# Sound Jams

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Methods of Collective Sound-Based Publication-Making for Practitioners
from Various Backgrounds

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# _intro

We are surrounded by sound on a daily basis and it is a medium
that has a major role in the perception of the world around us.
With the exception of people with damaged hearing, it helps us
navigate through the spaces we are moving around throughout our
days. Our bodies are used to perceiving all sorts of sonic
signals while orientating in private and public spaces. We hear
other people while having a conversation or attending a meeting.
We listen to music to relax, dance or distract ourselves. But as
a working medium, it still feels quite unattainable for many
practitioners – oftentimes, mainly associated with music, it is a
reserved territory for people with musical training and sound
artists. In reality, it is far more accessible and there are many
ways how sound-making can be open for creators coming from any
kind of background. Thus, I am looking at *which methods of
collective sound-based publication-making can be applied to a
group of practitioners from various backgrounds*, without the
restriction of having experience with sound as a medium in their
practice.

For this research, I facilitated various *sound jams* that I
designed, to test the methods in reality and understand what are
the important factors when creating a sound-making experience for
people from different backgrounds. What brings them together in
sound creation and sharing? What elements of the structure and
the process are vital for them to find a comfortable and
welcoming space for experimentation? What can they take from the
sound jams to their artistic and research practice?

By *sound jam*, I understand any facilitated process of sound-
making and publishing that includes more than one person. Its
core principle is inclusivity: it is open to people with or
without musical training and offers a structure in which everyone
is invited to find a suitable role and space for experimentation.
The process grants the makers the opportunity to create a sound
publication as a group. This paper explores different sound jams
as applied methods that provide such processes and a safe space
for makers to open up to a moment of collective sound-making and
sharing.

The research followed certain steps to unveil the methods and
draw important observations and learning outcomes from the sound

jams. It started with designing the sound jams and creating instructions for several methods to be tested with a group of people. In order to do that, I harvested ideas from my facilitation practice over the past 6 years and took inspiration from other handbooks and collections of artistic prompts and assignments. Each sound jam was implemented in a particular time and space context and then reflected upon. I had the opportunity to gather groups of people in several locations in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, and implement a facilitated process of producing sonic pieces together. Afterwards, during debrief sessions or in interviews, the participants were invited to share their experiences of the sound jams. The extracted learning outcomes were analysed and transformed into key principles for applying such methods of sound-making and publishing.

The research draws its core inspiration from the work of *Pauline Oliveros*, a pioneer of experimental music and improvisation who was active after the 1950s. In her practice, she investigated new ways to focus attention on music including her concept of deep listening – "a practice that is intended to heighten and expand the consciousness of sound in as many dimensions of awareness and attentional dynamics as humanly possible" (Oliveros, 2005). With this research, I take it further from the meditative sessions and inner listening and explore ways to create a structure for practitioners to apply this in their group sound-making processes of any kind.

This paper follows my research process. Firstly, I am warming up the space with the next chapter, containing a *glossary* with the key terminology. I find it important to make sure that whatever words are used here are understood in the particular context of this research. In the following chapter *sound jams*, I am describing what methods I managed to design and test. After providing a brief historical context, I am reporting the steps each sound jam proposed and what actually happened in reality. Some key observations are drawn from that particular process and explained. Afterwards, to turn them into the core *principles* of the sound jam practice, I am analysing the key factors that turned out to be important for most of the sound jams implementation. I focus on five key elements for the sound jams and connect them to examples from the sound jams and other practitioners' work.

# _glossary

There are terms in this research that might have different meanings in other contexts. It is also possible that you have not come across some of them. By creating this space, I aim to bring the words I am using into the context of my practice and particularly this research. Of course, most of their descriptions come from real definitions and usage in more universal contexts. Nonetheless, there are additional layers to their meanings and bear in mind that my personal touch is also part of the picture.

**Key terms**

[sound jam] Any facilitated process of sound-making and publishing that includes more than one person. It is not restricted by form, time, place or environment. Thus, some of the sound jams are literally facilitated jamming sessions with musical instruments and sound-making objects, whereas others are open calls for submitting audio contributions, or week-long workshops.

