

THE LISTENING ACADEMY - BERLIN
September 3 - 7, 2024
Flutgraben Association, Berlin

*Emergence emphasizes critical connections over
critical mass, building authentic relationships,
listening with all the senses of
the body and the mind.*
– adrienne maree brown



Organized and facilitated by Giada Dalla Bontà, Golnoosh Heshmati, Brandon LaBelle and Suvani Suri with the participation of Clare Cooper, Giulia Crisci, Femke Dekker, Juana del Mar, Stijn Dickel, Uzma Falak, Ira Ferris, Susanne Grau, Shareeka Helaluddin, Liva Hage, Heidi Hart, Marc Allen Herbst, Heidi Holmström, Irini Kalogeropoulou, Marlijn Karsten, Farah Kassem, Yulia Carolin Kothe, Lukas Lund, Jake Mehew, Aine Nakamura, Ginevra Naldini and Marco Isaias Bertoglio, Arman Nouri, ether O, Anna Orlikowska, Morten Poulsen, Camila Proto, Sarina Scheidegger, Angus Tarnawsky, Hany Tea, Myriam Van Imschoot, Arushi Vats, Ellen Waterman, Henry Weekes, and Nicola Zolin

The Listening Academy is an independent research project,
as part of The Listening Biennial.
www.listeningbiennial.net

Listening as an emergent strategy /

In the publication, *Emergent Strategy*, adrienne maree brown guides us to an appreciation for how complex systems are constituted by a multiplicity of small-scale interactions. Such an understanding for brown is grounded in giving attention to the living ecosystems of natural worlds, where emergence is fundamental and change abundant. From biodiverse proliferation to symbiotic accumulations, emergence is positioned as a potent guide to help “grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for.”

We're interested to research and test listening as an emergent strategy, and how it may contribute to embodying the just and liberated worlds we long for.

Following brown, this edition of The Listening Academy focuses on emergence, posing listening itself as an emergent strategy. As an emergent strategy, listening contributes to nurturing greater planetary relations and transcultural understanding by its ability to attend to small-scale interactions, the specificities and particularities of persons and things. This includes the capacity to listen out for the unheard and the inaudible, thereby shifting the borders of the sensible with its patient and persistent work, as well as opening paths for tending to the unfinished histories and broken communities that haunt our social-political worlds.





What are we carrying?
What do we bring into the room?
– *who is here, and who is absent?*
the present, the missing, the heard and
unheard... and the emergent

What are their effects, resonances –
lending to the community we may become?
To nurture friendship and family
keeping love at the center
and the body open
curious, involved

And which entails vulnerability –
and deep support,
ways of holding,
being responsive

How to understand listening as support,
protection, as critical action?

As a unique knowledge pathway –

To cultivate practices of reciprocity –
to touch and be touched

In what way is embodied listening key to
a care of the self, a care of others?

Listening as supportive of dialogical labor
as holding or reconciling disagreement

To engage difficult conversations

To work at the cultivation of sensitivity

Listening as an emergent strategy

To create more possibilities





Program / Schedule

Tuesday, Sept 3:

10:00: Gathering, coffee and tea

10:30: Welcome and introduction to The Listening Academy, Brandon LaBelle
Opening the theme of Listening as Emergent Strategy (setting the conceptual frame, raising guiding questions, offering perspectives)

Brief introductions by participants: sharing experiences, questions, interests – getting to know each other

13:00 - 14:00: Lunch

14:30: Taking a Walk: following adrienne marie brown's suggestion that emergent strategies are founded on natural systems and life worlds, we'll wander through the local environment, discovering connections between place and people, observing and noting existing dynamics, listening for relationships, interferences, synergies. We will also look for potential partners in the materials, creatures and entities found on site, considering in what ways they can help guide us throughout the week.

16:00: Regathering: sharing reflections, telling stories, arranging the space for tomorrow

Wednesday, Sept 4:

10:00: Gathering, coffee and tea / Open Forum: sharing and discussing experiences from the day before, offering reflections, questions, ways forward: gathering perspectives / plus: discussing Introductory chapter of Emergent Strategy by adrienne maree brown

11:00: Giada Dalla Bontà / Tuning In: Fractal Focus, Aural Attunement, and Murmuring Proximity

13:00 - 14:00: Lunch

14:00: breaking into Working Groups (facilitated by Giada, Suvani, Golnoosh) / to research and develop together an Emergent Strategy: in what ways can listening be conceived as an emergent strategy or figure? And how might it contribute to embodying "critical connections" and ways of organizing with others?

