

Communing with others: performing voices

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Introduction

This article concerns how we can use sound and listening practices to foster a different relationship with the animals in rural environments. This is done through two artworks *Rapture* (2014) and *Flow* (2019) created by the author, and how they explored ideas of voicing, translation and noise to push the human body to become more sensitised, and other to itself. In order to do so, the discussion is concerned with ideas of voice, translation, listening and nature: drawing upon the work of Voegelin (2011), Zdjelar (2009), Nancy (2007), Oliveros (2010) and Meijer (2019).

Furthermore, the article explores how we communicate with others, both human and non-human, through the use of voice (singular and as part of a group). The research arises from a body of artistic work exploring translation processes through voice. It seeks to understand what it means to 'voice' something, to *give* voice to something, to utter, to express, to vocalise, and to whom we are speaking or voicing for, to and with. It questions whether we need to be understood, or if a sound is enough to gain acknowledgment of existence.

The potential answers are sought through the use of dialogic and inclusive processes within my own art practice and translation studies. I will seek to understand how listening can become not only a tool belonging to the ear, but *towards* understanding that which is considered other. There is much about our environments that we do not understand fully, such as the rhythms of the earth, the ways in which animals move, what relations they have to the plants, microbial layers and so on. Not all is discovered or understood by us, we often find ourselves in situations where it is clear what is happening, or who is speaking to whom, or what they are saying. Non-human animals are often understood as different, lesser, without the capacity for language, however this is

of course dependent on how we measure and what qualifiers we are using. Here we are interested in approaching the environment we are with(in) from a different standpoint, from a dialogic listening approach, where it is in the recognition that we are other to the other. The aim is to suggest ways that we can perhaps start to live in a shared common environment.

Rupture and *Flow* are both visual scores for a choir created through artistic research. Visual scores are here understood as scores not using traditional notation but drawing and written language. The scores within these works are the results of translations from field recordings of animals (for example arctic fox, skua, raven) and volcanoes in Iceland, translated into visual scores that are performed by a choir. *Rupture* was developed during a period spent in Iceland in 2014, and performed by Hljómeyki choir, as part of the *Art in Translation* conference and exhibition, at Nordic House, Reykjavík, Iceland, 2014. *Flow* (2019) was developed as a response and continuation to *Rupture* with the aim to create further complexity and sophistication in the sounds sung or uttered by the choir. *Flow* was performed by Juxtavoices, as part of *In Dialogue* conference and event, at Nottingham Contemporary, 2019. During that event, Juxtavoices, first performed *Rupture* and then *Flow*. The difference between the two pieces will be discussed in detail throughout the paper, and will form part of the arguments around translation, listening and how these practices may help our understanding of animals. Below you can see/listen to edited versions of the 3 performances, these are not the full performances. I urge the reader to engage with these before continuing reading.

Rupture performed by Hjolmeyki Choir: <https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/137062263>

Rupture performed by Juxtavoices: <https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/419722939>

Flow performed by Juxtavoices: <https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/419723888>



Rupture and *Flow*, J. Hällstén, performed by Juxtavoices, Nottingham Contemporary, 2019



J. Hällsten, in the field listening, near Hekla, Iceland, 2014. You can hear part of the recording of this stream here: <https://soundcloud.com/johannahallsten/iceland-stream-recording-2014?>

Animals: translating voices

The grounding of this artistic body of work (past and current) is an interest in how we engage with what is commonly phrased as ‘the natural environment’, nature, plants, trees, water, wind etc. and the animals living in those environments (countryside, rural, forests, mountainous areas, etc.). I continue to call this *environment* from here on, as there is an arbitrary separation occurring when calling something ‘the natural’ in the context of environment. I believe we are no longer in a position to denote such differences; it is more of a case of how much or little a specific environment has been interfered with by humans. Engagement, here, describes a cohabiting or a co-use of certain types of environments (not places or spaces, but environs – living atmospheric locales outside of buildings), and how we can enable a greater symbiosis and understanding of the other inhabitants of environments. Here I am particularly interested in Northern European Nordic environments, such as the volcanic landscapes of Iceland and arctic circle areas of Sweden, where the geo and biospheres are particular. These environments are still relatively slowly changing and are native to me.

Rupture (2014/19) and *Flow* (2019), and an artwork in progress *Listening: Björk* (2023) are all works where I am particularly interested in the micro, local and specific environs of particular places in Iceland (Hekla and surrounding region) and Sweden (Snasahögarna, Arjeplog and Jokkmokk). The first two works specifically dealt with animal responses to volcanic environs and outbreaks around Hekla and adjoining volcanic areas of Iceland. Furthermore they draw inspiration from the work of Icelandic composer Jón Leifs (1899-1968) who drew his inspiration from the landscapes of Iceland and the sagas¹. A key component in his work, and in mine, is the close affinity with the cultural and indigenous engagement with the environments of these areas, an obsession with trying to commune and communicate, and to try and understand the language of these environments. What are they saying, how are we to understand, and can we understand, and is there a shared language that can be uncovered by humans? The recent work is still in progress, but is interested in how Sámi culture use voice, sound and listening to communicate with environments and how this has created a different cultural understanding of the landscape.

