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Alarm will touch

This talk will explore the notion of “expanded listening” as a mode of both attention and distraction, drawing on the sound composition, *The Listening Cobweb* (2021), devised by film-maker and sound artist Aura Satz and percussionist Evelyn Glennie. Within the fields of music and sound studies, expanded listening indicates both focused and global listening, such as Deep Listening (Oliveros, 2005), and ubiquitous, distributed, and inattentive listening (Kassabian, 2013). Geographers Gallagher, Kanngieser, and Prior (2016) use this term to probe sonic interactions across human and nonhuman bodies. The suggestion is to highlight listening as a cross and multi-sensory modality, which is not limited to human audition or human body. Similarly, *The Listening Cobweb* points to “aural diversity.”¹ It employs and translates low frequencies into “percussive sequences,”² that underline the “vibratory/haptic”³ and tactile aspects of sound.

In the wake of various ecological and social crises, Satz explains, *The Listening Cobweb* recasts low frequencies as “new siren sounds and emergency signals.”⁴ Satz pursues this idea in another project, titled *Preemptive Listening*. In it, she considers a “recalibration of emergency signals set to a longer temporal frame in a time of alarm fatigue.”⁵ Addressing preemptive listening, she also uses and develops the term, expanded listening. She makes a call for attention to the invisible, inaudible, imperceptible. Glennie, renowned percussionist who has been deaf since the age of 12, echoes this call by creating percussive segments that highlight the vibratory and tactile properties of sound and cross-sensory modalities of listening.

In this talk, I want to look at how Satz and Glennie articulate expanded listening as a modality of both attention and distraction. *The Listening Cobweb* looks into sensory thresholds but also prompts sensory transpositions and diffusions. It draws attention to capturing the inaudible but also asks for searching the inaudible through an extended temporal and spatial continuum. It invokes a politics of emergency sounds in the form of wake-up call but also distracts such awakening from immediate struggles of everyday life. Sirens’ song, as musicologist Peraino argues, encourages listeners to concentrate on “the past and future self.”⁶ When we feel the touch of a siren sound, of an emergency signal, where are we, where do we go?

¹ Satz, Aura, Evelyn Glennie. ‘The Listening Cobweb’. *The Contemporary Journal* 3 (June 01, 2021). [<https://thecontemporaryjournal.org/strands/sonic-continuum/the-listening-cobweb>].

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid. Also see <https://www.iamanagram.com/PreemptiveListening.php>

⁶ Peraino, Judith Ann. *Listening to the Sirens: Musical Technologies of Queer Identity From Homer to Hedwig* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2006), p. 2.