virtuous ethico-political practice. While rarely recognized as such, these normate philosophies are grounded in an idealized and unimpaired listener: they have little to say of those whose listening shapes and is shaped by hearing impairment or disability. Listening with tinnitus, however, might offer a different perspective on listening, which calls into question this sensory idealism. For example, where normate philosophies of listening often revolve around a sonic capaciousness and connectivity, listening with tinnitus amplifies the importance of disconnection: it requires us to take seriously the need *not* to listen, or to listen selectively.

Mack, why have you been drawn to researching tinnitus? And what do you think is gained by thinking with tinnitus?

MH: Hi Marie, there is so much to dig into in what you've written here! I'll start by answering your question first, as I think the answer relates to several themes you've raised. I wouldn't say I was drawn to researching tinnitus so much as I'd say tinnitus has been my companion in all my work in sound. I don't remember a time before tinnitus. As a small child, I was stricken with the rather antebellum-sounding affliction of scarlet fever, which can affect the middle ear. One of my earliest memories is of a fever dream from that time, of ants running through my blood vessels, accompanied by roaring and ringing. I don't really know if that's where my tinnitus comes from, but throughout my childhood I thought tinnitus was just the sound of the blood rushing through my ears. So, perhaps I'm always "thinking with tinnitus," whether it's my object of study or not.

It's certainly entangled in my thinking on music and sonic arts. By my teenage years, I was playing in loud bands and enjoying live music, which brought out another tinnitus, another relation to it, and another frame for it. I imagine you're familiar with this from your own performance background, as well as your scholarship on noise music, a genre whose performers manipulate amplitude as affection. The affective dynamics of amplitude dynamics are so amazing, even

within a single subgenre. Dave Novak (2013) really hit me with his ethnographic exegesis of high volume in Japanese noise, while part of your book teased out the ASMR-like pleasures of quiet Japanese noise (Thompson 2017). In my own life, I've noticed tinnitus emerging in the interplay between loud sociality and the subsequent return to quiet solitude. Absorbing the pleasures of high volume one moment, then contending with its sonic afterimage later… sometimes fearfully and regretfully. So yes, I'm keenly interested in the question your AHRC project raises around "problems of engagement" in the sonic arts. I think for many musicians—especially older ones—it's a navigation or negotiation between the social and affective potentials of amplification and the auditory fragility and sense of isolation that their tinnitus signals.

I also think that tinnitus primed me for anthropological and cultural studies in that it instilled in me a lifelong scepticism of objectivity. I didn't need John Cage to tell me there's no such thing as silence. And long before I went to grad school and learned terms like "positionality," my auditory system told me very clearly that no two listeners could ever be alike. So, I think tinnitus teaches several kinds of sensitivity and opens up precisely the kinds of interesting questions that you're asking in your project. Questions about auraldiversity and the projection of a universal listening subject in critical theory and philosophy.

However, for all the agency I'm giving my tinnitus here, I should also admit that I wouldn't have figured this stuff out without reading critical theory and disability studies and doing ethnographic research on tinnitus. In a very real sense, my research brought me to this place where I can call tinnitus a companion rather than an affliction. And I'm humbled by the fact that this could all change tomorrow. Tinnitus is always ready to expose the fantasy of the self as free agent.

Marie, if you don't mind, I want to come back later to your astute question about normate philosophies and relational listening. I think it's perhaps the most important question we can ask, as well as a space where there might be some productive differences in our sonic-affective approaches. But first, could I learn a little more about your relationship to tinnitus? What drew you to it? You mention that the new project is an opportunity to build on your previous work on noise. Is tinnitus noise? I'd also like to hear more about your workshops for people with tinnitus. Part of my past research involved attending support groups for people with tinnitus, which I found to be… *complicated!* To use your phrase again, I noticed "problems of engagement" in even communicating about tinnitus.

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MT: I came to tinnitus as an object of research through ongoing conversations about sonic philosophies and sonic arts with Patrick Farmer, who is also working on the AHRC project with me. We recognized that tinnitus generates some important challenges to certain assumptions that are often made in theory and practice: about listening, good and bad sonic environments, about subjectivity, embodiment, and affect. These are themes that I began exploring as part of *Beyond Unwanted Sound: Noise, Affect and Aesthetic Moralism* (2017). I think tinnitus certainly refutes – or at very least complicates – the aesthetic moralist positioning of quietude as an ethico-affective 'good' and noisy environments as 'bad', inasmuch as for some people with tinnitus, a degree of background noise is often preferable. As to whether tinnitus is noise, I think for many it can be manifest as unwanted sound. But also, in keeping with how I've previously theorized noise, it can be understood as pertaining to the material means of mediation: tinnitus might be thought of as the affective relation to relations.