The work draws on a long tradition of listening to environments, where Bernie Krause, R Murray Shafer, Hildegard Westerkamp and many others actively pay attention to, and have an interest in, the sonic qualities of specific places in north America from the 60's onwards. They paved the way for a now thriving and strong community of soundscape research, with organisations such as World Forum for Acoustic Ecology (WFAE) at the forefront, to understand how our environments, urban and rural, are changing and affected by building practices, oil extraction, noise pollution and so on. Krause writes in *The Great Animal Orchestra: Finding the Origins of Music in the World's Wild Places* (2013) that since he started field recordings in 1968, he has seen a significant alteration in the places he revisits on a regular basis, particularly in the last 20 years. He pays attention to the effects on the "geophony – natural sounds springing from nonbiological subcategories such as wind, water, earth movement, and rain – [which, he suggests,] has an effect not only on the individual voice expression but also on the performance of all animals in a habitat taken together" (2023, 39). This, by extension then has an impact on how our language, listening and 'voicing' evolves and changes as it relates to such changes.²

1 Icelandic Sagas concern medieval Scandinavian history, in particular Pre-Christian narratives.

2 In a previous work called *Sounds Like It* (2007), I witnessed this first hand when I had installed sounds of birds from a different place into Edinburgh Botanical Gardens where the exhibition took place. The work was situated in Edinburgh Botanical Gardens, UK and Kunming Botanical Gardens, China, it was site responsive and as part of the exhibition some elements

Returning to the projects/artworks in question here, the interest lies in how we humans can use sound, listening and language in conjunction with translation processes to open up a different, or altered, pathway in engaging with and understanding the world. There is a sense of possibility that erupts when the mis/interpretation/translation/understanding takes place, thus language is predicated on knowing what a specific sound means. The work asks – what happens when we do not know and when that language is not human? Eva Meijer, in *Animal Languages: the secret conversations of the living world* (2016/19), explores the specific nature of our understanding, or lack thereof, of animal languages, where, for example, only a few animals are currently understood to be capable of learning new sounds and potential language(s) (that is dependent though on what we constitute as a language). Of course, humans do not know if other species are capable of learning language, as we do not, as yet, understand their communication methods. Meijer draws upon Heidegger and Wittgenstein's to suggest that dialogue is a way in which we might be able to enter into a different understanding, and a way of approaching animals and their languages, as well as talking *with* rather than *at*, or *about*, animals. She states "Language receives meaning through its use and so is always a public matter" (2019, 46) and continues, "The emphasis on the relationship between usage and meaning provides a new angle from which to study language with and of animals, in which skepticism about other animals' thinking no longer plays a role" (2019, 47).

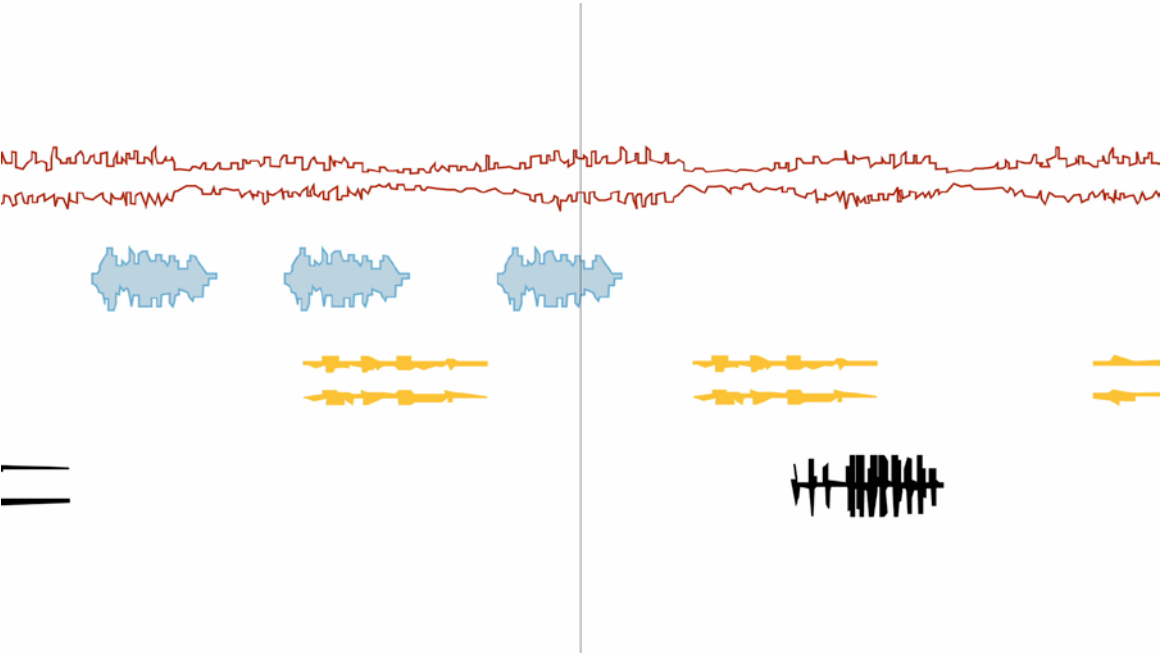
This is an aspect that is explored in *Flow*, where the social aspect of vocalising non-language, as offered by the visual score, is a communal effort which fluctuates and moves between individual and group exploration. In other words, they have to listen to the others in the choir vocalising, and at the same time as focusing on their own ability or non-ability to do so. At the same time the audience is asked to interpret the noises that they hear, where they may seek to establish if a language is emerging (or not) in the performance and how this is being achieved. This is different, yet similar to, hearing a foreign language. However, this is clearly noise, or nonsense, not a structured language which is presented as yet unknown and open to discovery.

