



Rendezvous: Facilitating (collective listening experiences)

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TO **B**ISCUIT,

ΔDIEU.



Image by Adrian Kato, Courtesy of UNIT/PITT//Sound of the Sun Vol. III
Listening Room

Acknowledgements

A few words of thanks before we begin.

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Abstract

This thesis explores how a designer might facilitate collective listening experiences (CLEs) by incorporating curation into their practice. This research uses the CLE of listening rooms to explore the in-between space of *curatorial design* coined by IZK institute for contemporary art. Noticing the shift towards dematerialization in our music-listening culture, primarily mediated by smartphones and streaming, this project advocates for designers to take a similar dematerialized shift in practice. By embracing facilitation of sensory-driven experiences, designers can reimagine our everyday *musicking* to be more embodied and poetic. Furthermore, this work proposes future directions for listening room development including integration within art spaces, design for ritual and potential field research in Japan. This work ultimately aims to create *splaces for conviviality*. Spaces that foster social connection and places that promote alternative ways of being.

Keywords

music, radio, dematerialize, listening, collective, *splace*, curation, kinesthetic, embodied, autoethnography

Research Questions

1. What are the ways in which collective listening experiences can facilitate the reimagination of social gatherings?

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Section 1. (Me)

1. Intro

My two favorite games to play growing up were *Homebase* and *Listening Seat*. *Homebase* is an elementary school game— my personal favourite to play during recess. Imagine somewhere in between Hide and Go Seek and Tag. After deciding the playing area and the safe zone, players chosen to be *it* attempt to find you. *Listening Seat* is a game I used to play with my brother on family road trips. First, each player chooses a set of songs to play for the other. Next, the songs are played at a ten-second interval before being paused. The person in the *Listening Seat* tries to guess the song based on the short snippet they heard. Points are scaled based on your speed and accuracy.

What I enjoyed about *Homebase* was the feeling of making it back home— the ecstasy that came with rejoicing with your comrades and letting go of your fears. What I enjoyed most about *Listening Seat* (besides beating my brother) was the cultivated space for music digestion. It also brought me closer to my brother; understanding each other on a musical level.

Philosopher Emanuele Coccia (2024) conceives of "home" as the "physical and mental material that we use to interweave our life and our destiny with those of others." (30) Shared listening experiences remain central to my sense of

home long after recesses are mandated and family road trips less frequent.

Therefore, I approached my Master's first and foremost as a music fan and as someone with a longing to revisit home through processes that cultivate intentional listening experiences.

1.1. Self Location

I left home at a young age to pursue my dreams of playing professional soccer. Moving to Vancouver for the first time, I was playing on the elite Vancouver Whitecaps Academy team. Despite my passion and determination to make it pro, the coaching staff didn't share the same vision for my future. After aging out of the academy team, I packed my bags and headed south. What initially felt like my "last shot" at making it pro turned out to be my first opportunity to discover a new side of myself. Upon attending the University of California, Los Angeles on a sports scholarship, a change in coaching staff and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic forced me to make the difficult decision to step away from soccer after my first season.

Utilizing this opportunity to sow a new passion for music and the arts, I learned how to DJ and became obsessed with the practice. The playing of and keeping track of music in all of its intangibility is freeing. Every DJ cherishes the feeling of being *in the mix*. The music exists, aurally, for a brief moment, yet it *sticks* to the environment, the speakers and the DJs USB.

Music's stickiness is due to its remarkable ability to circulate and be mobilized through culture (Straw, 2012). The stickiest of art forms, music is frequently repurposed and integrated within various "activities and situations" (Straw, 2012, p.232). Music sticks to objects like vinyl records, media like film & TV and settings such as coffee shops. In this sense, music requires supportive functions to propagate its existence and reach its full sensorial potential.

During my time in LA, I gained experience in these supportive roles working at various companies. At Red Bull Media House, I had the amazing opportunity to learn about brand and approaches to transmedia storytelling. At Dim Mak Records I received first-hand experience at a record label learning how music is found, selected and sequenced for distribution and publishing. In my practice as a creative, I established a storytelling platform, The Ryze, that produces DJ mixes, music, podcasts and radio.

One experience I am especially fond of was my time working as UCLA's Campus Events Commission Concert Director. During my tenure for the 2022/23 season, I co-directed a team of 12 staff members executing a range of programming and supporting diverse styles of performance. Some highlights include working with talents such as PinkPantheress, Teni The Performer, and Mindhatter; and organizations such as The Fowler Museum and The Hammer Museum.

Coming into this program, I was naturally drawn to explore the intersection between design, music and art. However, one thing I didn't expect this program to offer me was the opportunity to connect with my ancestry. On a trip I took back home during our summer semester, I had a spontaneous call with my grandmothers that changed my whole notion of self.

I was calling my grandma on my dad's side. I always feel a tad embarrassed and disconnected talking to her because she only speaks Yoruba and I can't understand her words. However, what I do understand is the rhythm of her voice. She has a poetic cadence and emphasizes certain words. My parents always say she is praying for me and my default response for years has been "*amin*" which is amen in Yoruba. This time I felt compelled to ask my dad what she was *really* saying. He told me she was reciting an *Oríkì*.

Oríkì's, also known as praise poetry, is traditionally used by the Yoruba people to give praise, encouragement and confidence. It also connects the recipient to their ancestors through summaries of their life history. As Yoruba, we believe that humans are spiritual beings and that you are intrinsically connected to the histories of the ones before. After calling my grandma on my mom's side who speaks English, she revealed to me our oral history.

Then and there it dawned on me that my history doesn't start with me but with the people who came before. Although I am Canadian by birth, my blood is Nigerian. By first acknowledging my history, I feel more equipped to navigate my identity and the path forward in my work. Greater acknowledgement of my past has also led me to better acknowledge my present. Through this understanding of self came a greater appreciation for this land, the water and the x^wməθk^wəyəm, Skwxwú7mesh, and səliłwətał (MST nations) who have stewarded them since time immemorial.