Patrick and I also recognized that clinical approaches to tinnitus are grounded in a language and frameworks that seek to objectify and measure tinnitus as a deviation from a norm. We felt that there was much of tinnitus – as a highly individualized and often context-specific phenomenon – that evaded this kind of approach. As you made very clear in your response, Mack, tinnitus may change in relation to different activities, auditory spaces, affective states and experiences. Furthermore, the ways in which tinnitus affects those who hear it and how they hear it varies widely. My own tinnitus is very mild, and often intermittent (though there have been times in my life where this hasn't been the case – about a year ago, I had a period of quite frightening tinnitus that manifest as a low, loud throbbing sound: a far cry from the high-pitched sine tone 'tinnitus trope' that you have written about, Mack). So, one of the key challenges that we're facing with the project is how to allow space for those whose tinnitus might be a banal, unremarkable, unimposing part of life (i.e. the tinnitus that does not become 'visible' to clinicians because it is not a 'problem'), while at the same time allowing for those who experience tinnitus as something that has a substantive negative impact on their wellbeing.

I guess this moves me on to your question about the complexities of working with tinnitus in an ethnographic context. As I think you've experienced, there are practical and ethical challenges even talking about tinnitus: for some people, this can draw attention to their tinnitus, and in so doing, make the tinnitus louder, more imposing or more difficult to manage. Likewise, we're asking people to engage in arts activities that require people to reflect on their experiences of and with tinnitus, which raises similar issues. I should also mention at this point that

our workshops were effectively derailed by the pandemic. They were due to be held in person, however we've had to redesign them to be delivered digitally. Amongst other things, this has made very clear how celebrations of digital accessibility often fail to take into consideration – or rather, produce and reproduce – disabled hearing. It has also meant that the pastoral support we can provide during the workshops is limited. These issues combined mean we're having to exclude participants whose tinnitus is categorized as 'severe' (in accordance with a clinical questionnaire). I'm hoping in future work this might not be the case.

On a more positive note, at the moment we're in the middle of running a pilot of the workshop with members of the British Tinnitus Association's consultancy group. While its in its early stages, it's already been interesting to note the different aspects of tinnitus that participants are drawing attention to; and the points of connection and difference between their experiences with tinnitus. I've also been struck by how generous people have been in taking the time to work with us and share their feedback.

Perhaps we can come back to this question about normate listening, affect and what we might call the politics of disconnection. I'm aware these are themes that are discussed within your recent book *Hush* (2019), which theorizes and examines "orphic media"– technologies that carry the promise of sonic control. I'm mindful that your first chapter begins with tinnitus, so I was wondering if you had any thoughts about the relationship between normate listening, affect, and orphic media?

MH: Yes, absolutely. The non-normate phenomenology of tinnitus and its recent mapping on a neurophysiological level became central to the theorization of listening and media use in *Hush.* In the book, I make a disabilities-studies move of using the neurophysiological model of tinnitus, not as a model of a flawed body, but rather as a model for how sonic affect works generally. For this conversation, I don't know if we need to delve too deeply into the neurophysiology, but for our readers who aren't expert in tinnitus, it might be useful to concretize the emergent and relational nature of this phantom sound that we've both mentioned. Tinnitus emerges, as you say, as "a relation to relations" between sound, space, self, and sociality. The example I often use is of a hypothetical librarian with tinnitus: In the quiet space of the library, the phantom sound of tinnitus is likely to grow louder in the subject's perception. Now, from the perspective of acoustics, we know that there is an inherent relation between sound and space, but it was fascinating to

learn that this applies even to sound no one else can hear! If the librarian responds to this change in tinnitus with fear and aversion, then going forward, the auditory subconscious may not filter the tinnitus out as an unimportant signal. In fact, the brain may 'turn up the volume' on it, straining to hear the perceived threat better and thus making the tinnitus even louder. At this point, the experience of an independent, agentive self may be undermined—so now we have a new relation between sound, space, and self unfolding. Next, a library patron walks in and needs research help, but the librarian is having trouble concentrating and comes off as difficult and unhelpful, so now the social relation is affected.