Meijer brings to attention dialogic³ practices and their importance. For the pur-

were exchanged between the two places. One of those were recordings of local birds in Kunming Botanical Gardens being played in the Edinburgh one. The ground keepers and myself noticed that only after a very short while, the local birds changed their flight paths and where they spent time, and started to respond to the new bird sounds in interesting ways. This led to my desire to explore language and translation further in my practice, and works such as *Onlookers Doubt* (2009) and others came about.

³ Dialogic here concerns Bahktinian ideas of multiple viewpoints informing a translation of an understanding of a text or person speaking in a foreign language, ie it is not from one single

poses here, I draw upon that used in translation studies and art practices, where the dialogic is commonly used to foster open conversations and understanding of that which is (or those who are seen as) other. Swedish translation scholar Wadensjö's (1998) research delves into the intricacies of dialogue-based translation practices, where the norm is to use traditional translation theories and tools that are often false/true or based on success/failure to describe the status of the process. Drawing on Bakhtinian (1981) theories of the dialogic nature of translation, she focuses on the socio-political and cultural aspects of what makes a meaningful conversation between two parties where dialogue is central. The importance of dialogue is meaningful. Speaking with someone, or an animal, that does not speak one's own mother tongue, sees an immediate entering into a position of othering, or being other. This allows for an acknowledgment and understanding that both are in a position of otherness to each other. Instead of closing down and fostering the othering of this situation into something hostile, we open ourselves up to the possibility of exchange when turning to dialogue as a way to understand and mediate the situation. Taking this positive position enables us to learn and grow from the other – essentially this allows for an opportunity to understand that positioned as foreign. This understanding is not predicated on the translation, or interpretation, or being technically correct, but of giving a sense of what the other may be uttering, and how that has a mutual and reflexive impact.



Rupture, J. Hällsten, detail of moving sound score, 2014

point of view, there is a fluidity between translator, text and author.

The performance artworks *Rupture* and *Flow*, focus on the futility of the translation process through the exploration and playing out of the dialogues between the choral voices, animal and environmental sounds. Yet in that futility there lays curiosity and hope, and a desire to try and understand the languages spoken by other species and our natural environment. The use of a choir explores the dynamic of a shared voice, whilst also being able to draw attention to the individual's role in communicating as part of a symbiotic system. The translation processes act as a way to connect to, and with, others, both human and non-human, through voicing, utterance and movement. *Rupture* drew upon ideas of call and response, asking the choirs to enter into a back-and-forth dialogue with each other. Meijer states "call-notes can have a cultural function. Calls are passed on to members of a group and certain birds can give them their own spin." (2019, 45). The choir is already a group with a certain vocal identity, however the score aimed to push their individual knowledge and positionality within that group dynamic, in the performance of the scores written in an unknown language. Meijer states, "language games extend beyond words alone to gestures, posture, movement and sound" (2019, 45).

