

food and drink, to smell with greater concentration, to wander and “get lost”, to be critical, to self-evaluate, to sharpen our sight, to encourage imagination, to rethink our relationship with time, to appease thoughts, to feel our bodies, to become sexier (as Einstürzende Neubauten proposed in its only concert in Mexico twenty years ago). This might sound banal and even somewhat new agey, but bear with me: It could be necessary in our grizzly present which is neither characterized by a rebellious nor a radical stridency, but trivialized by the extreme saturation we receive and partake in one way or another at all times, and that usually only flows towards the economic benefit of the big capital owners.

I intuit stealth as a political tool, as part of a resistance methodology, as a bridge to listen and share better, that allows us to act bluntly after that necessary pause, especially nowadays when we have no answers to more urgent questions, or citing the Chto Delat collective, that the questions have been changed when we thought we had the answers. I think about the Mexican March of Silence on September 13, 1968, or The Silent March of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) on December 21, 2012.

It is not true that silence only denotes apathy, repression or defeat, nor that megaphones, shouts and public demonstrations are the most effective forms of protest. Thinking that is falling into the “noise vs. silence” dichotomy. Stealth inserts those critical and often contradictory possibilities that we need to assume to deliver new ideas. Stealth can be an alternative to binary thinking: heterosexual or homosexual, white or black, capitalist or communist, good or bad, etc., criticized by Spanish philosopher Paul B. Preciado for wreaking havoc on the way we process any matter.

Stealth, I believe, is an option today.

to keep secrets sound for a shareable future

YANG YEUNG

1.

In the language I was born into – Cantonese, there is a colloquial that goes, literally, “Wintermelon-Tofu” (dung¹ gwaa¹ dau⁶ fu⁶ 冬瓜豆腐). It is not so commonly used these days for being a little old-fashioned. I love it though, for the shapes the characters draw around them and the sounds they make.

A friend translates it as “anything can happen”. It is a wonderfully lively translation. It keeps the humour as much as the caution the phrase suggests. Say, we might be joking about someone preparing for the possibility of being caught in a storm when hiking. So just in case, we bring an emergency kit with a whistle, an emergency blanket, and a flash light, to prepare for “Wintermelon-Tofu”. Or, in the 2019 pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong, many protestors were

reported to have carried wills with them – some written on their helmets, others buried in their backpacks. “Wintermelon-Tofu”. The caution is for possible injury. The humour is to keep an essential lightness in the seriousness of the just-in-case. The phrase isn’t associated with listening, but I always hear a splash, a thud, an underwater rumbling with the phrase. What there is to hear depends on what sinks or stays afloat. It depends also on the depth of water and the hardness of ground in which and upon which the Winter Melon and/ or Tofu is each and are together thrown.

As we are caught in a sensibility of uncertainty caused by natural and humanly-devised means, I think a lot, as many in the art community do, what art can do. Even when the certainty that it can do little creeps in more and more, I think of what artists keep doing anyway. For what purpose? Perhaps that there are still compelling reasons to care, which listening encourages.

When Brandon LaBelle’s email arrived from the other side of the ocean inviting me to co-curate the Listening Biennial, I felt happily led to both the leeward and windward slopes of mountains. Be it rain or shine by way of rapidly changing circumstances the global pandemic directs, he and my buddy-curators and buddy-artists are ready to offer something – of the habitual and the extraordinary. The email’s timeliness, and the conviction and warmth it communicates are inspiring. Timeliness – for insofar as we keep connecting by fingering on our phones to exchange a wish, a hug, a gentle hello, we might as well tap into the capacities we also have but may have forgotten or have been too busy with other things to recognize – as J.K. Gibson-Graham puts it, “‘the cultivation of subjects’ for ‘community enterprises and initiatives’ of postcapitalist ‘new commons’.” (Holert 40) Conviction – for insisting that distance can be transformed not only into proximity, but also intimacy. Warmth – for the heart from which the email was sent and received.