This little tale is a simplification of what I learned from interviews and participant observation in audiology clinics, support groups, etc. I think it's illustrative but there are two important and closely related things to note: First, the relations could have emerged in a completely different order and second, if you change one of the elements, all of the others change as well. So, it could have been the difficult research question that triggered an insecurity in the librarian, which then raised their perceptual vigilance, which then led to an awareness of the volume of their tinnitus in the quiet space of the library. But also, in either scenario, if the librarian had gotten *fascinated* by the research question, the tinnitus (as social, spatial, and sonic dissonance) might have receded in significance *and even in perception*, smoothing the social relation and perhaps even ceasing the perception of the tinnitus altogether, at least momentarily. And while all of these unfoldings can happen almost instantaneously, there is also the slow influence of these same embodied, environmental, and social factors, which accumulate over time into a habitus of listening and affection—ideas that prime the future emergence of specific tinnital experiences and one's relation to this relation of relations.

Neurophysiological research has shown that certain kinds of listening to tinnitus become conditioned reflexes, as linkages form between auditory system, the amygdala, and other areas of the brain. And it appears that suffering from tinnitus—as opposed to merely experiencing it—is more associated with this reflexive negative response rather than with the specific pitch or volume of the tinnitus itself (if it even makes sense to speak of "the tinnitus itself"). So, histories of sound, space, self, and sociality get imprinted on the subject as deleterious habits of listening. And in an ableist, neoliberal milieu that prizes freedom and autonomy, tinnital suffering is all tied up with affection ideas that other and problematize its sound: "I'm not supposed to be hearing this sound;" "I'm disabled by this sound;" "I'm not myself because of this sound." And unfortunately, the more you objectify, other, and push against tinnitus, the louder and more troubling it becomes. People who carefully guard their ears and avoid sound often end up with even worse tinnitus. This is normate listening *as suffering.*

And this became my model for *all* listening: from phantom sound to imagined sound, to acoustic sound, to figurative listening online, to political listening. In the book, I'm especially interested in the promise of controlling our listening, which is what media claim to provide. Ironically, the controlled listening our media provide has paradoxically led to a media-fueled crisis of listening, as indicated by complaints of information overload and controversies around filter bubbles, media echo chambers, campus safe spaces, disinformation, political tribalization, and so on. I came to the conclusion that we can learn a lot about these things from tinnitus—learning about listening in the informational and political senses by studying listening in the sensory sense. Because a similar behavior and even a similar physiology are at work when we recoil from a sound we don't like and when we recoil from an idea or identity we don't like. And the scary thing that tinnitus taught me is how deeply these reactions can become imprinted on the body-mind. What Spinoza called "inadequate ideas" about causality become reflexes of prejudicial listening. And when these reflexes determine how we use media, we're in trouble.

This is where I can finally circle back to your original question and a possible difference in our views. Above you wrote about the notion of relational and open listening as a virtuous ethico-political practice and you characterized this as a normate philosophy, grounded in an idealized and unimpaired listener. The funny thing is, in my research, I actually started with impaired listening and ended up believing very strongly in the importance of relational and capacious listening! I feel that what a sound artist like Lawrence English means by relational listening—understanding one's own audition of a recording in relation to the affordances of the media apparatus and the attentional focus of the artist—is essential. And for me, what a feminist media theorist like Kate Lacey (2013) calls "listening out"—decentering oneself in an act of adventurous listening—is essential as well. Both of these techniques have the potential to clarify causes and reduce suffering. Some of my own inadequate ideas involved an ideology of ability that othered tinnitus and said it was a defect that wasn't supposed to be there. Embodying and practising that belief was a great suffering for me. I had to learn the courage to decenter my ego, listen relationally, and gradually accept this 'noise' as part of myself. To sit with it and stop clinging to the delusion that I wasn't really just listening to myself, as a living record imprinted by experience.

At the same time—and this is also something you referred to earlier with regard to tinnitus—I also have to acknowledge that we live in a time when guarded, careful, and selective listening feels very necessary. For me, relational listening can also sensitize us to the commodification of our attention. Or tune us into the ways that marginalized people are often expected to listen to bad-faith arguments or verbal assaults. So, when it comes to the conception of media in my book, I'm trying to encourage a kind of relational listening to the affective use of media and the ways that consumer technologies encourage us to misrecognize unjust structures as merely personal experiences of noise. And this is where I think our approaches are very similar because, as your book so skillfully demonstrates, noise is a register of relations—it's so much more than unwanted sound!