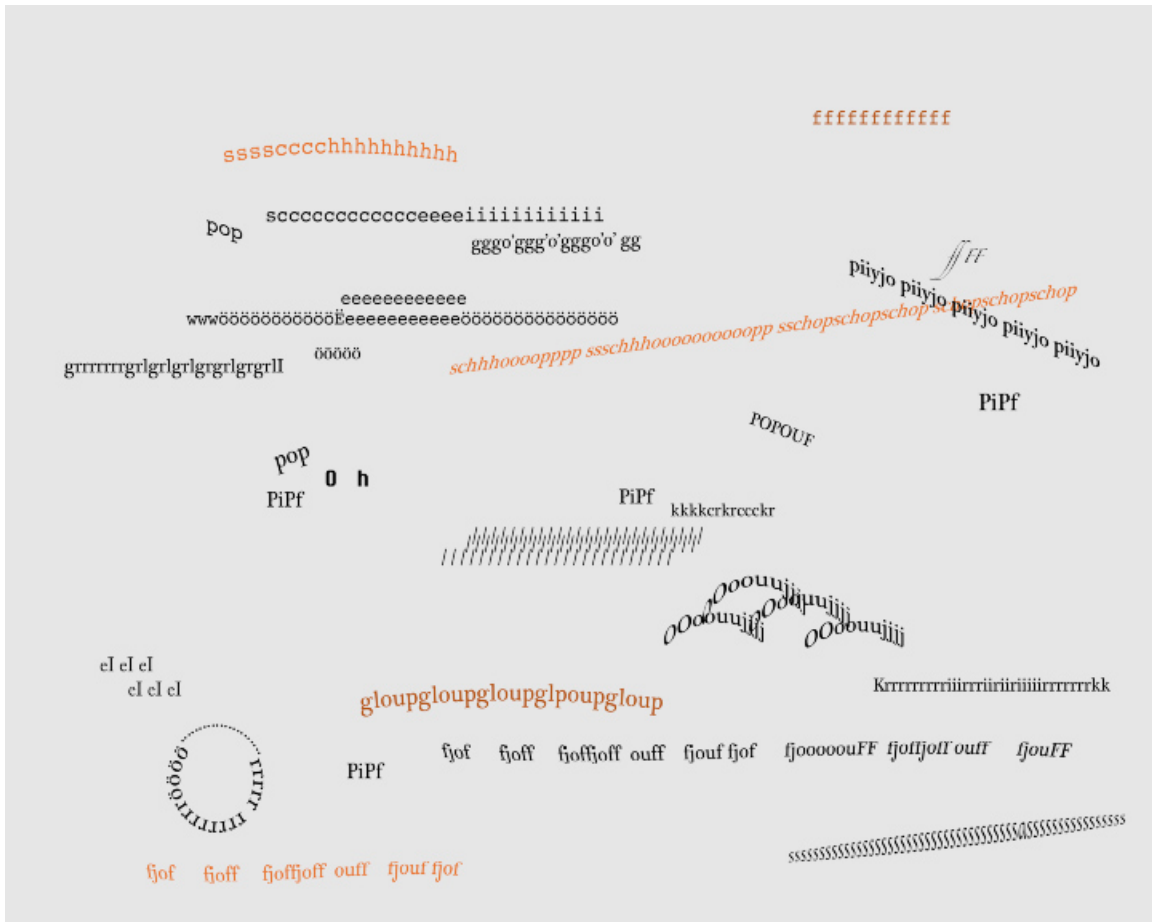
Much of soundscape studies, or studies of sounds of animals, pertain to establishing the animal's language. These studies ask "what are they trying to say, and how are they communicating with each other, and is this intelligent communication?" and so on. This is valuable research, but it is not what I am trying to explore in these artworks. Nor is it what I am aiming to achieve when listening with the animals on the mountain side - I'm not observing them, I am trying to be *with* them, spending time to enter into a dialogue *with* them. David George Haskell in *Sounds Wild and Broken: Sonic Marvels, Evolution's Creativity and the Crisis of Sensory Extinction* (2022), discusses the problematics of undervaluing the other human senses bar vision.

Our senses bias us toward feelings of kinship with species whose communicative sounds most closely resemble ours. Because concern follows closely on the heels of empathic connection, our senses shape our ethics. (Haskell 2022, 296)

Gaskell makes the point that this means that we may well 'prune' which species we favour and which we may not care about or notice at all. However, he too, as Meijer and the others attest too, sees listening as of vital importance to species survival.

With this in mind, the aim was not for *Rupture* or *Flow* to concern or work with mimicry. The choir made sounds that, although human, are not understood as language, seeing these potentially being understood as close to the sounds of animals. To be more precise, we might understand them as animal like sounds, but, the work asks, is that because that is how we are not trained to understand them as human? Going

back to Gaskell's point, we are inherently predetermined to read sound in a particular way, due to the empirical history of our sense development and understanding. Thus, the point here, is to try and break that predeterminate aspect of hearing, to become *attentive to listening* instead, and not just identification. This is posited as a 'rather than knowing'. Parts of this will be further engaged with in the next section on listening.