17:00: Participant Input: performance by Aine Nakamura

Thursday, Sept 5:

10:00: Gathering, coffee and tea / Open Forum: sharing and discussing experiences from the day before, offering reflections, questions, ways forward: gathering perspectives

11:00: Golnoosh Heshmati / Collective listening session w Rabt community Tehran

13:00 - 14:00: Lunch

14:00: breaking into Working Groups / continuation of collective research and activities from day before; elaborating listening as an emergent strategy, as a creative methodology for "building authentic relationships" across human and more-than-human worlds

17:00: Participant Input: presentation on Kin Structures by Arman Nouri

Friday, Sept 6:

Self-organized morning / Free period for individual activity, working together, sharing research and practices, or enjoying quiet time alone

14:00: breaking into Working Groups / continuation of collective research and activities; further exploring practices of listening, from repair and healing to an ethics of difference – in what ways does listening contribute to "creating more possibilities" and "shaping change"?

17:00: Participant Input: locational sound experience with Stijn Dickel

Saturday, Sept 7:

10:00: Gathering, coffee and tea / Open Forum: sharing and discussing experiences from the day before, offering reflections, questions, ways forward: gathering perspectives

11:00: Suvani Suri / Speculative Listening Session

13:00 - 14:00: Lunch

14:30: Presentations from Working Groups: sharing work, manifesting discoveries, articulating experiences

17:00: Saying goodbye and planning future collaborations: being a community

September 4

Giada Dalla Bontà /

Tuning In: Fractal Focus, Aural Attunement, and
Murmuring Proximity

In this session, we will explore ways to aurally re-learn the emergence we are enmeshed in and the intricate interdependencies of the elements constituting more complex systems. Through a series of succinct practical activities, we will engage in exercises that explore diverse listening foci, ranging from the micro to the macro level. We will practice corporeal listening and attuning to the “other,” training ourselves to perceive the subtle sounds of presence, before engaging with intentional sounds.

These exercises are designed to investigate multiple dimensions of listening—aural, corporeal, spatial, and semiotic—and to foster a collective dialogue on our experiences. Through this exploration, we aim to enhance our understanding of listening as a multifaceted, dynamic, and deeply diverse process, integral to the way we perceive and interact with our environment and each other.

Murmuring Proximity – Attunement

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Feet shuffle across the floor, bodies moving without seeing.

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You feel someone nearby—just a presence: }

The room pulses with the weight of submergent sounds, imperceptible textures.
The floor is alive underfoot. Murmurs on the soles of the feet.
Listening past the eyes, expanding with and beyond the ears and the ossicles; all that can be heard and absorbed through skin and bones.
A step, an exhalation. The rustle of fabric.
The air shifts with each body’s movement, breath and soft steps cut through the darkness.

Vibrations undulate brushing past you like currents, a quiet hum threading through the space—deep, stretched, layered.
Gushed from the discreteness of a disarmed genuineness, feeding into the next.



A wave filling the space like fog slowly condensing,
thick and dense, building and dissolving.
More primal than arithmetic harmony: attunement.

No one leads. No one follows.
It's adaptation without hesitation—birds shifting in
flight, murmuring starlings. Proximity feels tight,
then loose again, edges blurring.
The hum changes, twists, breaks —
no search for meaning in the sparse words and songs
that liquify in sonic ripples. Semiosis melts at
points of contact with pure materiality *and, per-
haps, mnemonic associative automatism.

Do you need eyes
To perceive me }

Can you listen
To the vibrations
On your sealed eyelids' skin
The passage of air
The breath of others
The stomping feet
Claiming space
The gentle rustling
Making space \

About not being seen.
About being mutually listened to.
You slip in the flux of decoding and recoding signals
that forgets signification systems. Murmuration isn't
planned. It's not coordinated. It just happens.
You sense them—everyone else—through the space vi-
brating with presence, its movements and sounding
and humming. Not drifting but shifting, adjusting.
Adaptation isn't a choice, it's a response, quick
and sharp.