So yeah, I'm super-interested to hear more of your critique of open listening because I'm not completely high on my own supply. There are certainly versions of it I feel uncomfortable with, such as the uncritical lionization of a Habermasian public sphere, which completely fails to account for all the practical and ethical complexities of difference you discovered while organizing your public project on tinnitus. The ways that we embody our diverse histories and traumas as listening subjects, the ways problematic modes of listening can become contagious. These things can't be accounted for or cured by the calls to rational listening that white dudes like me so often love to proselytize.

MT: I should probably say that my thinking about 'open' listening has been profoundly shaped by Eva Haifa Giraud's recent book *What Comes After Entanglement? Activism, Athropocentrism, and an Ethics of Exclusion* (2019). I was fortunate enough to read the introduction as it was in development and I found myself underlining section after section! Although her point of focus is not auditory culture, I consider Giraud's argument to have some significant implications for thinking about sound and listening. I don't want to provide too many book spoilers (!) but Giraud argues for greater critical attention to be paid to exclusions and omissions created by ethical and theoretical models that foreground relationality, complexity, and entanglement. Exclusion is not simply the opposite of relationality, because, as your great example of the librarian listening with tinnitus illustrates, the establishment of one mode of relationality (in your example, between sound, space, and self) forecloses other possible formations. Furthermore, although there is a tendency to attribute ethical significance to these terms (so, entanglement, connection = good; disconnection, omission = bad), Giraud makes clear that exclusion, disengagement, and separation can be necessary or even beneficial: indeed, they are often central to ethical decision-making and activist practice.

I absolutely agree that tinnitus makes clear listening's relationality: its constitution through the complex relations between space, affect, hearing capacity, sound environment, mediating technologies, social norms, cultural discourses and so on. But, as part of this, I think tinnitus also makes clear the affective and ethical imperative to not listen, to listen selectively, or to generate auditory exclusions: excessively listening to or listening out for tinnitus can serve to amplify it, it can exacerbate negative affections, or cause us to withdraw. I think the latter is what risks getting lost in some endorsements of open or capacious listening – particularly when these are positioned as ethical and political fixes. It feels quite important to emphasize this at a time where, I think, the ethical imperative to 'listen openly' is being weaponized by some on the political right. As you imply, Mack, we also need to attend to the forces that constitute audibility and aurality, and which cause listening to be unevenly anticipated and performed – often along lines of gender and race.

So, a relational or even 'capacious' model of listening needs to recognize that some relations (sonic or otherwise) are harmful, undesirable, and unjust. And that we might which to exclude, mitigate, or abolish some types of relation. Relationality is not inherently good. I know this might be stating the obvious, and is in many ways an old point!

Since my last bit of writing to you, we've hosted a pilot version of our workshops with some generous people from the British Tinnitus Association's consultancy group. I'm still unpacking the various implications of this very rich experience. But one thing that feels significant for our conversation here concerns the tension between theoretical models of relational listening (including listening with tinnitus) and how people understand and articulate their own experiences of tinnitus. During these sessions, there were many discussions that would have been of great interest to affect theorists: there was a lot of talk of how tinnitus affects and is affected by different emotional states, environments, life events, activities and so on. There were many who described their own experiences in ways that mirror your own account of moving away from an 'inadequate idea' of tinnitus towards a more accepting standpoint, based on the development of knowledge and understanding. In other words, there was a lot that would support a relational model of tinnital listening. Indeed, many of the workshop activities we designed took this relationality for granted.

What was particularly challenging, then, was when some participants expressed that their tinnitus is constant: it does not change, no matter where they are, what they are doing or what else is happening. In the immediate aftermath, I arrogantly assumed that they were mistaken: the participants had intimated that their tinnitus might modulate in volume, and so their tinnitus does change. Yet I've become increasingly hesitant about this interpretation: what does it mean that these participants don't recognize these modulations in volume as 'change'? What significance does 'constant' carry for them in terms of comprehending and articulating their tinnitus? What is the best way to understand this refusal of a relational model of tinnitus: is this an 'inadequate idea' or something else? I don't have any good answers here (you're getting thinking and processing in real time!) but it feels quite striking, given our conversation so far.