I asked Brandon what brought him to make the Listening



Biennial. He referred to one source in particular: Luce Irigaray's book *The Way of Love*. I resonate a lot with what Irigaray says about welcoming the other. "To experience this co-belonging implies leaving representative thought and letting oneself go in the co-belonging to Being which already inhabits us, constitutes us, surrounds us. It presupposes, in fact, dwelling 'there where we truly already are.'" (70) However, I cannot fully agree with her when she lets the "unity" of our being settle onto the compulsory complementarity of heterosexuality, and of the differently-sexed bodies. "Each part of what constitutes the unity of the human species corresponds to a proper being and a proper Being, to an identity of one's own. In order to carry out the destiny of humanity, the man-human and the woman-human each have to fulfil what they are and at the same time realize the unity that they constitute." (105) If we take atom into account, we may have a different story of our "unity" to tell. To be fair, though, Irigaray's argument is primarily grounded on the importance of recognizing difference, and the differences between sexed bodies would be one part of co-belonging. "To consider this relation as a co-belonging of man and woman in the constitution of human identity requires rethinking what being-in-relation itself implies." (90) The variety of ways of co-belonging requires another curatorial and life project. For the purpose here, I am interested in how artists lend attention to differences manifested less in socially circulated and established identities than those arising and produced out of contingent situations – what capacities do they activate to negotiate between unity and singularity in a listening situation. My hunch is, if one gets lucky, listening with attention enables such questions as "What moves?" and "What is it that moves us?" The pandemic has the potential to knock us out of the sensitivity that listening grants us. From where we are, with what we have access to, can we re-discover the listening body in relation to the world, incorporating the pandemic-induced habits, and find intimacy in human connection again?

By way of love, moving along the lines the word and its sound draw around itself, I present to you Wah-yan Au, Michele Chu, Yannick Dauby, Sharon Lee, Alecia Neo, Wantanee Siripattananuntakul, and Raheleh (Minoosh) Zoromodinia. Their works may not generate sound, but they channel its imagination through varying modes of listening. In their works, one gets the chance to learn to listen not to that which sounds out, but to mobility and immobility constituted by social and political challenges, fictionality and historicity constituted by the inadequacy of immediate realities, and rhetoricity that does not persuade by oratory and speech but by evocation. In their works, listening is activated not in the ears as isolated sensory organs, but as a bodily compartment that moves back and forth between oneself and the worlds it is fully immersed in. They show us the state of being together is less a combination of will power than an acceptance of that being already a condition that makes us who we are while also calling for effort and courage that we face, learn from, and overcome our solitude. For the Listening Biennial, they devise "listening situations" in which we may experience loss, but also possibilities of being found by others as much as ourselves. A situation is where anything can happen. All of their works carry an element of porousness. To be implicated in a situation is to be called to respond. All of their works do so with care, or, they care by constellating, in the way Le Guin imagines it:

Mind draws the lines between the stars
that let the Eagle and the Swan
fly vast and bright and far
above the dark before the dawn.

Between two solitary minds
as far as Deneb from Altair,
love flings the unimaginable line
that marries fire to fire.

2.

Wah-yan Au and Yannick Dauby each lends attention to non-human voices in forests and urban concrete jungles. Their collaborative work compels us to ask, How does the air change? What does the wind bring? Wah-yan Au has a print-making and story-telling practice, while Yannick Dauby has a field recording and sonic ethnographic practice. For the Listening Biennial, they collaborate for the first time, responding to each other's love of all living beings. They conjure their habitats as trembles and vibrations that impregnate every moment. They lead us into a world whose vitality is generous to our wrong-doings: I am thinking of Wah-yan Au's bats trapped in a supermarket, and Yannick Dauby's bleached coral reefs. I share with you what has inspired Yannick Dauby, and goes on to inspire Wah-yan Au and myself as their collaboration evolves:

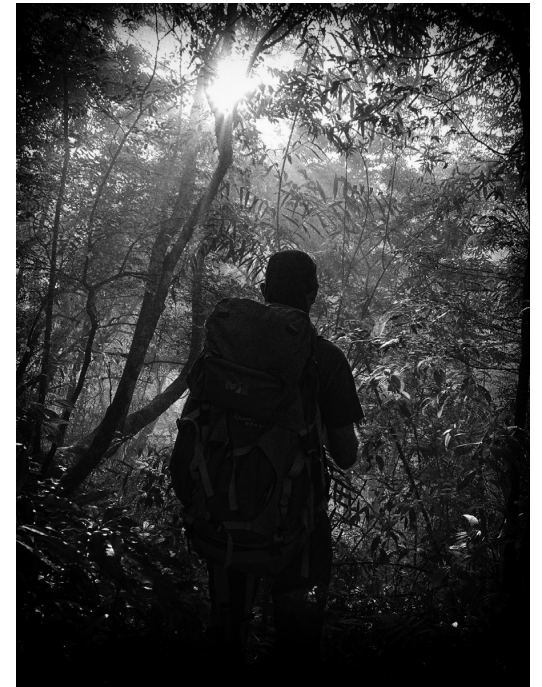
A number of objects like this, many of them fragmentary, have arrived, perhaps by meteor. You are to inspect them and arrive at the conclusion that they are the remains of living things. How would you arrive at that conclusion? What pattern connects the crab to the lobster and the orchid to the primrose and all the four of them to me? And me to you? And all the six of us to the amoeba in one direction and to the back-ward schizophrenic in another? (Bateson)

In the series of audio musings they make for the radio, Wah-yan Au's voice brings the stories from her book *Dreams of a Toad* alive, while Dauby makes patterns around them, for a different kind of connection. Fantastical beings: fantastical being as our way of being.

Sharon Lee's photographic practice is tactile. She works with light and darkness as material. She is interested not only in what the camera frames, but what the lens, the film, in their contact with

the world, can do – it's action research on photography. The rapidly changing political environment in Hong Kong in recent years has prompted her to, more urgently (though not exclusively), confront with the way state apparatuses compress urban shared lives. In a recent public art work in a park, she invites passers-by to make a wish when they see a rainbow conjuring above a fountain in the afternoon sunlight. The wish was made in silence. The artist observes, listens, without being able to hear. As the ritual goes, one doesn't tell one's wish because doing so would fail it. Is to make a wish the last resort when one is in despair? For the Listening Biennial, the artist furthers the complex state of making a wish by proposing that to wish well is a way to make home within, to carry hope around, everywhere necessary when one is in exile in a place once called home. Wishes made in the past stand between pages of books; those made in the past remain secrets, just as the ones evoked in the present.

Michele Chu presents a practice of experiential design in urban public space that sets up terms of engrossment that challenge routine policies of separation and social atomization. By design, I don't mean the ubiquitous kind serving corporate interests. I mean she designs by transforming her body into a vehicle for the formation of alternative human relations. She plays on ready-made, ordinary objects to set up situations for her encounter with strangers. She creates in open-air plazas and semi-confined spaces like train compartments and restaurants. In focusing on such themes as intimacy, fear, estrangement, she takes risks, necessary for exploring what engaged citizenship might look like. For the Listening Biennial, she choreographs situations in public space involving touch, verbal conversation and eye contact, using such materials prevalent in the pandemic as foam boards and hand sanitizers as a response to the subtle shifts in human relations during the pandemic. Chance makes connecting possible. Making and sharing shelters becomes both a means and an end in itself. In her interventions, she evokes hearing as co-extensive



with the perceptual field constituted by all other senses – even when unevenly distributed, a holistic communication vital for rejuvenation in our troubled times is encouraged.

Alecia Neo is interested in hospitality, particularly in times where human differences could become a source of fear and antagonism. Her work is a response to such disenfranchised communities as refugees and migrant workers, as well as the tension between professional and unpaid care work, by creating situations for connection and reconciliation. Neo's artistic inquiry in care stems from a profound trust in the human capacity to learn our insufficiencies and overcome them in a supportive environment. This is one reason for her practice being highly collaborative. She works with movement artists, poets, film-makers, with herself taking up various creative positions, to inquire into the complex web of needs, feelings, goals, and challenges that arise out of a caring relationship. The artist becomes a learner following the gestures of caring, a host making space for caring, and an observer and listener tending to the qualities of care brought out of one's best self. (Noddings) One has to be willing to be vulnerable, and surrender, for healing to come. For the Listening Biennial, Neo re-enacts the gestures of care she learns from her collaborators in Singapore and India. She shares the process and results of the learning with participants – who then become learners, transferring touch. She also extends her open call for gestures of care for the ongoing project "Care Index" – a scenery that obliges us to take a stroll in, and to care. Care Index was supported under the Dance Nucleus' ELEMENT Research Residency in June 2021.