2. Positioning

2.1. The Curating Designer

My interdisciplinary practice can be challenging to define. Alongside curating music and listening experiences, as a designer, I respond to splace¹ in both built and natural environments. Rather than treating curation and design as separate entities, *The Curating Designer* proposes a hybrid role that fluidly oscillates between the two. Dutta (2023) introduces the concept of “The Curating Composer”, a role that blurs artistic and curatorial practices through an iterative cycle of making and distributing. Likewise, *The Curating Designer* freely moves between designing and curating, bridging creative disciplines to

¹ Splace (or splatial) is a word I coined that is the combination of space + place. Space is an act of movement while place is a moment of pause (Tuan, 1979). Space and place are examined together in my research to gain a better understanding of experience.

reflect contemporary interdisciplinary practice. As a Curating Designer, I ensure that every aspect of a project—from artist selection to spatial arrangement to audience interaction—is intentionally crafted.

I see the role of The Curating Designer similarly to Martí Guixé who urges designers to, "think beyond design (2010, p. 105)". Guixé, working in the Spanish context, considered how cultural customs around food and design influence national identity and behavior. I also consider my own Canadianess and Afro-diasporic upbringing as a critical point of departure in this work.

The Curating Designer operates in the emerging discipline of Curatorial Design. This discipline sits *in media res*; between curating– the practice of reassembling knowledge and design–the process of construction at all scales (IZK Institute, 2018). In this in-between space, I find freedom to mobilize whatever design or knowledge is needed to orchestrate an experience. In this in-between space also sits Canada. Similarly to curatorial design, Canada exists in media res. This has become more apparent with the current United States Administration which takes Canada's sovereignty lightly.

As a nation, we have always struggled for self-identity. Somewhere between the United States and the UK/Europe. Between indigeneity and colonialism. Between immigrant and settler. This makes curatorial design a quintessentially Canadian design practice. To be Canadian is to struggle

between opposing forces and embrace the space found in between. In this thesis, I use this ethos to reimagine collective listening experiences (CLEs).

2.2. Curation and Design: Expanded Definitions

My expanded notion of design originates from artists in the 1990s who were engaged in dematerialized art practices. These art practices were referred to as “relational aesthetics” and used human gatherings as artistic material (Bourriaud, 2002). Today, contemporary artists work with time and space, “manipulating visual and spatial codes” rather than solely producing physical objects (Holert, 2020, p. 208). In a similar fashion, contemporary design should embrace facilitation and orchestration of social experiences (Carrico, 2018) as core facets of practice.

Curation should also be looked at with an expanded viewpoint. In “Everyday Workouts in Minor Curating”, Libera (2023) distinguishes between major curation—festivals, exhibitions, opera, and minor curation—knowledges we assemble unconsciously throughout our everyday. According to Libera, curation is a ubiquitous act, though certain forms receive more institutional recognition than others.

One way these expanded notions of curation and design manifest in my practice is through DJing. As a DJ I naturally undulate between modes of archiving and contextualizing, constructing and making. From selecting

music to using sounds as raw material, my skills and knowledge as a DJ inspire an intuitive way of working (DeNora, 2000). While DJing often involves specialized equipment and public performance, the act itself is deeply embedded in the everyday. Choosing a specific sequence of songs for a morning commute, for instance, is DJing—whether based on mood, energy, place, history or desired ambiance. Opting for a podcast instead of music is another DJ decision.

The late Virgil Abloh was a contemporary Designer/DJ operating in this liminal space. In his “3%” approach to design, Abloh is “only interested in editing something 3% from its original form (2017, 12:30)”. In this way, he looks for minor interventions that can have major impacts on the final outcome. Similarly, when I work with *splace*, my goal is to be repurposeful and work *with* what is being offered.

3. Methodology

3.1. Embodied Autoethnography

Before getting into what CLEs are and why I am doing this research, I will first divulge my methodology and methods used to conduct this work.

The primary methodology I used in this research is embodied autoethnography. My affinity for autoethnography comes from the understanding that I bring myself with me in whatever I do. Through a deep

understanding of self, I act as a conduit to reflect the zeitgeist. An embodied approach to research appeals to me because it enables me to gain a somatic understanding of a phenomenon (Lee, 2024).

Within my embodied autoethnographic methodology, I use three primary methods: kinesthetic exploration, poetic observation and reflexive analysis.

3.1.1. Kinesthetic Exploration

I've never been able to sit still. When working on a project, I utilize kinesthetic exploration to gather resources and attune myself. When I am in motion, my body engages in all of its senses. Through this heightened perception, I gain intimate access to embodied knowledge. Knowledge such as emotion, subjectivity and thought all reside within the body (Hokkanen, 2017). One way I engage the body is through walking. Another is by making.

Kinesthetic exploration is trusting your body before your mind, to “act first and learn... from that acting (Schleicher, 2010)”. As Pink (2015) would put it;

“It is through our actions in the world– through the ways in which we move through the world, react to it, turn it to our needs, and engage with it to solve problems – that the meaning that the world has for us is revealed.”

3.1.2. Poetic Observation

Using poetic observation (Suri, 2011), I engage in a practice of noticing. I notice the sublime in the everyday. How the simple can be the most impactful. Poetic observation for me at its core is learning how to sense beauty in things often regarded as mundane. Through reflection on the everyday's impact on my life, I find the inspiration to conduct my work. It's the flowers on the way to school or the first snowfall of the year.

3.1.3. Reflexive Analysis

My perspective of reflexivity comes from Haraway (1988). In her notion of situated knowledge and limited location, I "become answerable for what [I] learn how to see" (Haraway, 1988, p.583). Using reflexive analysis gives me the confidence to understand my position within a larger socio-cultural narrative.

One tool I use for this analysis is voice memos. Through these memos, I generate thick descriptions of my experience. When recording, I find walking fruitful in coaxing thoughts to arise freely. Rank ordering is also another reflexive tool I use. By preferentially ranking items based on whatever internal criteria I set, I tap into a level of internal objectivity within my analysis of a phenomenon.

Section 2. (You)

4. Rationale

4.1. Reformat

In our contemporary music-listening culture, music has increasingly become dematerialized (Campenhout et. al., 2013), increasingly sticking to our smartphones and music streaming rather than the physical media of the past era. This shift in the way we interact with music has led to a loss of a tangible relationship with music. What initially felt like a well-intentioned effort to make music more accessible now feels borderline gluttonous. For context, in 2024, more music was released on a single day than in the entire year of 1989 (Price, 2024a). What is often forgotten is that music is a verb, not a noun. *Musicking* as Small would refer to it, is an activity in constant flux (1998). Music is an experience that is symbiotically produced by interaction between performer and listener. For Small, the listener is as much an active participant in the experience as the composer or performer. Therefore, when the screens mediate too much of our experience, the music truly does suffer.