In light of this, I was wondering if I could ask about your own experiences of the relationship between, on the one hand, your theorizations of tinnital and other modes of listening; and your ethnographic work with people with tinnitus? How have you understood this relationship, and how have the people you have worked with understood this relationship?

MH: Marie, thank you for telling me about Giraud's book. I read the introduction and I love this concept of an "ethics of exclusion." This is such a positive term for the ambivalence I had throughout the research for my book. I call white noise machines, noise-canceling headphones, tinnitus maskers and the like, "orphic media" to express this ambivalence. Orpheus was a musician and poet who could unite the human, natural, and divine through sound—an expert entangler! But he also defended the Argonauts from the Sirens by creating a wall of sound with his lyre, the kind of sonic disentanglement we all rely upon today with our headphones, meditation apps, and various media of self-care.

But as you say, entanglement is not inherently good. Tuning out can be the most ethical choice, both in terms of self-care and in terms of positioning oneself as a gap or firewall in webs of harmful relations that ripple through media networks. So, I think we're on the same page here! If "relational listening" means privileging entanglement, that's not what we're after, but if it means listening out for emerging relations and then making ethical, informed choices to include or exclude, that's probably the best we can hope for.

What I worry about is when exclusion becomes the reflexive default, when orphic media become what Jodi Dean (2009) calls a technological fetish, something that, as Freud says, covers over a trauma and helps one through a trauma, but also, in Dean's view, renders us passive in the dynamics that actually cause the trauma.

Dean describes this in the context of political speech on social media, which she regards as a fetishistic substitute for real political action. I'm thinking about this in terms of our technologies of *non*-communication and the sense of control they provide. If you could only hear what you want forever, would you really be empowered by that? There are entire media and technology industries making this promise today through noise-cancelation, algorithmic listening, news filtration and so on. Ironically, these are the same tech and media industries that created the cultural conditions that put such pressure on our listening to begin with.

I've really enjoyed this conversation! Before I sign off, I want to address one question you asked me and then ask you a final question about where your work is headed.

You asked me about the relationship between my theorizations of tinnitus/listening and my ethnographic work with people with tinnitus, as well as the ethics of those relationships. I went into my fieldwork with some understanding that I was interested in how subjects used sound to manage spatial relations, but I didn't yet have a theory of it. The theorization really came from the fieldwork with people with tinnitus, clinicians, researchers, and technology manufacturers. In fact, I hadn't read any affect theory beyond some Deleuze when I started my fieldwork—I only turned to affect theory and disability studies when I was struggling to respond to the questions and experiences offered by people with tinnitus. I'm completely indebted to them, so I love it when I meet people who find my work useful in their own struggles with tinnitus. There are various folks I've been in dialogue with over the years by phone or email and it's fulfilling to be doing, in a small way, some 'applied affect theory' or 'applied humanities,' as I think you're doing in a larger way with your project.

But again, tinnitus requires a great humbleness of us. Who is to say mine won't return with a vengeance tomorrow? Will I feel like someone with answers then? And what of the people you describe, who overtly deny the waxing and waning of tinnitus, even if their narratives betray it in other ways? Who am I to say they are listening in the wrong way? At the end of my chapter on tinnitus in *Hush*, I describe two different patients. One understood wearable white noise technology as a tool to help change their listening practices, while the other expected the technology to cure them of tinnitus. As any clinician would have predicted, the first person found relief while the second person did not. I could praise the first

person for succeeding by understanding and practising relational listening and relaxing into their tinnitus. I could blame the second for embracing a technological fetish to help them cling to their autonomy, thus perpetuating their own suffering. But that would be more than a gross oversimplification. I would also be regarding these patients as fully autonomous subjects with the natural burden of rational agency. I'd be spreading the same discourse of suffering that strains our listening to begin with. To me, theory is worthy only insofar as it ultimately helps reduce suffering. Otherwise, I honestly don't see the point.

This brings me to my question. I was happy to see the other day that *Sonic Cyberfeminisms*, a special issue of *feminist review* that you co-edited with Annie Goh, has arrived. This is a long-running project for you, as you've also held a symposium and other events under this title. My understanding is that sonic cyberfeminism is looking for a radical alternative to mere inclusion and participation for women in gendered spaces of sound technology. Can you talk about those goals? Also, both sound studies and cybernetics have received well-earned criticism for masculinist, Eurocentric, techno-fetishist propensities, yet we also seem to be in a fertile period for Afrofuturist, indigenous, feminist, and queer ideas and practises in sound and technology. So, I was hoping you could talk about the 'sonic' and 'cyber.' Why put them together? Do they have a way of correcting flaws in one another within sonic cyberfeminism?