Flow, J. Hällsten, detail of moving sound score, 2019

Listening to

The research arises from a body of work exploring translation processes through the use of voice. What does it mean to voice something, to give voice to something, to utter, to express, and to vocalise? And who are we speaking or voicing for and to? Does it matter whether we are heard, understood or simply acknowledged as existing? Much of my artwork involves being in a location, to be with and in it, to immerse oneself, and listen to it, and those who inhabit it, whatever the species. This has been explored through works such as *Onlookers Doubt* (2009), *Credo* (2008), *Babbling Brook* (2010),

Time Breathe reprise (2010)⁴ and others, through the use of a single voice or duet. The artwork has sought to test how we translate from one media to the other through the use of voice. *Onlookers Doubt* is a 5.1 surround sound call and response artwork, constructed of animal alarm calls and machine alarm calls (fire engine, fog horns etc). The artwork starts as the sounds being opposed to each other, however, as it progresses the calls enter into a dialogue and end becoming one. The work was first exhibited at Cell Project Space (London, UK) in the outside courtyard leading to the main gallery spaces. The visitors to the exhibition had to walk through this area to enter the gallery, and thus listen to the alarm calls and dialogue unravelling through this journey.



Onlookers Doubt, J. Hällstén, Cell Project Space, 2009

4 Link to artist website where these works can be explored further: <https://johannahallsten.co.uk>.

An important aspect in this artwork is the performativity of the act of translation in motion, of immediacy, attentiveness and reaction. Performativity here speaks to action, of something taking place over time, and often in front of an audience (or others outside of an art context). However, the important aspect here is not solely on the performers/actors, but the performative speech act reality-making that occurs in the receiver's uptake (J.L. Austin). Thus, there is a relational aspect at play in the performativity of the sound scores *Rupture* and *Flow*. The double durational aspect of these scores – the moving score and the performance of that duration – creates a heightened performativity, and in return how these are engaged with by the audience.

All of the artworks I am discussing here are concerned with the slippages between words that occur in the utterance and production of meaning when we speak, or rather, in this context, vocalise. The language qua language discussion is often dislocated from the listener and the act of verbalisation and the context that they find themselves within. In *Babbling Brook* (2010) I sought to speak water's language. This saw a failing over and over again, as my vocal cords were not trained for the tonal qualities of sound. This artwork is a sound piece that is ideally to be listened to next to a stream or shallow water.⁵ Why even try, you may ask? The aim is to test the boundaries, or rather the porosity, of those boundaries of my tongue, of my animal voice. Putting myself in a situation where I am no longer able to be in control is important here, in order to understand what the geophony of water language entails. Can we establish a dialogue in this way? Are we in a dialogue? Of course, there is something humorous about this position, but often humour masks a fear of failure, or fear of not knowing. However, I welcome this position of being on the cusp of failure in the artwork, because at that point or close to that point of failure, lies a great space for discovery and an experience of the other (non-human animals and plants).

Katarina Zdjelar's text, *I think that here I have Heard My Own Voice Coming to Me From Somewhere Else* (2009), discusses vulnerability in this context. She speaks about the nature in which we (humans) learn language and how this changes when speaking a foreign language, i.e. not our mother tongue. Zdjelar notes that as soon as we utter words that are not in our mother tongue(s) we immediately make ourselves known, vulnerable and in a state of change. She writes: "When I speak a language other than my mother tongue my speech falls between me speaking language and language speaking me" (2019, 161). The foreign language forcing oneself to reveal oneself to the other in some capacity, is a "signaling [of] difference" (2009, 161) that is of interest here. This explores an attuning oneself away from or towards a new language, and one that

5 It can be listened to on my website: <https://johannahallsten.co.uk/Babbling-brook>.

we may not be able to understand at all, to be so far removed from our hearing capacity that it becomes just sound or noise. Salomé Voegelin in *Listening to Noise and Silence: towards a philosophy of sound art* (2010), speaks to this:

The sonic self finds the collective from his solitary agency of listening through his body rather than through language, because of it rather than in spite of it, and it is his effort to communicate, to belong, that is the belonging rather than an assumed and preordained position of national or cultural identity backed by an a priori language (Voegelin, 2010, 94)

Listening to our non-human counterparts and understanding their languages is a very difficult task, but one we should not give up trying to undertake. As Meijer so aptly summarises:

Talking with animals also requires a new way of thinking about language. Other animals show us that language is broader and richer than we thought, and that there are many more ways of expressing ourselves meaningfully than in human words alone. (2019, 231)

One may extend this to include our own relation to other humans as well as plants, but to what extent do we actually need to fully comprehend it? Is there something to be said for listening but not understanding? In that 'not understanding' the voice of the other, I suggest, we can find opportunity for repose and wonder in each other's foreignness. Zdjelar states, "When we are not quite sure what we hear, we don't speak the language we hear and try translate our experience of listening into speech, we enter the sphere of provisional and improvisational production of sounds and meanings" (2009, 163). She is speaking about human language, but much can be learnt from this in terms of approaching the non-human world too. We are so preoccupied with meaning-making, that we forget the opportunities afforded us once we allow for other sounds to become important. Moving away from hearing noise, gibberish, 'song' of the other etc., to listening carefully and openly to their voices, allows the capacity to see other significances. Exploring what my language can voice of theirs is to move towards a speaking *with* and dialogic approach of communing with the other.