Our streaming platforms instigate hyper-consumptive music-listening behaviors and give us a false sense of freedom. With almost 10,000 songs liked on Spotify, I am the most guilty one here. A study by Daye & Lee (2018), found a similar pattern in their participants' streaming platform usage.

Because it is so easy for songs to be skipped, people feel they are not exposed to new material or are compelled to stick with a song or album. In line with designer Kenya Hara's perspective, I argue that streaming platforms coax the natural human "desire towards idleness" (2007, p.145) and inflame our impulse towards convenience. However, not everything convenient is in the best interest of human flourishing. What we gained in ease, accessibility and storage (Campenhout et. al., 2013), we lost an embodied connection to music. It is time to return to our senses. A shift needs to occur away from a technology-driven world towards a *sense-driven* one. Not to abandon new technology but by first learning to develop our senses we can develop greater sophistication in our perception (Hara, 2007).

One way to lead with our senses when listening to recorded music is by engaging with it in a collective realm. Listening collectively puts music in a "sound environment which establishes a common ground among listeners" (Roca et. al., 2019) and encourages music to exist in its full sensorial potentiality. My work in facilitating collective listening experiences is my attempt to create *spaces of conviviality* that move music from consumption to digestion. This research is important to music listeners, artists and cultural workers but also an open call to society at large. My work is aimed at a generation of listeners that don't have the same spaces to gather as previous generations (McIntyre, 2019) but also at the emerging asocial society (Policy

Horizons, 2018). By reimagining collective listening experiences I create opportunities where a more sensuous, intentional and social connection with music can bloom. One that takes us back to the *Listening Seat*.

5. Practice

*“In the new art every [music] requires a different [listening]. **The new art creates specific [listening] conditions.**”* (Carrión, 1975, pp. 6-7)

Reimagining collective listening experiences starts by looking back at behaviours and technologies that were once deemed old or archaic but offer us a chance to experience the world anew. One technology that I see as apt for renewal is listening rooms.

Before we continue, I will delimit how I am considering music in this research. In Straw's (2012) “Music and Material Culture” he distinguishes two ways one can go about researching music. You can either move forward or backwards. Moving backward from music means dealing with music in all its physical and technical properties. That means music as sound, vibrations and frequencies. Moving backwards could be the design of speakers to how a building is made to absorb or reflect sound. I refer to this in dealing with music in its *content*. Moving forward is concerned with the social and cultural manifestations of music. For example, this could consider how music is shared or the settings in which it is experienced. I would refer to this in

dealing with music in its *context*. To completely understand a musical phenomenon, both the content and context should be considered to varying degrees. However, in these next sections, I will focus my commentary on music from a contextual perspective.

5.1. Listening Rooms

Listening rooms are musical experiences that can trace their heritage to Japan's mid-20th century Kissaten culture. Jazz Kissaten or Jazu Kissa's were small coffee shops/bar-like spaces that prioritize the hi-fidelity listening of recorded music. At the height of its popularity in post-WWII Japan, kissas primarily centered around imported Jazz music from the United States (Novak, 2008).

At the time, it was prohibitive to individually own audio equipment and import records so people came to these shops instead. At their peak, Jazu Kissa's had a predilection for an audio listening experience devoid of noise. In these rooms, no talking was often enforced. In the 70's, "free" kissas were formed by various youth counter-culture movements. These new interpretations of kissas embraced a DIY and Fluxus ethos. They encouraged various forms of socializing and musical expression, creating space for patrons to "listen experimentally" (Novak, 2008).

Similarly, in the last decade, there has been a steady adoption of the Japanese Kissa culture in North America and Europe. Throughout this research, I have had the chance to visit sites across Canada, US and Mexico. As the culture has grown, many names referring to the same concept have popped up. Some names you might recognize are, listening bar, listening lounge, hi-fi bar, listening session or listening party. Although each type of listening room may slightly vary, what is common is an intentional, collective, audio-listening experience.

At this point, some people may be wondering what distinguishes a listening room from going to a concert. One way to distinguish listening rooms from other forms of music listening is on a spectrum somewhere between personal listening (such as streaming) and a concert.

Music Listening Spectrum

<u>Personal Listening</u>		<u>Listening Rooms</u>		<u>Concert</u>	
❖	Intrapersonal & Interpersonal	❖	Group & Collective	❖	Group & Collective
❖	Recorded Music	❖	Recorded Music	❖	Live Music

Of course, these are not hard lines, even the free kissas back in the day sometimes incorporated live performances. This is just to help show what each mode of music listening tends to prioritize.

In the following two examples, I will showcase two types of listening rooms I created during my time at Emily Carr University of Arts + Design. The first was for the Black Art Center within their Black History Month programming. The second was for the Artist-run Center UNIT/PITT and their sound art project *Sound of the Sun*.

5.2. Black Art Center - Kendrick Lamar - To Pimp A Butterfly

~ Exploring Blackness ~



Image by Jefferson Alade // Entrance of The Black Art Center

In this first example, I hosted a listening room at The Black Art Center alongside their inaugural exhibition *Say Mi Affi Work*. It was an amazing opportunity for me to connect with the Black and African Diasporic (BAAD) community in metro Vancouver as well as explore a listening room's discursive quality.

When I facilitate listening rooms, the intent is to create flexibility within a space. For this listening room, I created flexibility through prioritizing a hybrid listening environment. My push for hybridity comes from the understanding of our current generation's need for multifaceted third spaces (Taştan, 2023). With hybrid spaces, both a social and functional role are fulfilled which allows for diverse sets of people to come together and access a space. Alongside listening to an album, I also set up a collage station to fulfill a social role. The functional role was fulfilled by providing services such as food & beverage and seating.

5.2.1. Curatorial Design

In the process of constructing this listening room, I considered various curatorial design elements. The five I will talk about are album selection, Run of Show, spatial arrangement, lighting and directed growth.