[sound publication] An audio piece that is shared with the public. There are two core elements in this term: sound or sonic work, meaning an audio piece and a publication, as a publicly shared piece. Thus, being a wider term, it may vary – from musical pieces to podcasts or audiozines – anything whose core medium is sound (music, noise, voice, ambient sounds etc.).

* Oliveros noticed that many musicians were not listening to their own performances. In order to experiment with finding a solution, she created *Sonic Meditations* (1971), a body of work that focuses solely on patterns of attention and gives ways for listening and responding (Oliveros, 2005). This piece was actually the basis of her practice of *Deep Listening*.

[listen and respond] Most of the methods for the sound jams invite the participants to listen and respond with sound. By this, I mean giving the contributors the time to listen to others' sounds before starting to make theirs. Inspired by the work of *Pauline Oliveros*, this approach gives space for awareness and mindfulness in the collective making. To listen and respond in this research means that the contributors are invited to take the time to perceive the soundscape around them before adding their own sound to it.

[safe space] In this paper, we are looking at this term as an instrument for inclusivity. Creating a safe space here means that we are building a structure and process that

* In her article
*Cultivating the Art of
Safe Space* (2008),
Hunter shares the
experience of
facilitating a "safe
space" for groups of
people with very
different cultural
backgrounds and how to
create a healhy and
accessible space for
experimentation with
youth communities used
to violence and
isolation.

give everyone the chance to take a role they are comfortable with. The making of the sound jam is indeed a creative development and as *Mary Anne Hunter*∗ defines it, a safe space that "is conceptualised through rules of engagement that scaffold the creation of new work and, somewhat paradoxically, invite a greater degree of aesthetic risk" (Hunter, 2008).

**[score]** In music, a score is a musical composition in written or printed notation. It is basically the written form of the piece which highlights rhythm, frequency, pitch, and instrumental notes in the song. The scores of the sound jams in this project are also a visual representation of the sonic piece. However, they might have the form of a text, a sketch, an illustration or a mix of various forms.

# _sound jams

**before the sound jams**

The concept of using prompts to create collective artworks and improvise with the medium of sound is a practice that had intrigued artists and educators from different movements and groups over the years. My interest in approaching the work with sound through the lens of awareness and attention was initially inspired by the practice of *Pauline Oliveros*, a composer, scholar and central figure in the development of experimental music during the 1950s. As one of the pioneers in improvisation and electronic music, she developed the practices of "deep listening" and "sonic awareness". She saw them as an important ability to give your attention to the soundscape and all the musical sounds in the contexts of group improvisation, electronic music and meditation. Her practice was developed in the next decades of listening retreats, sessions and performances she led and her legacy is carried by countless artists who embedded it in their work.

In the 1960s, some alternative artist movements were growing in the United States and Europe, that were creating new spaces for art outside the museums and galleries. As part of the practice of the Fluxus group, their assignments and prompts provided anyone with the opportunity to become a maker, no matter if they had an artistic background or not. *La Monte Young*, composer and musician who was working with the group, created a series of performances that were mixing music, visual and performing arts. An interesting work he made was *Compositions 1960* — a collection of conceptual short text-based scores that contained unconventional instructions for musicians in order to get them outside the traditional box. Another remarkable work containing short prompts for improvisation sessions was the *Nature Study Notes: Improvisation Rites* by the *Scratch Orchestra*, published and freely distributed in 1969. *Cornelius Cardew*, one of the founders of the musical ensemble and the editor of the publication, was an English experimental music composer who developed a practice of facilitating, performing and teaching improvisation for both musicians and non-musicians. The rites were a collection of 152 text-based scores that were used in many of the early Scratch Orchestra concerts. As *David Toop** shares, "They compacted revolutionary strategies for collective improvisation into

*\* In *Into The Maelstrom: Music, Improvisation and the Dream of Freedom. Before 1970.*, David Toop follows the many paths of improvisation in music and other disciplines, by creating a rich landscape of its philosophy and practice in the post-war era.*

beautiful objects, highly susceptible to recreation as acts of nostalgia for the golden age of the avant-garde" (Toop, 2016).