Listening: performing the in-between



Flow, J. Hällsten, detail mid performance. To see an edited version of the performance go here: <https://vimeo.com/419723888?>

In order to understand the dialogic nature of the languages explored, we need to turn our attention to listening, and in turn how that relates to sound, noise and voice.

One cannot truly act without attentive listening, to be open to that which we cannot define (Oliveros 2010)

Pauline Oliveros aptly points to the crux of the matter, namely that the act of listening has to be *attentive*. There is an important distinction here, namely this is not speaking about hearing, but the active undertaking of listening. Care needs to be taken in the act of listening, as well as what we speak about a willingness to enter into a dialogue with the other. There are of course many times when we need to just zone out, and not pay attention to sounds, but for what we are interested in here, attentive listening is important. This collection of my artwork concerns animals living within what would be considered rural environments. Therefore, this is not to say that the dialogue will produce understandable language, or is between two interlocutors, merely that a dialogue is, as a tool, an approach to engaging with someone, something or a place.

The research is based in listening where relationships are being formed and fostered through dialogue. *Rupture* and *Flow* sought to find that space that allowed for the

human counterparts to become other, to enter into a (perhaps 'fictional') space where they could be tested and find a different language. To do this, they try to actively move away from certain tropes of occularcentricism, as centred in historical thought and still prevalent in science, art and culture. As such, *Flow* utilised multiple translation processes where listening is at the centre: dialogic, literal and feral,

Flow is constructed from field recordings from around Hekla in Iceland and other similar places. These were made after spending significant period of walking and sitting in the landscape – listening to it attentively. After this, it was necessary to listen to the recordings again as this affords a very different attention and attuning to the sounds recorded; one is able to hear things not noticed when in the site. In that listening from afar, translation, interpretation, and improvisation took place. This was to facilitate the possibility to enter into a new dialogue with the sounds and the particular place and its inhabitants. This generated new recordings that were translated to visual symbols acting as a score for the choir to perform. The score is a projected moving score within a gallery context, and not all information is visible from the start to neither the choir or the audience.

Jean-Luc Nancy offers a way to understand this approach:

to listen is to be straining towards a possible meaning, and consequently one that is not immediately accessible. (Nancy 2007, 6)

This is a quote I return to often, and Nancy's book *Listening* (2007) has been invaluable, along with Oliveros attentive and deep listening techniques (1982). Nancy, here, stresses a vital point: it is the "towards a possible meaning" which is significant in the act of listening as an active act. In *Rupture*, but more so in *Flow*, the performers are listening to each other and the situation (environmental, their physical being and that of others): they are within the situation, and the audience is listening to the environment in which they sit, *and* to the performers responses to the score. All within the context of the artwork, as performer and audience, are 'straining towards a possible meaning in that act of translating.



Glacier in Iceland, image by J. Hállstén, 2014

The research draws upon the Icelandic composer Jón Leifs (1899-1968), who endeavored to translate the Icelandic landscape into orchestral and choral works, such as in *Hekla*⁶ (1961), a landscape that is sonically very complex. At the same time John Cage published *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (1961). *Hekla* is produced as the antithesis to Cage's piece *4'33"* (1952). What is of interest here is how many of Jón Leifs' works are incredibly complex, making it either physically impossible to perform by singers or because they have so many instruments and other parts that they do not fit onto the average music stage.

The use of the score to be performed by the singer, voice artist or musician has a long tradition as demonstrated in the *Sense sound/Sound sense* exhibition at Whitechapel gallery, UK (2019-2020) drawing attention to the use of visual scores to create 'music' 'noise art' and 'sound art'. I position this research in relation to this tradition, however, the primary interest here is the process of translation, not the visual score as

⁶ Leifs was an Icelandic composer classically trained in Europe who later in his life returned home to Iceland where he wrote pieces based on the Icelandic sagas and the natural environment. *Hekla* (1961), for example, explores the ways in which our environment communicates through sound, an aural language without words, through complex orchestral work that include many non-conventional noise-producing items such as stones, chains and anvils.

an artwork in and of itself. The score is simply a means to explore how the performers (choir members) interpret and translate the score, and if this alters when in an unknown visual language. Furthermore, how this allows how they act in that performativity, by turning their attention to those around them, both other performers and audience. Often this seems uncertain, as they operate within the unknown parameters of the score and its language. This act explains, in some way, to the honing of our listening skills, by performing and translating through dialogic practices and soundscape.