Album Selection

One of the considerations for this listening room was what we were going to listen to. I selected the album “To Pimp a Butterfly (TPAB)” by Kendrick Lamar for the group. TPAB is a critically acclaimed album released by Kendrick Lamar in 2015. It is certified Platinum and won the 2016 Grammy for Best Rap Album of the Year. The album is one of my favorites and deftly blends elements of hip-hop, funk and jazz to draw on themes of racial disparity and systemic discrimination. Considering that the listening room was held at the Black Art Center (BAC) during Black History Month (BHM), I wanted to choose music that was seminal and reflected the experiences of the people in attendance.

Run of Show

Another way I considered the curatorial design was through how I thought about sequencing the listening room. I used a tool called a Run of Show (RoS) to help. I learned about RoS in my previous experiences working in the live music industry. It is typically used to align everyone from artist managers to the head of security on the same schedule. In a listening room context, The Curating Designer can use the duration and scheduling of an event as ways to suggest possible actions for participants throughout their experience.

At the start of the listening room, I created time in the RoS for people to gather and get settled. It is important not to rush people and provide natural opportunities for casual interaction. After the initial welcoming, we sat down for a couple of questions to warm people into the experience. The first question prompted what kind of *sonic postcard* would they give to someone who hasn't visited their hometown (Sánchez & Cambrón, 2022) and the other inquired about their comfort music. The reasoning behind the questions was to gear people toward thinking about sound and music more intentionally. I liken this approach to when Sony first introduced the Walkman (The Sony Walkman, 1990). Since most people in attendance had not partaken in a listening room before, I needed to prime people to the possibilities of engaging with music in this way.

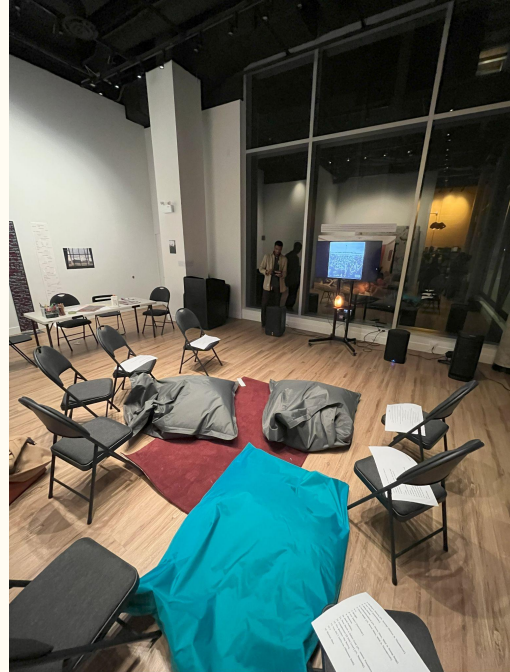
During the listening room, I created time in the schedule for people to engage in a collaging activity. In previous rooms, I received feedback and observed people wanting to do something with their hands while listening. Adding a collaging table was my way of increasing the flexibility and tactility of the music-listening experience. And even though adding a collage table may take away from a pure audio listening experience, I received feedback from participants saying they appreciated being able to make something alongside listening.

At the end of the listening room, we held a post-album discussion and reflection. During this conversation, we were able to talk about the themes of the album and how they related to our BAAD experiences in Vancouver. It was amazing to see the progression of people's energies from the beginning to the end. Initially, people were a little more reserved and to themselves but as the event went on, people opened up and were profoundly expressing themselves. Since sound and music have a universal resonance, I find it the perfect conduit to engage participants in reflection and opening up about their experiences. In this way, I would position this style of listening room somewhere between a book club and a film screening. It takes elements from the film screening oeuvre in the way it creates a space for a collective experience with media. It learns from book clubs by way of facilitating group discussions.

Spatial Arrangement



Poetry Spatial Arrangement



Listening Room Spatial Arrangement

To decide on the spatial arrangement, I was motivated by my kinesthetic exploratory method to visit the space prior to my event. Visiting helped me situate myself to place and meet the people who ran the center. During my visit, I stayed for a poetry open mic night. I took note of how people were interacting with the space and how I was feeling. One element I knew I wanted to repurpose for my listening room was the positioning of furniture.

During the poetry reading, one of the first things I noticed was how the chairs were positioned to face forward. Although forward-facing seating lends

well to an open mic format, I wanted the listening room to have a different feel. Instead, I made these decisions to prioritize conviviality and design the environment to feel casual and welcoming. I opted for circular seating as well as bean bag floor options. I also intentionally placed the collaging and food table outside of the circle. Doing so creates spatial distinction so participants can decide whether they want a more focused listening experience or a more conversational/tactile one. This illustrates how semifixed features such as the positioning of chairs and tables can aid in participants' sociopetal experience within a space (Malnar & Vodvarka, 2004). My design for this environment was informed by proxemics in the way I considered creating distinct zones to allow for flexibility in the way participants could interact with the space.

Lighting

After my preliminary site visit, I also wanted to consider what role sight plays in supporting listening experiences, so I repurposed the lighting they had in the space. As discussed in Lupton & Lipps (2018) book "The Senses: Design Beyond Vision", I decided to destimulate the sense of sight to allow the other senses to flourish. We dimmed the overhead lights and I used a salt lamp and a TV screen as the primary light source. Balance is key. Too little visual stimuli and people tend to feel awkward not knowing where to rest their eyes. Too much and people may become distracted and might look more than listen. For this listening room, I placed the salt lamp in the center

of the room for people to rest their eyes. The TV was used to show the album art and lyrics which supplemented the sonic narrative with visual storytelling cues. Similarly to how vinyl records provide a tangible connection to an album's art and liner notes, I also wanted to give people an immediate experience with this extra contextual information.

Directed Growth



Image by Jefferson Alade // Taken at Granville Island

One big takeaway from this listening room came from poetic observations I made during a visit to Granville Island months before the event. After milling around, I stumbled into a design studio that was training plants to bend in a certain way. What came to me was the idea of *directed growth*. As a host, you need to find the right balance between control and openness. When creating and facilitating a listening room, although you may have preconceived notions of what you want to happen, the true magic comes from responding to the moment and guiding people along their journey.

