

Crys Cole, Zen and the Art of Listening, NanoMega, Poolside Publicaiton, Videopool, 2008 (pg 1/2)

Zen and the Art of Listening

by crys cole

No sound is innocent. Every utterance, rustle and nuance is pregnant with meaning. ... To let a sound escape unnoticed before coming to know what it represents or can do is carelessness. Each aural emission can be unlocked to show its origins and intentions. No sound is innocent.

— Edwin Prévost, AMM

WE HEAR, BUT HOW OFTEN do we listen? There is a comfort in being surrounded by noises; their omnipresence lulls us, yet we barely perceive them. When they are absent, we are acutely aware of the silence. When they are imposing, we are aggravated by their distraction. The aural world is so present that we barely notice it. Yet subconsciously we relate to certain sounds, familiarizing tones that signify what we want or are repelled by: the sound of the phone ringing, a kettle whistling, a car horn or a friend's voice. The rest often get lost to us.

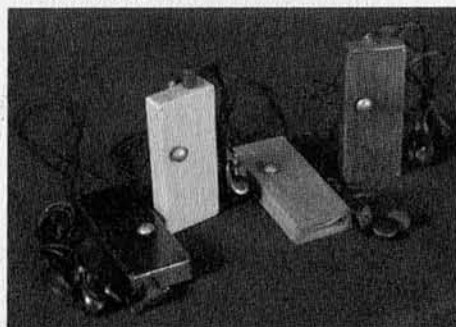
It's strange that we can exist in a world so densely congested with sound and yet be so unfamiliar with it. The act and/or art of listening opens the

world up to us and grounds us in a sense, to the moment. It heightens our awareness of self and the way we relate to everything around us. Placing sound in a context where one is purposefully listening, as one would to a piece of music or to a confidant, gives the ear an opportunity to really appreciate the surrounding sounds and textures. At Video Pool in January and February of 2007, two different projects were presented to give us an opportunity to listen.

Darsha Hewitt and Stéphanie Brodeur offered to equip Video Pool visitors with a tool to create their own. Their Personal Soundtrack Emitters were made available in the Video Pool office, but participants were encouraged to take them beyond the office and outside onto the

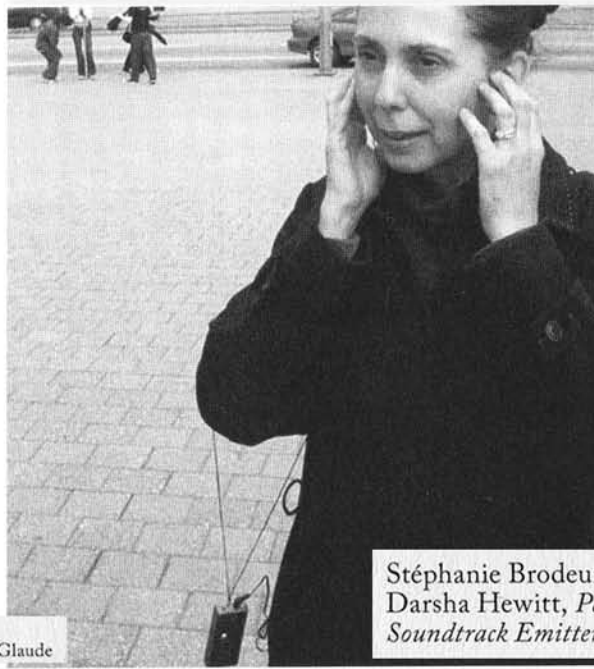
surrounding streets. When the small wooden boxes were activated by turning a copper knob, sound immediately funnelled in to listeners' ears and quickly claimed their attention. Whether one chose to leave the building or simply sat in one place, there was more than enough to listen to.

PHOTO Anik Glaude



Stéphanie Brodeur and Darsha Hewitt, *Personal Soundtrack Emitters*

Zen and the Art of Listening (pg. 2/2)



Stéphanie Brodeur and
Darsha Hewitt, *Personal
Soundtrack Emitters*

PHOTO Anik Glaude

We typically dilute our focus with so many of the everyday sounds around us, yet these devices assisted in tuning back in to the subtle tones and textures that ordinarily go unnoticed.

The art in this piece was left in each user's hands to perceive and elaborate on whatever grand or seemingly insignificant sounds you might choose as your focus. By controlling the volume and distortion of the input, you were able to create your own unique auditory experiences. As if someone were to give you a telescope to admire the stars, the Personal Soundtrack Emitters acted as a tool for listening with greater focus to what was around you — or even to yourself.

Something else Hewitt and Brodeur are playing with is our relation to the omnipresent personal listening devices upon which our culture relies so heavily. The portable MP3 player often acts as an anti-social barrier in our culture. We enter the public world with headphones on to remove our attention and render us unavailable. The irony of designing the portable emitters in the style of an MP3 player is that instead of tuning the world out, as is usually our intention, we are instead tuning it back in.

There is a lot to pursue and investigate in the sound world around us. The changing nature of sounds in general, and within themselves, can be captivating — the ways they announce themselves and dissipate. There is a musical nature inherent in all sounds, and just as we can see the beauty in the world through a photograph, or simply by stepping back and admiring its presence, so too by listening can we appreciate the aural world in its discreet and imposing ways.