

# Phytophonic Choreographies of Care: Project Journal

## /// Beginning

Close your eyes, mute out of your human reality and tune into meditate minutes of acoustic choreography.

Let the touchable sounds tune your being.

Scrunch, shake, furl, unfurl, short breath, fast breath. Follow the rhythms in harmony or respond asynchronously with your own expression.

Allow that tactile sound to animate the airwaves and forge an intimacy between their molecule and 'yours'.

## /// Summary

ELASTIC FICTION presents a three minute multi-species mixtape capturing a cacophony of communion between the plant beings of London's ancient woodlands. She has fictioned and imagined 'phytophonic' communications between plant species affected by the planetary crisis and in existential threat including Oak, Horse Chestnut, Maple, Birch and Sycamore. Seeds, seedpods, leaves, barks, twigs, casings, catkins and buds rub, stroke, sooth, tickle and brush together creating sounds elicited from gestures of care and solidarity whilst more aggressive gestures of scratching and flicking elicit a more threatened response. The piece is an assemblage of audio that draws attention away from the human world and its anthropocentric concerns and towards that of overlooked and unimagined extra-human realities. Close your eyes, mute out of your human reality and tune into meditate minutes of acoustic choreography.

The sonic cues are as follows:

- 01 Oak Leaf Summoning
- 02 Oak Stroking an Oak Twig Kin
- 03 Horse Chestnut Caress
- 04 Conker Aggravation
- 05 Fruticose Lichen Whispers
- 06 Acorn and excavated seed casing
- 07 Maple - Oak Alliance
- 08 Turkish acorn cap and Birch leaf meet
- 09 Soothing a Birch leaf
- 10 Fruticose and Monk's Hood Lichen comfort
- 11 Birch Paper Choreography
- 12 Twig Signalling Birch
- 13 Sycamore Key Cacophony

### /// On Biophony in the Sixth Extinction

July 2019, the *Trends in Ecology & Evolution Journal* published a paper postulating that climate change is altering Earth's natural acoustic fabric and that these are shifts that all "sound-sensitive organisms" both marine and terrestrial may experience (Nov, 2019). This stimulated me to imagine, how might more-than-human species be sonically responding to our changing planet?

For the 'Sounding Extinction' project led by ADF, I was curious to approach the subject of 'extinction' from an alternative standpoint where the relationship between humans/humans + human/ more-than-human species was not the focus. What might the sensory reaction or affective action of more-than-human species in a time of peril and threat? How might this emerge 'sonically'?

### /// On fictionalas method

How to address the problem of speaking (or sounding) on behalf of the Other, of representation without colonisation (Neimanis, 2015) and of projecting our inherent anthropocentric bias? Whilst by no means a solution, I often deploy fiction and imagination as methods, as useful instruments for navigating these issues. I gravitate towards Jan Švankmajer's praise of imagination as providing "the ability to liberate a person from a burdensome reality because it offers an alternative." So long as it is disclosed, fiction and imagination are ways to meet nature by feeling for the unfeeling, sensing the unsenseable and envisioning other worlds radically different and alternatively structured to our own - whilst leaving plenty of respectful space for unknown wonderment.

In order to imagine the sonic communications of more-than-human species in times of peril, I permitted myself to speculate on the sensory signals that pass from species to species and stream-of-creature-consciousness.

### /// On extinction closer to home

Discussion of "extinction" in mainstream European media is all too often "exoticised" as the urgent concern of alien landscapes like primal glaciers, impenetrable rainforests and the arid kindling of the Wild West. Bringing climate collapse closer to home, I ventured into London's Ancient Woodland and collected fallen seeds, seedpods, leaves, barks, twigs, casings, catkins and buds from species that have particularly significant stories within the context of 'extinction' in the city.

Some field notes in relation to species extinction:

/ Oak forests support more life forms than any other native forest in the UK - up to two hundred and fifty species. They are deeply interdependent and their loss will effectively extinguish a cascade of other species.

/ Horse chestnuts are vital food sources for pollinators.

/ Fruticose and Monk's Hood Lichen thrive in undisturbed ancient woodland and develop very slowly (1-2mm a year). If they are disturbed, they will not survive.

/ The Norwegian Maple (the main species of maple in the UK) is tolerant of compacted soils, shade and pollution meaning it could prove a vital species in surviving existential threat.

/ The Birch is often planted to renew and purify lands, thriving in dry woodlands with an open canopy that welcomes light for species on the forest floor.

### /// On composing on behalf of the Other

The piece is an assemblage of audio that draws attention away from the human world and its anthropocentric concerns and towards that of overlooked and unimagined extra-human realities. It illuminates the imperceptible animacy between species - the sound of the living world is more than the bird songs and babbling brooks that grace our ears.

Whilst the artist directed the material collisions between forest fragments, handling them like instruments, the sounds you hear are unaltered, unfiltered with no effects. The result is arguably something soothing, rhythmic, textured, resonant and meditative. There is a harmony which to me sounds inherently ecologic.

The composition embraces collage and assemblage - the sound undulates between solo couplings and cacophonies of multi-species voices. A 'one' does not make a sound. You always need an Other to free a sound. The collage of sound is used to emphasize the inherent interdependence of our ecologies in radical riposte to the 'self'. It blends and creates indistinctions, refusing classification. It exists not to interpret, represent or speak for, but as a humble gift of attention.

### /// About Leaf Hearing Blue, Moss Tickling A Soil

This project is part of *Leaf Hearing Blue, Moss Tickling A Soil*. We inhabit a world where mushrooms 'sense' predators, trees have heartbeats and mallow weeds 'remember' the location of sunrise. The sensing abilities of other beings has inspired me to exercise my own sense-able being, discover new ways to meet the more-than-human and imagine the multispecies interrelations and world-making that exist beyond our capacities.

*Leaf Hearing Blue, Moss Tickling A Soil* is a research project investigating methods like Diffraction, Fictioning, Arranging, Mapping, Embodying, Sensing and Imagining. This project is not occupied with fact-finding, measuring or proving but practices of affinity - how to feel closeness, intimacy, affection; practices of creatureliness - how to tickle at the edges of other ways of being; and explorations of how can sense-able interactions and imagination might work as a partnership to re-enchant the spaces between.

### /// Due Gratitude and Further Reading

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