For example, during the beginning of the listening room, the director was the one who suggested we put the lyrics up on screen. That possibility didn't occur to me until he mentioned it. Because TPAB is a highly lyrical album, having the words visible helped people catch more of the meaning. Near the end of the listening, I noticed a couple of people reading. At first, I was a bit thrown off but during the discussion, the people who were reading were the most engaged in the dialogue. By staying open, meeting people where they are and trusting in directed growth, I felt I received genuine engagement from participants.

5.3. UNIT/PITT - Various Artists - Sound of the Sun, Vol.III

~ Creating a vibe (aura) ~



Image by Adrian Kato, Courtesy of UNIT/PITT // Sound of the Sun Vol. III
Listening Room

The second listening room I hosted was at the artist-run center UNIT/PITT. The project was supported by the Shumka Center's Art Apprenticeship program. I earned the spot as UNIT/PITT Guest Curator for the third and final volume of their sound art compilation album, "Sound of the Sun". The project meditated on sonic-celestial relationships and for each volume, ten artists were invited to respond to the solar movements through audio-based methods. For each volume, the works were compiled onto a cassette tape and a public event was hosted to celebrate the release. In previous editions, the public event featured live performances from select artists involved in the project. However, I was excited to use this opportunity to also host a listening room as a way to showcase alternative modes of gathering and music listening.

5.3.1. Curatorial Design

The scope of my work on this project was broad. Some of the curatorial design elements I facilitated in my role were album selection, establishing a visual identity, producing a cassette and programming an event at their place.

Album Selection

The first task I did to kick off the project was to engage in a reflexive analysis and put myself in the artist's shoes. The Sound of the Sun uses an open submission to source work. As a way to spot my biases and develop

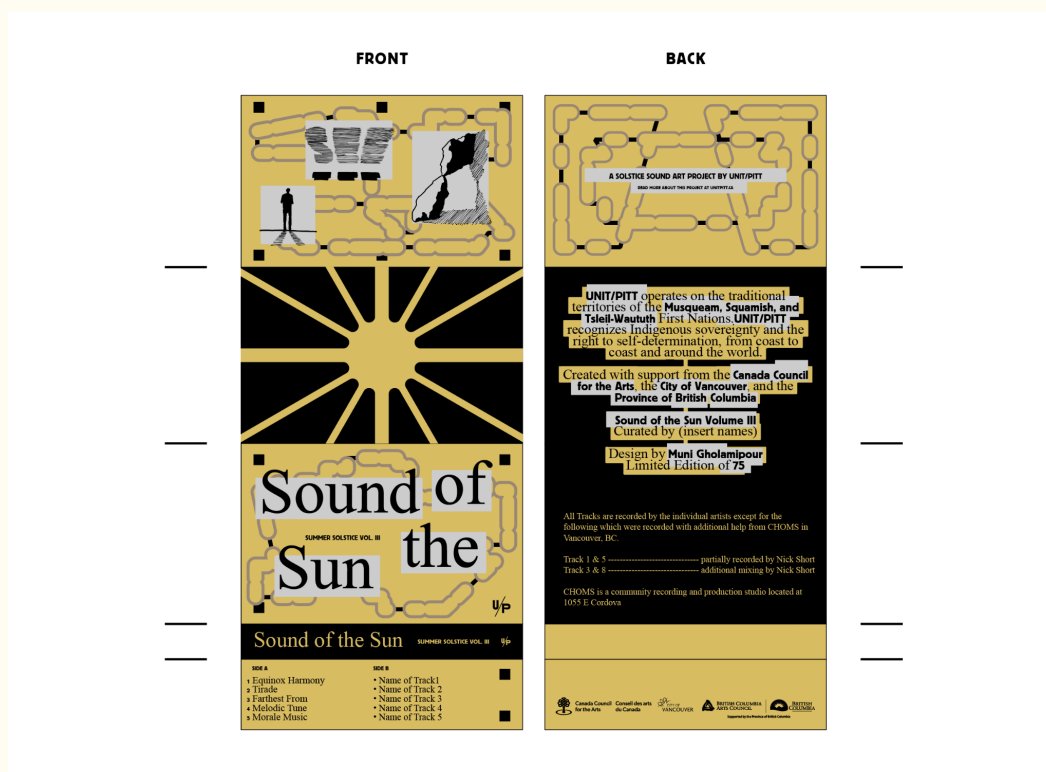
empathy for those who were submitting, I answered the prompt myself. In doing so, I wanted to see where I instinctively went with the idea. This way when I was going through others' submissions, I didn't only pick people who were similar to me. Throughout the process I was conscious about the places people were coming from in efforts to include diverse sun perspectives. The selected artists represented places from the west coast, prairies and central Canada. The project also featured sonic perspectives from Asia and Europe.

Another consideration I took into account for this album was why make a cassette in the first place. Although I appreciate the aesthetic and nostalgic aspect of cassettes, I felt unsure if this decision would be seen as no more than a novelty. Therefore, to turn a novelty into a meaningful moment, I decided that if we were going to make a cassette then we also had to listen to it. That way at least people could hear the cassette regardless of what equipment they had access to. This idea is very reminiscent of the OG listening rooms in Japan. At the time because most individuals didn't have access to audio equipment or records, it forced people to come together to listen. Similarly, because most people in this age don't have a cassette player, our listening room became a service for people who wanted to hear the authentic version of the project.

Through this commitment to collective listening came the idea to do the public program in two parts; a listening room at the start to welcome and

live performances at the end to close. In the middle, we had a break for food, drink and socializing. Creating an environment to listen to the cassette in the format that it was intended for helps create an aura (Guixé, 2010) around the listening experience. By creating an aura within my events, I narratively transport people to a place that evokes a spiritualness and a shifting perception of reality.

Visual Identity



An early draft of the J-card for the cassette

After selecting the artists, visiting all of them and deciding on the form for the event, my next task was developing the visual identity for the project. I was initially considering designing the graphics myself– until I met another designer. I was playing at my weekly drop-in soccer match where I met Muni Gholamipour. We happened to live near each other and ended up walking back home together. After hearing about his work and seeing his style, I knew he better captured the vision I had in my head. I had Muni take the lead for the initial graphic design inspiration. Just like the artists, I got him to respond to the project prompts. In doing so, I wanted him to create work that he was passionate about. Later on in the project, we worked together to finalize the visual identity that resonated with me, him and UNIT/PITT's aesthetic.