Salomé Voegelin (2010) speaks to the notion of a score as a grid, and she draws on Rosalind Krauss, where the grid is too fixed and one could argue that the performance is to some extent rendered superfluous, or an extra. In other words, the music is known through the rigidity of the notational system. Voegelin states, “Understood as grid, the score does not represent or enable sound but mutes it, silences its articulation in a dense net of horizontal and vertical lines that purport distance and closed-ness” (p.58-9, 2010) Therefore, the move to a moving score in *Rupture* and *Flow* forces a rupture in this relationship whereby it is not known in advance what is to be come to neither listener or performer.

Jón Leifs, *Hekla* (1961), part of score. Here you can see the full score as you listen to the piece, performed by Icelandic Symphony Orchestra, conducted by En Shao: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=W2obLTN0gYc>

Both works went through several layers of translation processes, from auditory to visual (and back) and to text in various ways⁷. This was used with a multitude of field recordings to create a sound piece. For *Rupture* I traced the soundwaves (as seen when editing sound in, for example, Adobe Audition). These were traced and altered via screen clips and using photoshop. Once this process was done, I listened to and watched the new score, made alterations to rhythm, and pacing etc., altering the peaks and troughs of the visual aspects to emphasise or diminish sounds. At this point the score does not much resemble the original sound piece created by field recordings, which was important. For *Flow*, no sound piece was created that was translated, instead I listened to the field recordings, making my own vocalisations out loud, drawing these as interpretations, and creating a score. The visual score was created at the end of this process, and this took place many times over until I could no longer remember what each notation/mark was in previous iterations.

In both artworks a lot of editing and re-listening, moving and translating sounds took place. This included editing where particular attention to rhythm and positioning occurred, taking into consideration how the choir may or may not be able to translate the score and perform it simultaneously. My interest was in the performativity – the differentiation between verbalisation and vocalisation, where verbalisation, almost always in a semiotic and linguistic way, tries to make sense of something, whilst vocalisation is counter-punctual. However, what is interesting, when engaging with the musical score, is how these two – verbalisation and vocalisation – interact or disconnect from each other at varying points. And it is through these ruptures, these slippages of translation between verbalisation and vocalisation, that I aim to position the choir and score of *Rupture & Flow*. It was important that the choirs were not given too much information about the work, and that minimal rehearsals were undertaken (once in both cases). This was to allow for the score to be translated in real time, there and then, in the performance at the different venues. Much like interpreters perform simultaneously: they have to translate the text, Text, extra-lingual qualities (intonation, register and emotional state) of the utterance, whilst listening attentively and coordinating interaction between all parties (Wadensjö, 1998).

⁷ You can hear a field recording of lava that was used in the making of *Rupture* and *Flow* here: <https://soundcloud.com/johannahallsten/bubbling-lava-rec-iceland-2014?>



Juxtavoices performing *Flow*, J. Hällsten, 2019

The scores that both choirs translated on the day of the performance had not been rehearsed before. An important aspect of these kinds of scores is how they allow for each performance (whether with the same performers or not) to be different from one another. With many sound scores there are some instructions in terms of reading. For *Rupture* minimal information was given to Hljómeyki choir and none other than what it concerned for Juxtavoices. I chose not to include information for Juxtavoices for two reasons, to see what the difference would be between theirs and Hljómeyki's performance, in terms of sonic translation, and because Juxtavoices are experienced in working with sound scores, as they categorise themselves as an 'anti-choir'.⁸

We need to address noise here, and what it means for the way in which we communicate with those that are other to us, such as animals. Voegelin speaks about noise and how it "is realised on your body", saying, "noise crashes those barriers of obliging politeness and hears what cannot be seen" (p.60, 2010). Essentially, it is intrusive but also pregnant with potential. Humans often consider animal language as lacking or non-existent, of it being noise, or non-sensical (not systematized into a known language structure) and therefore not worthy of the same intelligence as ours. However, as

8 An Anti-Choir does not perform classical music in a traditional sense of choral practice.

Meijer suggests, considering that we need to expand on our understanding of animal languages, to include a more bodily engagement, we may shift our focus from non-intelligent or non-sensical to potentially change our view. If we move those animal sounds into the category of noise, and understand noise at its core as possibility for difference and a 'desire to communicate' (Voegelin), a new world of languages can emerge.

The sound scores, in particular *Flow*, created noise, or at the very least a lot of noise and some sounds that had the semblance of words. The more complex the translation process was from original sound to score, such as in *Flow*, the greater the difficulty in translating it, in motion, for the choir (Juxtavoices). This resulted in the most varied and unique sounds being vocalised. That in turn led to a significant increase in the choir being able to translate the original soundscape to the audience; it became immersive for the audience in a completely different way to how *Rupture* was received. Here, I should state that I only heard Juxtavoices perform the works at the same time as the audience, for the first time (I was present at the rehearsal with Hljómeysi choir, but not Juxtavoices out of choice). By immersive, I mean that the audience had to decide whether to read/translate the projected moving score themselves or to focus on the choir's translation. This was further accentuated by the audience being very close to the choir. There was no stage between audience and choir - they shared the same space. Because of this, the space became communal, a shared common ground where both performer and audience were invited to be present, and to open their senses to that which cannot be translated fully. The research and artworks are not attempting to fully translate one to the other equally, but to let the process reveal how we translate and engage with the sonic environment around us, and that which we are part of, thus, opening up a possibility to understand otherness, to becoming animal/other.