Wantanee Siripattananuntakul has a research-based practice that draws from her concern and perplexities over the multiple and entangled ways regimes of political power exercise control over those subjected to their power. While politically concerned and informed, her work suspends political discourse to preserve the subtleties of feeling and being in and with power. She approaches the con-

tentious laterally, defying any simplistic relation between Authority (that claims power) and the People (deprived of power). She explores how unfreedom manifests in an individual's life. For the Listening Biennial, she presents "She Sings a Voiceless Song". A woman mouths a song employed in the history of Thailand against enemies as changing ruling regimes define them. It compels questions as to how a singing voice corroborates with that which seeks to silence it, how a muted voice centres and dissipates attention, and whether silence is a choice, has a force, or is burdened by uneasy compromises. Resistance may have no face, just as totalizing power deafens itself with its own roar. What, in the end, are we hearing? What we read from the moving lips is much more than one native tongue could inscribe. The artist will also share her creative processes of this work among others in a live chat based in Hong Kong and open to all online, "What politics?! Troubles that make artists laugh today".

Raheleh (Minoosh) Zoromodinia presents a practice that explores the meaning of belonging. Walking in urban space and the height of mountains alone and with others, she moves between memories and imaginaries of home. She recontextualizes ritualistic practices from particular traditions into contemporary geo-political contentions, preserving the tensions. For the Listening Biennial, she presents her video works "Sensation" and "Resist", in which the artist's body wrestles with an emergency blanket in gusty winds. The body is at once caught and surrendering, while also braving and standing up to what nature offers it. The tinge of humour the work conjures wrestles with the gravity of human vulnerability. The more one stands with her in the wind that sculpts her body, the more one becomes sensitive to what it might be like to be both exposed and sheltered by as much as detached and engaged due to conditions not up to us. The appearance of nonchalance is deceptive: she shows the face of sturdy defiance. Raheleh (Minoosh) Zoromodinia also presents a "walkshop" for the Listening Biennial. She prompts participants to

take a walk with her at a distance, in places she does not know, but is curious to. Can belonging be shared from where we think we already know, with whom we think we do not know? Trajectories of the walks become maps of one's self-making.

Empathy is conventionally understood as the ability to project oneself to the other's situation. Nel Noddings proposes otherwise: it's in receptivity, not projection, that empathy begins. Her proposition is an important reminder that to claim we know more than we can imagine or bear is to lose touch with such subjectivities as pain that is "absolute". (Scarry) When the claim we know becomes bigger than the process of moving ourselves into the person, we fail; we become our own borders. But this doesn't mean we can give up on empathy. I think it is not an either or between projection and reception. All the artists mentioned above offer help as we sustain efforts to live together. The back and forth is equivalent to the way listening teaches receptivity. We insist going back and forth so we are not cut off from the enticing and comforting but misleading claim that we know all. To be situated in listening could be confining, it could also be liberating. The reason might be the same: we keep reconsidering and practicing that which we oblige ourselves to.

Are we in transition into some new phase of our history of being together? I hear 20TH century Chinese thinker Lu Xun (Leys) murmuring to himself, leaking a little of his voice to us in our here-now:

I naturally believe that there will be a future, but I do not waste my time imagining its radiant beauty.

Rather than discussing how to reach the future, it seems to me that we ought to think first about the present. Even if the present is desperately dark, I do not wish to leave it.

Will tomorrow be free from darkness? We'll talk about that tomorrow. Meanwhile, let us busy ourselves with transforming to-day.

I imagine Lu as a listening, walking, thinking self, visiting us with hope. Walking with us, hearing his own footsteps amidst ours, he adds, "Hope can be neither affirmed nor denied. Hope is like a path in the countryside: originally there was no path – yet, as people are walking all the time in the same spot, a way appears."

The way then is up to us – what and how we follow, if we are to at all.

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