While Muni was designing the J-card, I focused my visual energy on designing the shell and casing for the cassette. My two intentions were to have the cassette communicate what the music sounded like and paired with what Muni was creating. I chose a frosted white shell to reveal the bright yellow cassette on the inside. Through these design decisions, I wanted to communicate the story of changing seasons. Defrosting from the winter to spring into the vibrant sun of the summer.

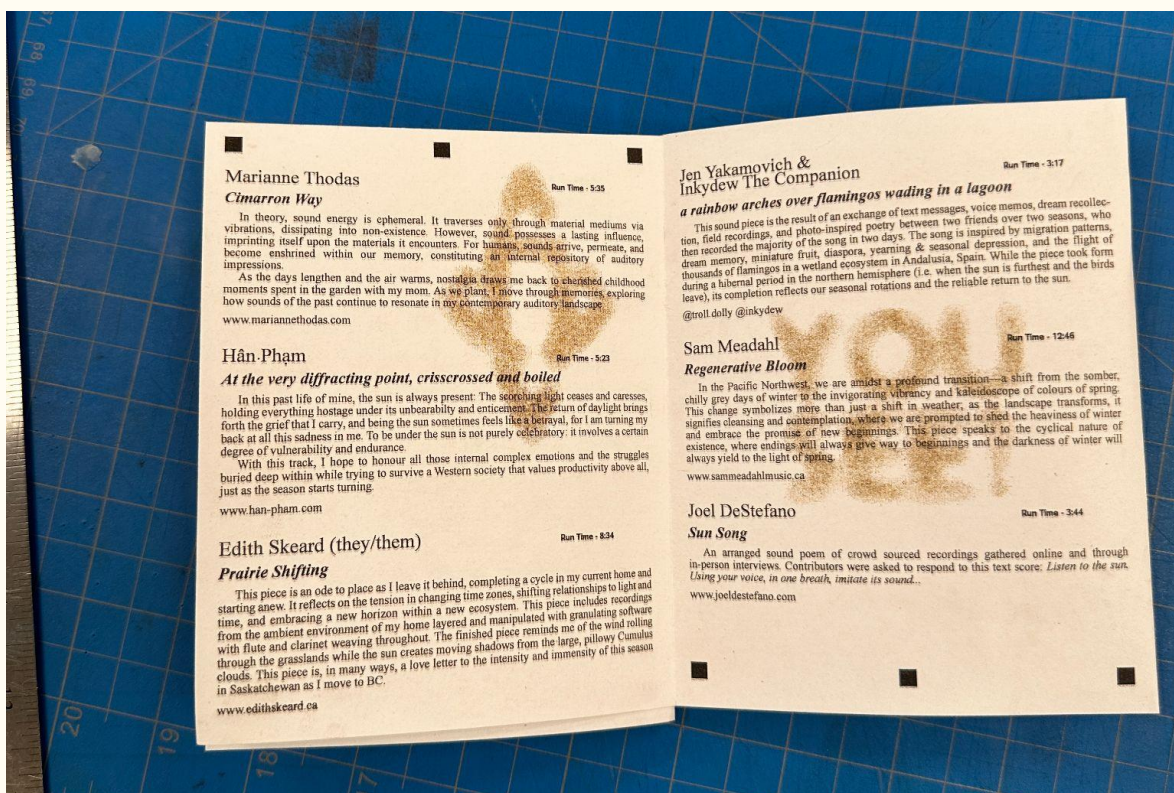


Images by Jefferson Alade // Sound of the Sun Vol. III Cassette

It was important for me to create a free collectible for the project.

Because events are transient by nature, creating a physical item provides participants with something tangible to recall their experience long after it's completed. After iterating on a few ideas, I landed on using the traditional 8-fold zine. To add some extra spice to the final product I printed them using a Risograph printer. Muni focused on the layout of the brochure while I concerned my visual energy on the printing/color aspect of the design.

We ended up going for a three-color riso print on 11 x 17 60# text paper. We wanted the paper to be heavier than your typical copy paper, giving the design a more premium feel. The colors were sunflower, black and flat gold which were directly inspired by the sun and themes of the project. I was also keen on experimenting with using the flatbed scanner instead of printing digitally. I feel that using the flatbed function humanizes the printing experience and aligns with my kinesthetic exploratory method. With the flatbed, you are in more physical contact with the printer as well as dealing with tangible materials throughout the process. During the event, I placed the brochures throughout the garden, creating a sense of discovery and play for the participants in attendance.



Images by Jefferson Alade // Sound of the Sun Vol. III Brochure

Run of Show



Image by Adrian Kato, Courtesy of UNIT/PITT // Entrance of Sound of the Sun Vol. III Listening Room

I once again used a Run of Show (RoS) to consider the temporal flow of the event. Experimenting with duration, I was interested in the event being very long. The Sound of the Sun mediates on the lengthening of the days and also took place on the longest day of the year. By scheduling the event to last for five hours, I used the duration as another element to communicate the project's theme and intention. The event included a listening room, a catered meal and live performances at the end. Although the attendance severely

dwindled at the end, I felt this made the concept stronger. According to the sun, the end of the day should have the least amount of light, hence the least amount of people in attendance.

I brought Bleach Studios to help cater this event. They are a listening room in Chinatown and also have a fantastic rotating menu. Over the past year, I have gotten to know the founders and I was excited to use this platform to cross-pollinate between art and music scenes within Vancouver. Food can be used practically to give people the needed energy to stay throughout your event. It can also be seen as a medium for social connection. After the listening, we took an hour of intermission for people to eat and mingle before jumping into the live performances.



Image by Adrian Kato, Courtesy of UNIT/PITT // Sound of the Sun Vol. III
Listening Room Catering by Bleach Studios

Spatial Arrangement

For the spatial arrangement of the listening room, the first decision was to host it outside in UNIT/PITT's garden. Having the listening room outside provided a unique opportunity for both the inside and outside space to be activated. We opted for the live performances inside which created a natural flow and progression throughout the event. Hosting the listening room in the

garden was also an attempt to further connect the idea of place to the themes of the album. Because the album is about the sun, being outside during the listening was my attempt at evoking a more embodied relationship with what people were hearing.