The improvisation jamming session that gave me the inspiration to pursue this research, was an Unpublic concert, facilitated by musician and scholar *Harold Schellinx*. In June 2022, together with my Experimental Publishing classmates, I took part in an artistic residency at *La Générale Nord-Est* (Paris), where we were invited by him to perform with violinist and sound artist from Myanmar *Mr Lili (Kam Seng Aung)*. That was the first time when I felt included in a jamming session. Upon reflection, I realised that what made it possible, was the facilitation and the clear position (or role) everyone had in the circle as well as the various backgrounds of the participants. After this event and all the work on the *Special Issue #18: Radio Implicancies* sound-based publication, led by guest-tutor *Femke Snelting* in my third trimester at the Piet Zwart Institute, I figured out that if the process of sound-making is facilitated and taken care of, it becomes much more accessible for people coming from different experiences. I also became interested in exploring alternative ways to collectively work with sound beyond the format of jamming sessions and if there are other methods a group sound publication can be done.

**sound jams setup**
For this research, I designed and facilitated sound-making and publishing experiences for groups of people from any kind of professional and artistic background. The goal was to give a structure of making and sharing that provides space for freedom to experiment: to choose what roles the participants would like to take in the process, how much to be involved and how would they like to create their sounds. The sound jams aimed at being accessible – there was a focus on the process and the structure, whereas they could choose any instruments and sound-making objects. How much everyone contributed and how much space for experimentation they had, was depending not only on the process (even though it was designed to give opportunities and freedom) but also on the group dynamic. Thus, there was an effort for group building, warming up, creating dynamics and raising the awareness of people about others, and the overall soundscape with everyone's role in it.

I tried out five sound jams that followed different steps and thus, experimented with five methods to make collective sound-

based publications. I played with various approaches to try out diverse entry points and processes for collective making and sharing. My goal was to propose and test variations of paths to a defined aim — to publish a sonic piece created by a group.

**intention of the research**

The main intention of the experiments was to find out *if the sound jams could work in reality* and *how the participants would feel, what would they take out of them and what was their motivation to join*. I was curious to see if the process would limit or liberate the people in the group and if the structure would help everyone find a place they feel good about. It was important to understand if providing a structure is helpful for people to find such a process accessible.

In order to *measure* the experiments, I was observing several *factors* about the sound jams and I was asking some debrief questions to the participants after the activity took place. In the form of an informal discussion with rounds of sharing or 1-to-1 interviews, we have been talking about everyone's experience and how they felt about the structure and the process. There was also space to share and discuss anything that came out of the whole activity, expected or not. Those discussions were recorded so I could go through them again and draw key learning outcomes from the sound jam experiments.

> **work with sound**
> The main motivation for this research was to bring the sonic medium to a wider audience of makers, who do not necessarily have experience in working with it. Thus, I was asking everyone what was their motivation to join the jams and was observing if interest in working with sound was one of them. I also researched whether it was accessible and easy for them to work with this medium.

> **roles**
> Each method proposed a structure in which the makers can take a particular role. It was up to them to decide which one. By observing how they positioned themselves within the group and reflecting upon that with them afterwards, I was measuring the importance of the roles self-assigned for the overall experience of the process of making and sharing. Providing them with the freedom to choose their roles was

anticipated as a significant factor in creating an accessible and inclusive space for experimentation.

**group awareness**
The sound jams were designed to give space for the participants to experiment and special attention was paid to their awareness of what was their role and how much it was affecting the whole group process. Were the participants able to pay attention to the soundscape and the dynamics between each other when they were put in the same room?

**accessibility and inclusivity**
The methods aimed at creating an opportunity for participants without musical training to join the collective making of sonic pieces. One of the most important elements to observe was indeed whether they felt the process was accessible and if they felt included in the group.

**experimentation and improvisation**
Creating a safe space for experimentation was also important. No judgement of the quality of the sound pieces was applied because the sound jams respected the do–it–yourself and do–it–with–others culture. There was supposed to be a lot of space for failure, experimentation and improvisation. The tools for sound making did not need to be professional, nor the sound editing process and software. It was important to provide a welcoming, simple process. Thus, the research was also observing if that really happened during the tryouts.