MT: I've really enjoyed this conversation, too! It's been really great to hear more about your work and to have the opportunity to reflect further on my own.

Just briefly, I found your reference to possible designations of 'good' and 'bad' tinnitus patients significant in relation to my own work. I've found in some conversations with people with tinnitus, there is a desire to articulate that you are doing things 'right': which is to say, adopting a position of acceptance, listening differently, and so on. What was also invoked in some of these conversations was a contrast with an imagined person who approaches their tinnitus in the 'wrong' way, or who have not yet reached a position where they could approach it in the 'right' way. This imagined person experiences the negative affects of tinnitus more intensively, it prohibits their life, their sociality, their wellbeing. I won't say too much more here, but I'm interested to think more about how people with tinnitus understand themselves in relation to one another, and how affect is used to distinguish these positions.

It's really great to see the *Feminist Review* special issue on Sonic Cyberfeminisms out. It was edited by Annie Goh and I, as well as members from the *Feminist Review* collective: Ioana Szeman, Irene Gedalof, and Sadie Wearing. Taken col-

lectively, the articles and open space pieces that make up the special issue can be understood as a variety of responses to the question of 'what is sonic cyberfeminisms'? As you note, this has been a long running project, and the rubric of sonic cyberfeminisms has been used to facilitate different events with different people: we've done a reading group, an artist residency, a podcast, a listening room installation, a zine, panel discussions, and now a journal special issue. You are right that we have been keen to keep a distance from inclusionary models of gender diversity in sound technology, and we've offered what we hope are supportive critiques of such approaches. We've aimed to use the successes but also the limitations of cyberfeminism as a means of working through the relationship between sound, technology, and gender. This has meant revisiting what was and what is cyberfeminism. We've been keen to make clear that cyberfeminism isn't necessarily synonymous with an optimistic or techno-utopian standpoint (there is cyberfeminist work that is explicitly critical of technocultures and their imbrication with capital and coloniality). At the same time, we think that cyberfeminism's sometimes ambiguous relationship with feminist politics, its tendency to centre whiteness and the (over)developed world are significant because they can reveal something about wider and ongoing omissions from discussions about gender, sound and technology.

In terms of our goals for sonic cyberfeminisms: it's quite hard to talk about this because we haven't really had clearly defined objectives. Or rather, the goal has often been to provide a space, to provide resources or opportunities to think, work, make, and speculate together. My personal perspective is that this project came about at a time where myself and others were being asked to talk about 'women in x' (the x can be music, sound technology, audio…) and it felt that some elements of these discussions were limited by assumptions about what gender is and how it relates to auditory technocultures. Annie wrote a piece a few years ago that highlights this tendency called 'Sonic cyberfeminisms and its Discontents' (2014). I'd say for me, personally, having a space to be negative has been really important! Which is to say, to not feel the need to be celebratory or even optimistic in the ways that inclusionary models of participation often demand. But also, to have space to think and do in ways that allow for feminist opportunities and ambivalences. This ties back to some of what we were discussing earlier about listening. I've been adamant that listening is not this magical social force that can easily fix injustices; and I've been critical of accounts that I perceive to advocate for listening as such. At the same time – and with this in mind – listening has

been integral to the various manifestations of sonic cyberfeminisms. The project has sometimes created space to be listened to, and to listen to others, together. The zine we created during a residency at Wysing Arts Centre, with myself, Annie, Miranda Iossifidis, Marlo De Lara, Robin Buckley, Frances Morgan, Shanti Suki Osman, Natalie Hyacinth, Louise Lawlor and Jane Frances Dunlop, contains various visual, sonic and written reflections on an 'Agony Aunts' session that we ran during the week. What became clear here was, again, the need for listening, or more specifically, the need to be listened to, requires selectiveness and control in order to resist the tendency for stories of harm to become objects of consumption. If we understand the cyber of sonic cyberfeminisms as referring to the steering of sounds, voices and listening for feminist means and ends, then part of this is to consider strategy: what do we want to steer toward, and steer away from?

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