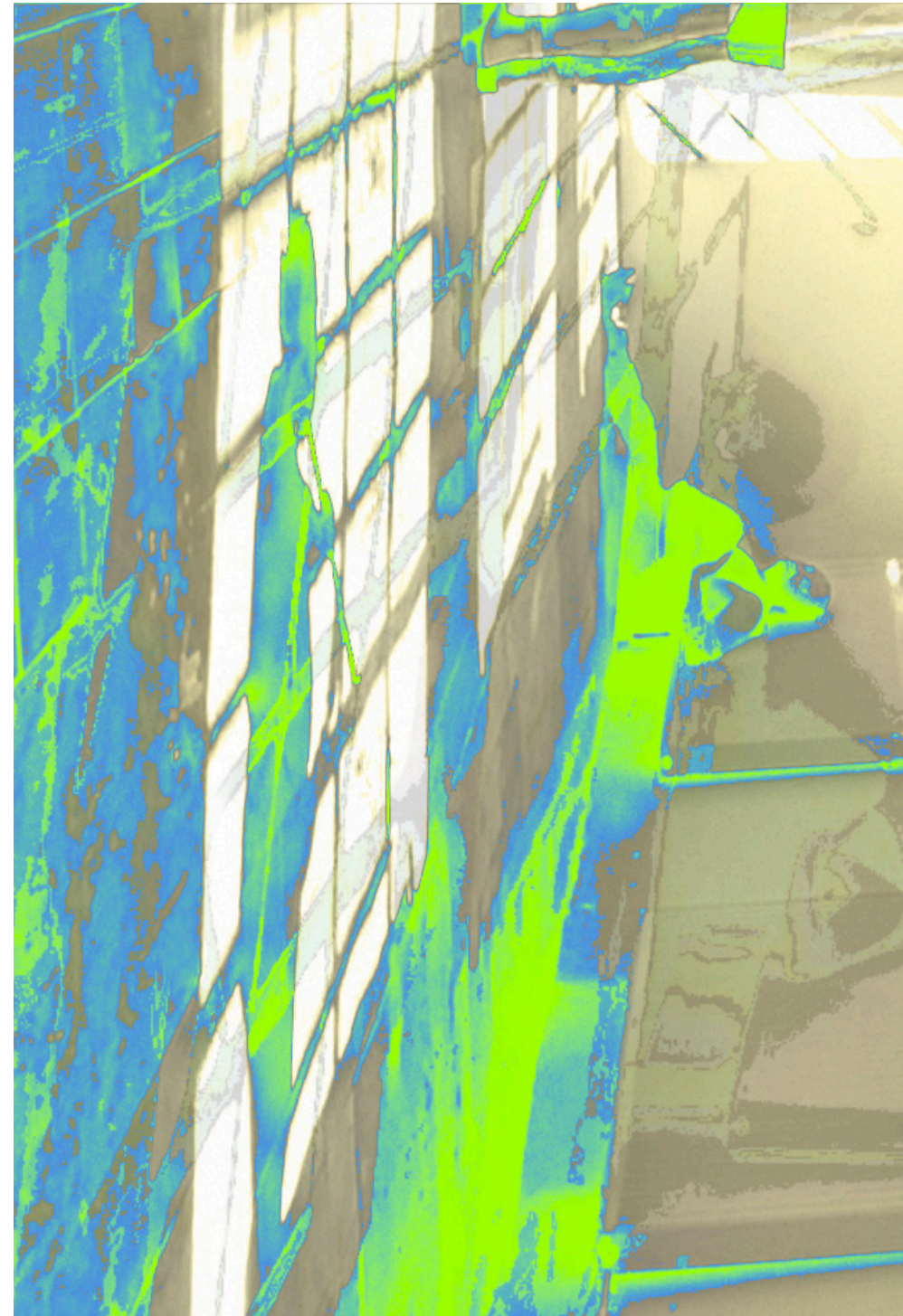
The hum rises, thickens. Voices layer, twist.
No single direction, just a pull. Sound pulls bodies
together, then apart. Transversing them and dispers-
ing back towards the source.
No need to speak, no need to see.

Each movement is a reaction to the barely heard but
fully felt, to the inundation of a shout, to the
persistence of a frequency or rhythm. Each step,
each shift is an act of adapting through listening.
Attunement forgets harmony. It's survival. The space
between bodies as vast emptiness, intermittent-
ly filled and charged with the mechanical energy of
sound waves.

The mute pack of fishes can mesh
In one diaphragmatic wave.
Tune in [And out] []
[[] [] []] [] []

I follow the trembling thread
Of your undertones
Syntonise
With the pulse of you
Pouring on empty words
Across blinded eyes
 I am here
Stretching the antennae
From the soles to the hair
Transducing vibrissae.
 The minute system
sewn around one wave
Reverberates to the tissue
we are braided in

[[]



September 5

Golnoosh Heshmati/
Collective Listening Session with Rabt space (Tehran)

In this listening session, we connected online with Rabt space in Tehran. Established in 2020, Rabt is a roaming curatorial studio that focuses on artistic research, particularly in sound and sonic arts. Participants from the newly founded School of Sonic Arts in Tehran joined us for this session, which was facilitated by Maryam Katan and Shaahin Peymani.