**debriefing questions**
After each of the sound jams, in a group discussion or individual interviews, there was a reflection on the participants' experience. In order to find out if the methods worked out well for them, I asked some debriefing questions, such as:

> _Why did you join this sound jam?
> _What did you want to get out of this sound jam?
> _Did you receive what you hoped for?
> _If not, what could be done differently to help you achieve that?

*_How did you find the working process of the sound jam?*
*_How did you find your role in it?*
*_If you had struggles with that, what were they and what could be done to help you overcome them?*
*_Did you follow the steps in the sound jams' instructions or made changes on the go?*
*_What worked well in this process? What didn't and could be done differently?*
*_What did the sound jam give you? What did you take out of it?*

**sound jams reports**

The reporting of the implemented sound jams follows the structure below:

*_title*
*_facilitator(s)*
*_dates*
*_location*
*_number of participants*
*_format*
*_instruments*
*_schedule*
*_process*
*_observations*
*_publication links*

**1 // deep listening impro jam session**

_facilitators // Alexandra Nikolova and Mitsa Chaida
_dates // 10–10–2022
_location // Piet Zwart Institute, Rotterdam
_number of participants // 10
_format // jamming session
_instruments // Fretless electric guitar, harp, bass guitar, ukulele, paper, body percussion, DJ mixer, computer, jar and pen, voices and microphone, mobile phone
_schedule // 10 min warming up the group, 20 min collective reading, 40 min jamming session
_process // The sound jam was divided into three main parts. First, we introduced a breathing exercise and a hand massage in pairs to warm up the group and create a safe space for them to relax and feel comfortable. Then, the context of the sound

JAM SCORE: CLOCK PROGRESSION

WHAT HAPPENED

ROUND 1
4 PPL

ROUND 3
5 PPL
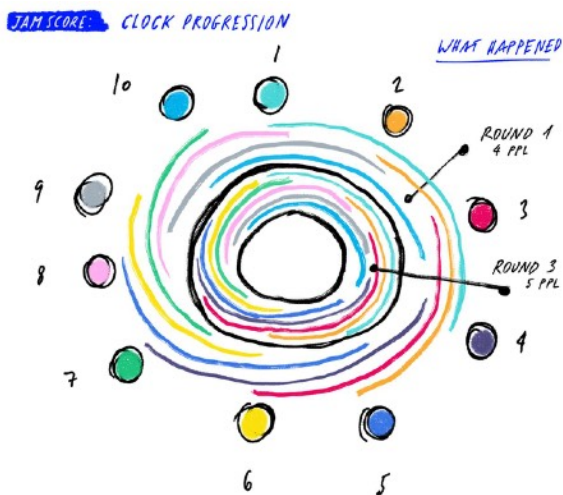
* visual score of the sound jam playing progression: illustration of the position the circle // by Alexandra Nikolova

jam was presented: what is deep listening? The intention was to get the group focused on bringing deeper attention to sound in the ways we perceive it, and the ways we respond with it. We read collectively excerpt from her work *Deep Listening* (Oliveros, 2005) explaining briefly what is it about. The structure of the jamming was also introduced: we followed a playing progression based on a clock rotation in which 3 people were only playing at the same time by slowly passing by to the next one*. Whenever a fourth person was joining in, the first person in the trio slowly fades out their sounds. The participants picked a sound-making object of their choice and played with it during the first round. Some of the participants switched their instruments between the rounds. The jam session was recorded and published by the facilitators.

_observations // According to the participants' feedback, the jam was well facilitated and the structure helped them to be part of a sound-making experience which was new to many of them. They felt included and the jam was accessible. They expressed that the "deep listening" context was a good starting point and when listening to the recording, they can hear and identify moments of listening and responding to each other. The score of the clock as a way to play in a circle was a good choice and the participants expressed excitement to even build on it and experiment with more complex progression after each round. Overall, the method of combining a topic and a score for sound-making in a group of people worked well and the participants felt content with the process. The publishing of this sound jam happened later after I edited the piece and uploaded it online. I also created a printed zine with a short summary of the

jam, the process and links to the audio mix.
_publication // <u>sound publication</u>, <u>zine</u>