Image by Adrian Kato, Courtesy of UNIT/PITT // Sound of the Sun Vol. III
Listening Room

I designed UNIT/PIT's garden space to flexibly accommodate diverse listening room experiences. One of the more interesting effects of this was how people naturally assumed a certain etiquette without needing to be told.

For those who wanted a deep listening experience, the area closest to the speakers was optimal. The people that were okay with a little chatter and reactions fanned out into the garden. If you moved inside the gallery you would find others listening more attentively to each other rather than the cassette which to me is an equally valid way of appreciating a listening room.

One way I created flexibility was by adding extra seating to the garden. I worked with an industrial designer Emilia Abundis on this aspect of the project. The intention was to organically add seating with repurposed material that reflected the garden's aesthetic. One point of inspiration for my decision-making was inspired by Japanese gardens. In her book *Everyday Aesthetics*, the author Saito (2007) details how in Japanese gardens, designers place uneven and unique stones for people to walk across as a way to attune the participant to their body. Similarly, we applied this idea when deciding on materials and seating height. For a couple of the seats, we used cement blocks and planks of wood found in the garden shed. For one of the seats, Emilia spotted an abandoned closet door in a nearby back alley. After assembling the seating, we recognized the value of keeping the height low. By having the seats lower to the ground, we were attuning people to feel grounded and connected to the nature and sounds around them. In this way, our design created a thoughtful and considerate environment to facilitate participants' ease and comfort within the space (Saito, 2007).





Images by Jefferson Alade // Sound of the Sun Vol. III Repurposed Seating

5.4. The Perfect Host



Image by Adrian Kato, Courtesy of UNIT/PITT // Sound of the Sun Vol. III
Listening Room

Although it's impossible to include the many, and varied, takeaways and learning experiences I had through this research, here I will summarize some of the key points. Specifically around listening rooms, one thing I would like to impart is an overall ethos when it comes to creating them. There are no hard and fast rules. Even in Japan, where I take my point of departure,

experimental free kissas contrasted with the more traditional jazz kissas. Both of them are equally valid. If we start from the premise that listening rooms create intentional, collective, audio listening experiences; how we get there can be achieved in many ways. In traditional kissa's they created intentionality and collectivity through hi-fidelity audio equipment and a social expectation for patrons to be silent. People connected not through words but through a common appreciation of Jazz (Novak, 2008). Free kissas on the other hand created intentionality and collectivity less through a vow of silence as it was a commitment to listening experimentally (Novak, 2008). Hence, in North America, the cropping up listening rooms shouldn't feel the need to precisely imitate traditional kissas but find their way to create intentional, collective, audio listening experiences that reflect their own culture.

In my listening rooms, I create intentional, collective, audio-listening experiences through the lens of my curatorial design practice. As the host of a listening room, I set the tone for engagement. In Swartz's notion of "The Perfect Host", he ushers forward the next generation of contemporary creatives to,

"be present, to reside performatively over his or her own creation, to set the terms of its language, to negotiate the terms of its consumption (Guixé et. al., 2010, 110)."

With my work, I disrupt the traditional notion of the “bourgeois and elite” host into a reimagined role that is the “total art of the 21st century (Guixé et. al., 2010, 109)”. By combining presentation, intentionality and cultural reception (Guixé et. al., 2010, 109), I carry forward the torch of Marti Guixe's work with food and dining rooms into music and listening rooms.

As a host, the success of the listening room hinges on your ability to facilitate people's participation and experience more than any equipment or location. Listening rooms can be done with HiFi spatial 4D audio or with whatever shitty ripped MP3 CD you could find that day. They can be hosted in public with hundreds of people or done at home with a small group of friends. Ultimately, listening rooms are about collective experiences. In this spirit, listening rooms can learn from the Bantu African philosophy of Ubuntu. Ubuntu is the recognition of the interconnectedness of individuals with society and the physical world around them. It's the recognition that I am because you are. You are because I am. I am because we are. Through Ubuntu, listening rooms can be understood as *spaces for conviviality*. Spaces that move music from consumption to digestion and places that reimagine alternative forms of social connection.

Section 3. (We)

6. Outro

6.1. Future Research Directions

Listening Room X Art Spaces



Image by Adrian Kato // Synesthesia @ Bside Radio Sound. DJ The Ryze B2B
Munro Blue

Over the past two years, I've also explored radio as a collective listening experience. At Emily Carr, fellow grad student Logan Wilkinson and I rebooted the campus station, Radio Emily. Outside school, I host Synesthesia, a

monthly show on Bside Radio. When I first moved to Vancouver, Bside became my entry point to a community because it created a *space* where people could physically gather to listen. Inspired by this, we integrated similar elements into Radio Emily, adding furniture, exterior speakers, and an on-air sign to shape a shared listening environment.