Over the past year, in collaboration with the Khamoosh—a transdisciplinary community dedicated to preserving and archiving Iranian sonic heritage—several spaces have come together at Rabt, both offline and online, serving as a bridge to imagine new ways of convening and engaging around sound.

Following this edition of The Listening Academy's focus on listening as an emergent strategy, participants were invited to share: "A sound that made them aware of their body's relationship to their surrounding space or locale. This could be a sound that evokes feelings of sharing, coexisting, or perhaps a sense of disconnection from the environment."

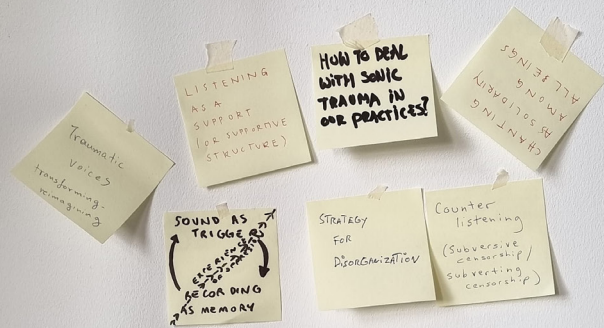
An audio mix was composed of the sounds including/ contributed by:

Farah Kassem
Heidi Holmström
Maryam Katan & Shaahin Peymani
Pedram Karimi
Sedākhāne
Stijn Dickel
Woven Sounds (A film by Mehdi Aminian)
Yulia Carolin Kothe

*the mix can be listened to [here](#)



“How we are at the small scale is how we are at the large scale. The patterns of the universe repeat at scale. There is a structural echo that suggests two things: one, that there are shapes and patterns fundamental to our universe, and two, that what we practice at a small scale can reverberate to the largest scale.”
adrienne maree brown



How can we continue to listen collectively?

24'11": a bodily reflection on our collective listening session

The aura inside the space starts shifting; gradually bringing you inwards, I feel my breath and start to listen to the rhythm. The abstract repetitive sound makes you aware of your presence and prompts inward reflection; I start becoming aware of my breath and my presence in the space. The sound begins to carry language, it's a call to prayer with a rhythm I've never heard before. Many voices begin to surround us as we start a journey among our bodies, listening together.

A repetitive rhythm is intervened by a cry –a voice of someone weaving a rug while mourning the passing of a loved one. The harmony between weaving and mourning soon drifts into the unfamiliar sound of a string instrument. It changes the aura, reverberating into the space and awakening the unknown layers of what is surrounding us. Counter to the first sound that made me aware of my heartbeat, I feel a palpitation in my veins, I can't predict what the next note might sound like...

As these unique decaying sounds pass, we are drawn back into reality by the recorded voice of an operator speaking Farsi. it's only a few seconds and before I can comprehend what I'm exactly listening to, we are immediately called back to listen, by a voice shouting "Attention! Attention!"

We begin to listen to many tones and sounds from around Iran and beyond—protests, a mass of bodies sounding together, followed by a speech in Arabic. I understand only a bit, but with the warmth of the voices, I feel assured that this is a speech uniting our bodies, something that feels both missed and needed.

Drifting again to a place, not knowing precisely where we hear a window opening and a breeze coming—a sense of waiting. It's as if I need to listen to understand something, but time is not moving, and I'm not going anywhere—just for a few minutes. I sense our minds merging as I drift into a kind of weightlessness from the voice of a woman singing while weaving a rug; I embody her rhythm, her hands, spirit, and mind becoming one.

...a few moments of silence; coming back to the place and time we are in. It felt like we all dreamed together, connecting our unconsciousness into one whole sonic experience.

This session took off from two key provocations shared by **adrienne maree brown** of "organizing as science fiction" and "collaborative ideation".

("Creating more possibilities: How we move towards life" in Emergent Strategy, page 151)

With these provocations as the key anchors to think together, the participants were invited to an investigation into how speculative listening could be framed as an emergent strategy to enact these principles. The session unfolded in the form of a discussion, collective reading, listening and brainstorming guided by a series of prompts to unearth how language, listening, fictioning and speculation might all be at the heart of imagining a collective movement.

Speculation and listening go together, hand in hand, but to this there is a third node of intentionality...which is perhaps what separates the violence of listening from the radical joy of it.