Returning to Nancy, who speaks about sound, sense and resonance:

Sense is first of all the rebound of sound, a rebound that is coextensive with the whole folding/unfolding [*pli/dépli*] of presence and of the present that makes or opens the perceptible as such, and that opens in it the sonorous exponent: the vibrant spacing-out of a *sense* in whatever sense one understands or hears it (Nancy 2007, 30)

Both Voegelin and Nancy speak about how sound and our sense of hearing is transitional, unfolding and folding at once, opening itself up whilst covering over. Sense is a vibration and therefore open to the potential to encounter the other. Vibration suggests a different way in which we could become more attentive to animals and biomes in general if we were to engage more openly with it and its potential for enhanced understanding of the other. The sense of sound often becomes understood as mysterious, or

strange, weird, and by proxy animals who we aren't familiar with in an everyday setting, because I am here not speaking about dogs, horses, cats and other familiar animals. I am speaking about beetles, voles, snow grouse, worms and so on.

The idea of silence is particularly interesting in relation to the specific locations that my research focuses on, it is often said to be silent, or that the silence of sitting in the snow is overwhelming. Indeed, it is overwhelming, but because "When there is nothing to hear, so much starts to sound. Silence is not the absence of sound but the beginning of listening" (Voegelin 2011, 83). The world is not silent, bar anechoic chambers, where we are able to start hearing our own pulse, but even so it is not silent. Silence on the other hand denotes a quietude, a slowing or lowering of our perceptual ability, but that also has the potentiality to open up to careful sensing of the environment we are with and in. Voegelin states that, "In silence the visual perspective vanishes into sensorial simultaneity. The sound field is compact but potentially infinite." (2011, 84). Seeing is directional and sequential to a larger extent than hearing. Sound is all around us and we perceive it through the whole of our body, the skin being our sensing membrane. Animals too rely on this all-body hearing mechanism – and although some species have extreme eyesight, some additionally rely only on bodily vibrational hearing. Sounds are fleeting and momentary, we are less in control of the sounds we make, and those we encounter through listening. Voegelin draws our attention to that we have sonic expectations of the world around us and how others may sound, how these are met or not is always in process, developing.

Nancy draws further attention to this by speaking about resonance, the resonant body, it is porous, it changes how we listen, where we are, who we are at that time in place. Our resonance rebounding in the spaces it occupies, affecting the soundspace of the Hekla hillside, or the snowy landscape of Snasahögarna (Sweden) where I am currently working on a new body of work, of scores responding to this unseen environment. The work is temporary and a gesture of care, caring for the damaged trees, mosses and those that inhabit them. It aims to draw attention to the sonorous aspects of the place and how my resonance is affecting it and it affecting me. A symbiosis (hopefully). Lastly, hardly any of my work visibly involves animals but only through the inference of knowledge and through that vibration of air that permeates our skins.

A return: concluding remarks

This text involves discussions of listening, noise, voice, language and how these are important factors in finding a way to engage positively with those that are other to us, in this case animals and natural environments. This was done through the two artworks, *Rupture* and *Flow*, where the aim of the works was to see if we could position us (humans) in such a way to become other. They seek to open human senses further through a reexamination of why we need to be comfortable in noise and silence to understand their importance for difference to be at the forefront of human/animal engagement. Voegelin serves as a good departing, or ought that perhaps be, springboard, when she writes “There is noise before silence and silence before noise, again and again in circles the speech is found and lost to be found again but never the same” (2010, 108-9). It is forever in practice, never perfect.

As discovered with regards to speech and language development, by moving towards a greater bodily engagement, allowing for movement, the porous body and being comfortable in the noise, we can start to develop a different (perhaps more sympathetic) understanding of those that are not us (humans). Instead of objectifying the non-humans, I argue with Meijer and others, for a listening and speaking *with* them, positioning ourselves as other instead, and inhabiting this position. If we enter into a dialogic engagement, where the emphasis is not on exact translation or understanding but on moving towards engagement, then perhaps we can foster a less abusive and more inclusive environment in which to coexist. I wish for us to continue to more openly explore this nonverbal (or very slight verbal) relation building to our environments, building on our calls of emotive appreciation or frustration, thus leaving only a temporary communication. Being careful in not damaging the environment we are in, and subsequently all those living within it. Thus, attentively listening from a position of entering into a dialogue with the animals and geophony of a particular place may foster a gentler approach to said environment and ultimately care for our shared common.



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