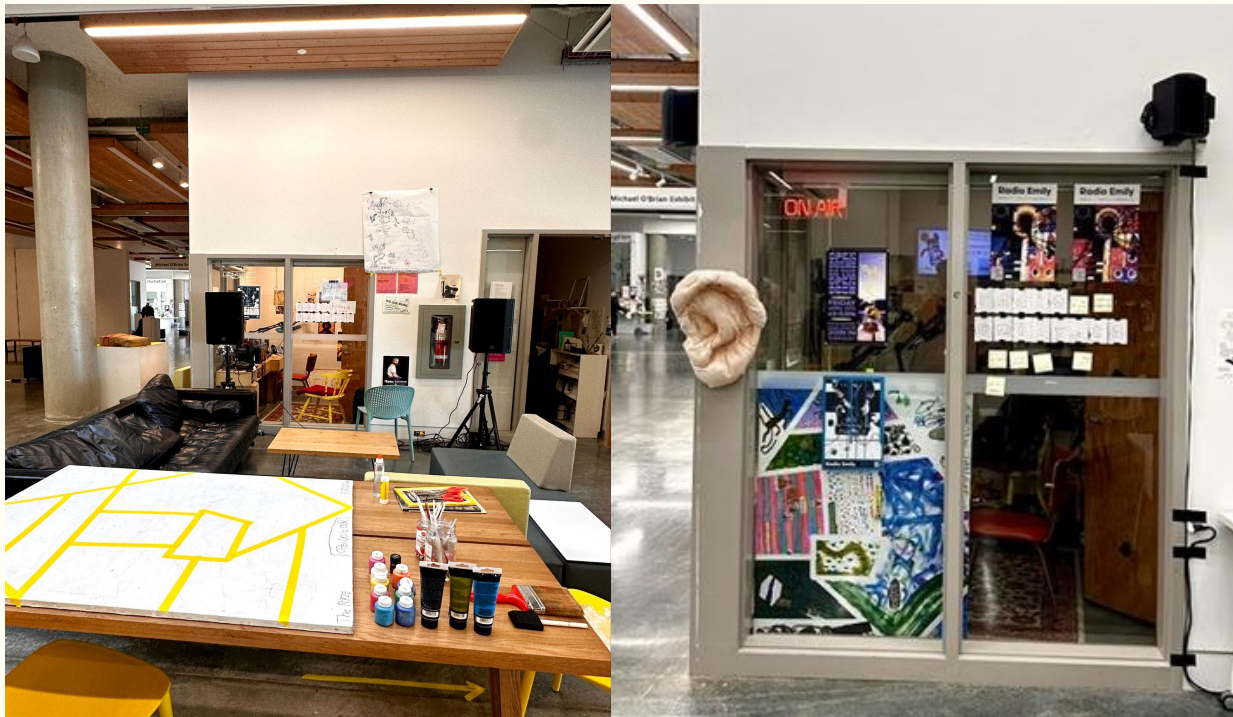


Image by Jefferson Alade // Outside of the Radio Emily station located in Emily Carr's cafeteria

A key insight I gained from my thesis work is that listening rooms function best as features within a larger experience rather than as standalone spaces. The ones I have encountered so far are typically embedded in food

and drink settings, and my work with listening rooms has existed within gallery contexts. Moving forward, I see artist-run centers (ARCs) and galleries as natural hosts for collective listening experiences, absorbing new audiences of aficionados and appreciators in the absence of record shops as primary gathering spaces (McIntyre, 2009). I am already seeing an emergence of listening rooms in and around Vancouver's art spaces. For instance, a year after I hosted my listening room at the Black Art Center, The Vancouver Art Gallery hosted its own listening session on Black History Month.

Speculating on what would be the best way for galleries and ARCs to embed listening rooms within their spaces, I see radio offering a particularly viable route. With radio, there is already an established collective understanding of its audio-centricity. Just as art spaces already incorporate bookstores, urban screens, artist talks and reading circles, radio (and by proxy listening rooms) can *stick* to galleries as dedicated spaces that support audio-based works and the sonic arts.

In Vancouver, where art spaces constantly face threats of closure, fostering interdisciplinary intersections is key to their survival. Listening rooms not only expand artistic engagement but also enhance accessibility—both for those who are visually impaired and for audiences who may not yet resonate with traditional visual art forms, listening rooms could be a gateway for further engagement. I also think there is an opportunity to increase the

participatory aspect of listening rooms. People in attendance could be encouraged to share music that means something to them and explore collective notions of curation.

Listening Room Research & Development

In terms of how I want to advance my practice of creating and hosting listening rooms, I want to take a field research trip to Japan. Japanese culture, their listening rooms and the way they consider design is something I would love to be immersed in. I would also love to pay Kenya Hara a visit and thank him for giving me the final push to complete this research.

An aspect of a listening room I want to further explore is its installational quality. By treating listening rooms as an installation and enhancing it with sculptural interventions, there is high collaborative potential with artists to enhance the experience with spatial, tactile, olfactory and visual interventions.

Ritual

Lastly, I haven't fully fleshed out this point but I notice a connection between my work with collective listening experiences and ritual. Rituals are meaningful to most people and can be major sites for change within oneself and a community. I would like to continue to explore how my practice can facilitate and create rituals.

6.2. Reflections

Writing these final words feels bittersweet. What should be a moment of celebration—closing one chapter of research—is colored by the grief of losing loved ones. When I think of myself against the vast uncertainty of the world, I feel small. Yet in that smallness, I listen to my spirit. I find a quiet power, a sharpened focus and a resolve to make an impact with the time and strength I have left. I carry the torch of their memory, and with it, a devotion to live and work in service of something greater than myself.

For this final reflection, I offer two thoughts: one for life, and one for work.

For life, I return to my cultural heritage and the practice of collective listening. After presenting at the Master of Design Symposium, I received feedback from my external reviewer, Dimeji Onafuwa. A fellow Nigerian, I felt he truly saw me. One insight he offered me was about the Yoruba tradition of *Oríkì*. Until that moment, I had not fully grasped how deeply an *Oríkì* is rooted in the act of listening—not just between performer and audience, but across time, reaching out to our ancestors. In *Oríkì*, listening becomes a bridge. It reminds me that even as people pass into another place, they do not leave us. They remain in our hearts, our minds, our words, our sounds. Through listening, we keep them alive.

For work, I return to radio. In the previous section, I wrote of radio as a powerful tool for galleries and artist-run centers to embrace. I still believe this. But now I also see radio as something I want to carry forward on my own terms. Before entering this program, I had begun The Ryze Radio in Los Angeles—a station with two shows: one showcasing DJ mixes, another holding conversations with creatives about their journeys.

Now, having completed my research in Vancouver, I imagine a new future for The Ryze Radio (TRR): a mobile radio station, a nomadic platform that moves between digital and physical spaces. TRR will use transmedia storytelling to broadcast from wherever the creative spirit calls— whether that be a gallery, website or garden. At this moment, rather than building permanent infrastructure, TRR will focus on popping up in places and facilitating collective listening experiences to new communities. It might host a season in Vancouver, then drift eastward to Edmonton, gathering stories and weaving connections. Through its mobility, TRR stays flexible, hybrid and responsive; becoming a living, breathing archive of creativity.

This program has given me more than new skills or conversations; it has given me a methodology for practice, and a deeper understanding of myself as a creative being. I know better how I wish to walk through the world. I recognize my place in a larger, ongoing story. Life is bigger than me. With the wisdom of Oríkì in my ears, and the vessel of The Ryze Radio in my hands, I

move forward—ready to listen, to remember, and to meet others who also believe in creating positive change. One sound, one word and one gathering at a time.



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