Occupy and Black Lives Matter are two large-scale recent efforts that take this collaborative ideation to a movement level, proliferating futures from a place of possibility, of multitudinous paths forward towards a shared dream. In our work for *Octavia's Brood*, Walidah and I articulated that "all organizing is science fiction," by which we mean that social justice work is about creating systems of justice and equity in the future, creating conditions that we have never experienced. That is a futurist focus, and the practices of collaboration and adaptation and transformative justice, are science fictional behavior. We didn't create this understanding, we observed it amongst the afrofuturists and sci fi writers and creators we grew up loving and being liberated by. Language changes with time, and sometimes the word for a people or an action comes centuries late. But I want to always remember and honor those who stayed and stay future oriented in the face of oppression.

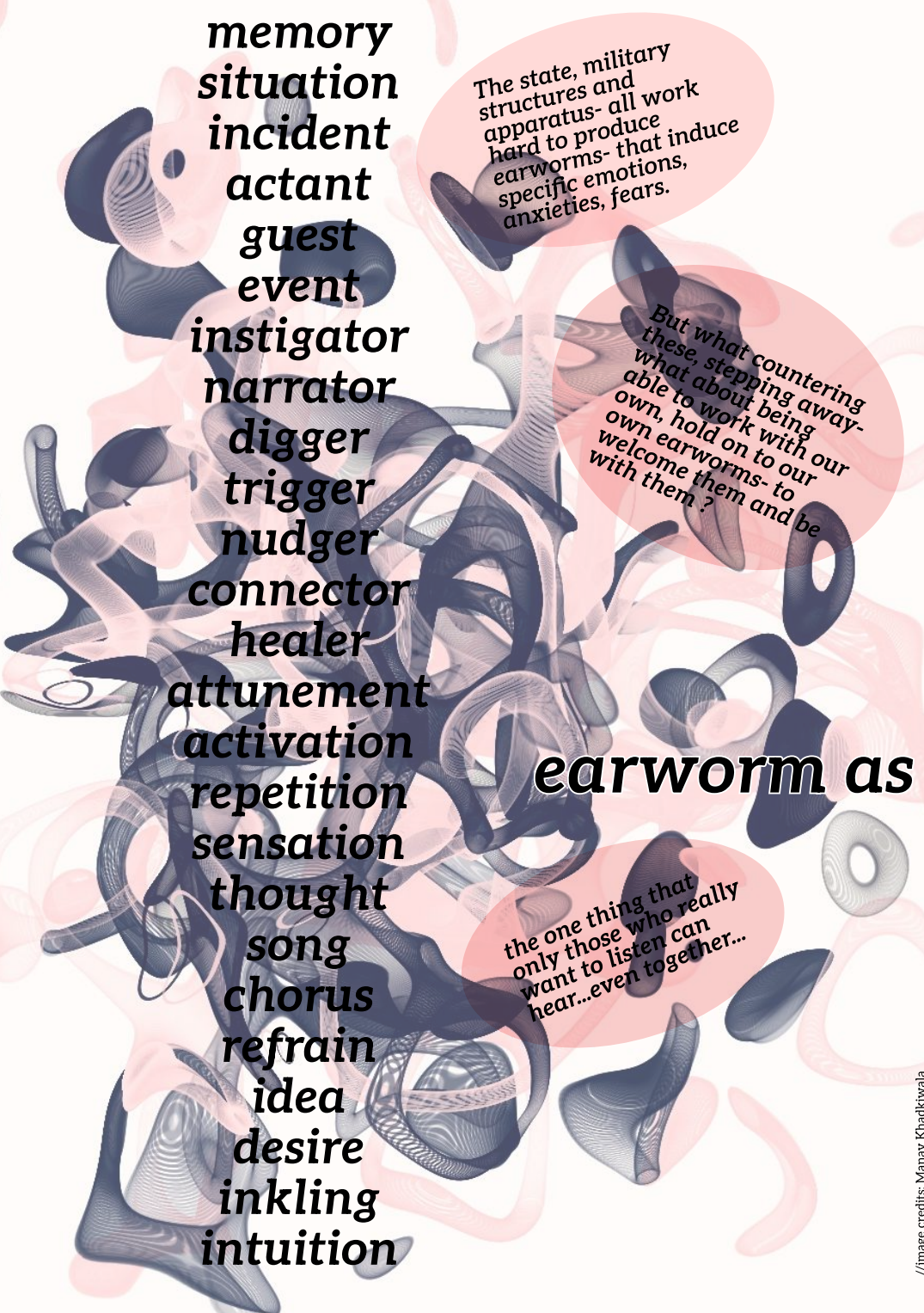
"There is nothing new under the sun, but there are new suns."
—Octavia Butler, Parable of the Trickster²³

ohrwurm ~stuck in the head~~
~~an uninvited ringing~~~a humsickness~~

where does it come from, why does it find us, how does it pick a host, how does it grow, connect, build across, speak nearby, what is it trying to tell us, does it connect us to others that it inhabits, when does it leave, how does it leave? Does it leave?

To shape the universe.
Facilitation Tools for Creating More Possibility
Collaborative Ideation
"I was attracted to science fiction because it was so wide open. I was able to do anything and there were no walls to hem you in and there was no human condition that you were stopped from examining."
—Octavia Butler
Ideation is just the verb for coming up with ideas. We are socialized to come up with ideas in isolation and compete with them, to have the best idea and get rewarded for it. But if we want a world that works for more people, we have to get into the practice of ideating together, letting others as close as possible into the intimate space where ideas are born.
My teacher Richard Strozzi-Heckler says the dream of the cell is to become two. I think the same is true of an idea—that an idea wants to be shared. And, in the sharing, it becomes more complex, more interesting, and more likely to work for more people.
Practice saying "yes" to the ideas that come from others, growing the idea with yes after yes. When you are tempted to say "no," a try asking "how?" instead. Often a "no" is a way of expressing a fear or worry that something can't work. "How?" is a collaborative question, inviting the creation process to keep going, to come up with a way for the idea to grow to the next stage.
As described above, *Octavia's Brood* leads workshops for collective sci-fi writing, which are collaborative ideation extravaganzas.¹²³

Visionary fiction (a term that Walidah coined) includes sci fi, speculative fiction, fantasy, magical realism, myth, all of it. In addition to this intentional genocide, visionary fiction intentionally explores how change happens from the bottom up.
How change works in collective ways, disrupting the single white male hero narrative.
Centering marginalized communities... Meaning we are the center of the story, as opposed to the sexy and unbelievably stylish sidekick. And visionary fiction is hard, and realistic, and hopeful. It's neither utopian nor dystopian, it's more like life.
Imagination is one of the spoils of colonization, which in many ways is claiming who gets to imagine the future for a given geography. Losing our imagination is a symptom of trauma. Reclaiming the right to dream the future, strengthening the muscle to imagine together as Black people, is a revolutionary decolonizing activity.
Some of the key practices that show up in Octavia Butler's work are collaboration, compassion, curiosity, romantic and sensual and non-possessive love, play, mediation, and the patience that comes from seeing ourselves in a much longer arc of time than we are encouraged to see in the instantaneous culture of the modern world.



memory
situation
incident
actant
guest
event
instigator
narrator
digger
trigger
nudger
connector
healer
attunement
activation
repetition
sensation
thought
song
chorus
refrain
idea
desire
inkling
intuition

The state, military structures and apparatus- all work hard to produce earworms- that induce specific emotions, anxieties, fears.

But what countering these, stepping away- what about being able to work with our own, hold on to our welcome them and be with them?

earworm as

the one thing that only those who really want to listen can hear...even together...

Listening as bringing attention to something –
as radical receptivity

In what ways does our attention affect
what we attend to?

How may we foster the conditions needed for
listening – for what is present as well as absent

Or when listening is unequally distributed or
strained by particular attention economies

Listening as surveillance, as capture
*as refusal, a call to action, as
a demand for change*

How to listen in times of war, violence,
genocide? – *when things become
profoundly unlistenable*

Listening as epistemic disobedience –
searching for other ways of knowing,
sensing, relating, keeping close
to the pluriversal

*listening as anger at systems that abuse
people and places*

The ability to imagine differently

To trust the emergent nature of things –
*from starlings to mycelium, ants to dandelions
as organizational guides*

We are always already emerging and
existing within complex we-ness

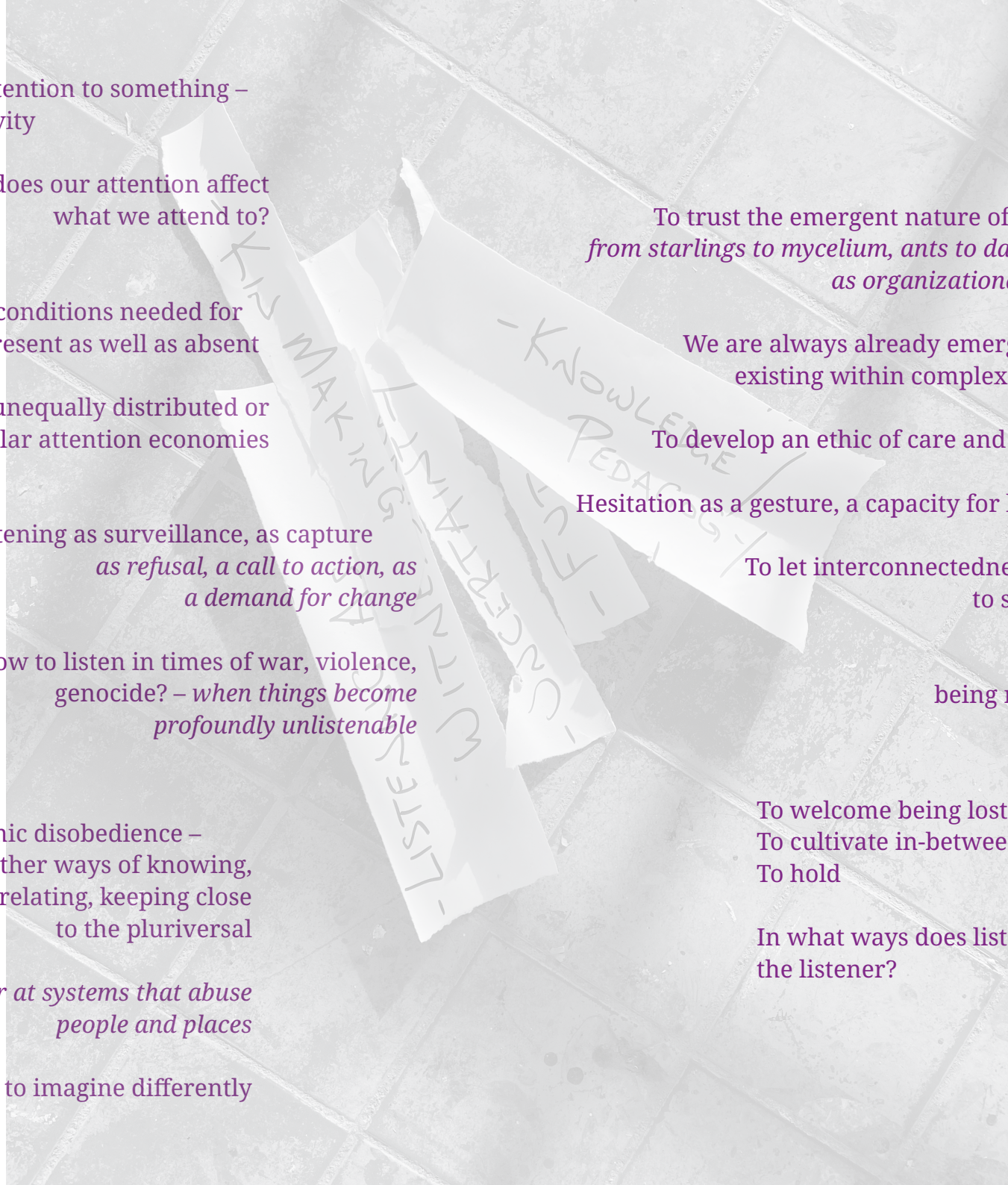
To develop an ethic of care and concern

Hesitation as a gesture, a capacity for listening

To let interconnectedness guide
to stay with
linger
trust
being reflexive

To welcome being lost
To cultivate in-betweenness
To hold

In what ways does listening affect
the listener?







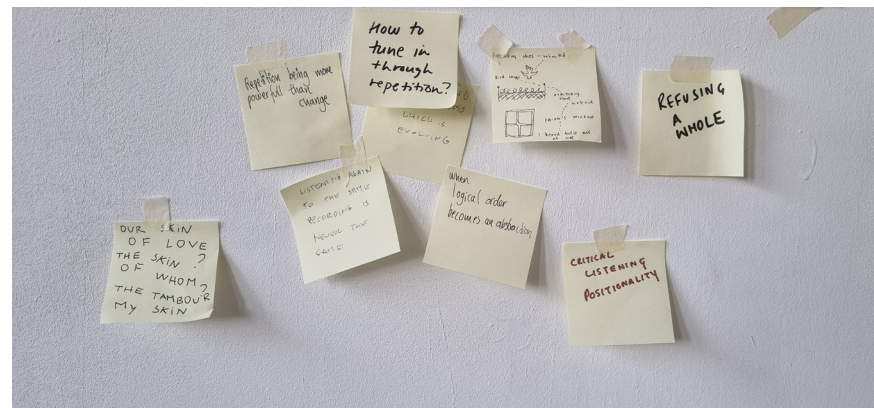
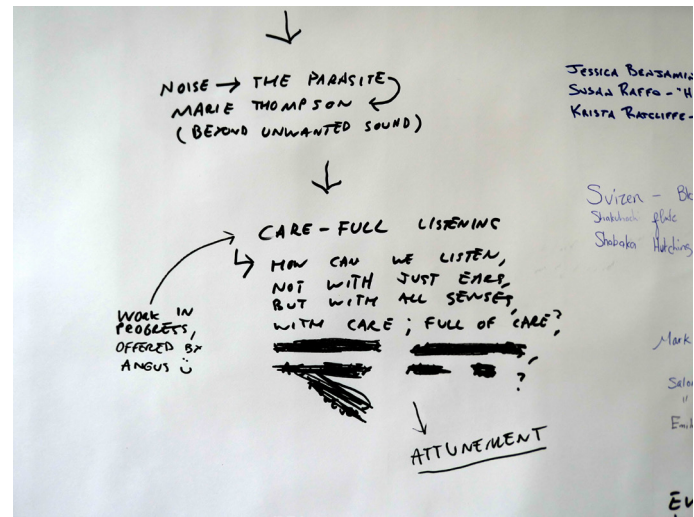
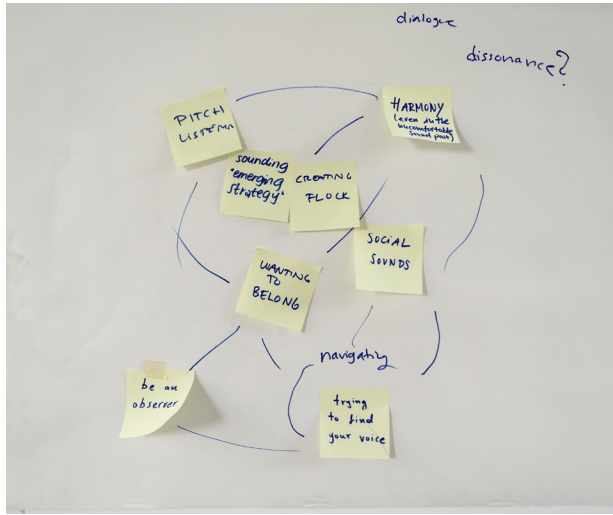
To be a host, a carrier, a support –
being touched, impinged

To connect past and future, inner and outer,
ground and sky – *as a web, a liminality, a force
of listening*

What are we willing to risk?
whose risk...

What does it mean that we are willing to listen
without knowing where such listening
may lead?





Listen to the behindness
(attend to the in-between)
Delay (re)action
Digest listening
Words don't convey the meaning
Durational listening
Listening is a risky act
(uncertain what is coming)
Listening as radical presence
(grounded listening)
Take shoes off when you listen
Don't bring knowledge into listening
Acknowledge knowledge while listening
An empty vessel
Dissolve as you listen
Be uncomfortable
Listen to the noise
Resist the irresistible
Listen to the quiet
Engage the body
Listen to the land
Disperse listening
Ask for rest from listening
Prepare the body for listening
Listen to your memories
Wash the clay
Break open
Don't conclude





Dear Adrienne Maree Brown,

I'm one of the participants that is currently gathering in a former factory building near the river Spree in Berlin to read and discuss your book *Emergent Strategy*. For some of us this is a deepening of an already established friendship with your work, for others, like me, it's an awakening to dreams, concepts and tools that can shape our lives in more emergent ways. We are all touched by what you shaped.

This Berlin gathering of more than 38 people from all over the world is part of the Listening Academy, an initiative of artistic director Brandon LaBelle and his team of partners, not to forget the many participants who come at every occasion to reflect about one aspect of listening.

Here, we are concerned with questions like: how can emergent strategies interweave with methods of listening and how do we read the manifestations of emergence with respect to their different temporalities. We are discussing the patience it sometimes takes, the insurrections, and with what rhythms micro-actions inspire the bigger beats. We let us be guided by your emblems and invent new ones. It's just to mention a couple of examples that reflect the vibes of the whole. Yes, a fractal.

We read that you are very busy with fermenting your new projects. First we were keen to ask you for a short zoom exchange but now we think of waving to you instead and sending you much gratitude for your inspirational work. With respect!

All our bests,
Myriam Van Imschoot, with the regards of The Listening Academy



The Listening Academy is an independent research academy focusing on listening as a philosophical, artistic, social and somatic issue. This entails a relation to sonic, performative and ecological practices, community organizing, sensing and sound studies, and experimental pedagogy. The Academy offers a generative and nurturing framework for researchers and practitioners to engage in collaborative exchange and the sharing of knowledge, as well as workshoping new methodologies and knowledge practices. This includes bringing together individual approaches and work, and creating opportunities for material exploration and building new collaborations.

A warm thanks to all the participants for sharing these beautiful days together, for the generosity and care, and for all the ideas, practices and reflections offered – we hope this document can carry some of the collective experiences and insights for others.