**2 // what do books say?**
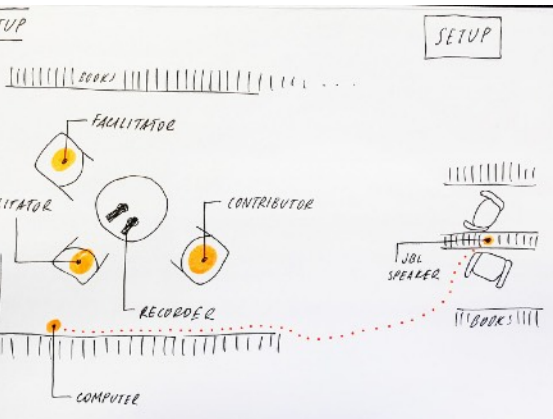
_facilitators // Alexandra Nikolova and Mitsa Chaida
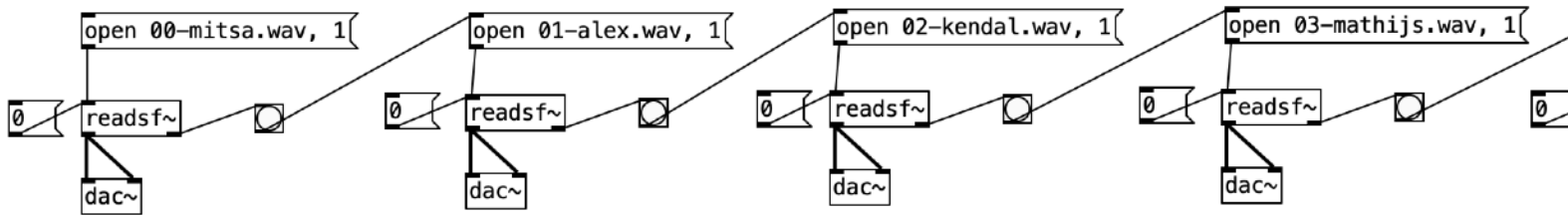_dates // 17–10–2022
_location // Leeszaal, Rotterdam
_number of participants // 12
_format // Workshop
_instruments // Two Zoom H1 stereo recorders, voices, room soundscape
_schedule // 2 hours; each contributor took around 7–10 minutes
_process // The structure of the sound jam was to invite the contributors to join one after another. It took place in a cosy corner of the library over a round table and three armchairs where we, the two facilitators and one contributor were seated. A contributor listened to the recording of the previous one, reflected upon it and then made another recording in response to what they listened to. In order to start the jam, Mitsa and I recorded the first two pieces. The invitation was to pick a book from a shelf and read a paragraph of their choice. I listened to Mitsa's recording, reflected on its content and then picked another book that for me responded to what I listened to. There were a few rounds like that until Mitsa opened the instructions to "respond to the previous audio by recording anything". As a result, the next contributor decided to record sounds from the room. The same approach continued for a few rounds until another contributor wanted to read from the books again.
The first moment of publishing of the sound pieces happened on spot via a sound

```
open 00-mitsa.wav, 1    open 01-alex.wav, 1    open 02-kendal.wav, 1    open 03-mathijs.wav, 1

0 (  readsf~      O     0 (  readsf~    O      0 (  readsf~    O      0 (  readsf~    O      0

     dac~                   dac~                  dac~                  dac~
```

part of the audio mix in the
interface of Pure Data

installation. A small speaker was subtly
hidden between the books in the library and
each new recording was added to the queue.
The second publishing form is an audio mix
with all of the contributions played one
after another that I coded in Pure Data.
_observations // The structure of this
sound jam allowed the facilitators to play
the role of editors and publishers of the
final sound publication. The contributors
were aware of the process and enjoyed
listening and responding with an audio
recording. They found the sound jam
accessible, which allowed them to use sound
as a medium even though not all of them
worked with it before. Some of them used
their voice to produce their piece, while
others preferred to record a soundscape in
the room or other people talking. The
process was quite strict but at the same
time, gave them the freedom to choose how
to approach the assignment and that made
them
content with the experiments and their
recordings. With this structure, the
contributors only could hear the recording
before them and they would not know who are
the other makers in this sound publication.
Thus, everyone had the same role as a
contributor. The sound jam was accessible
and inclusive as such and without the need
to work on creating a specific group
dynamic and putting people in the same
place and time.
_publication // Pure Data mix, to be
published in June 2023
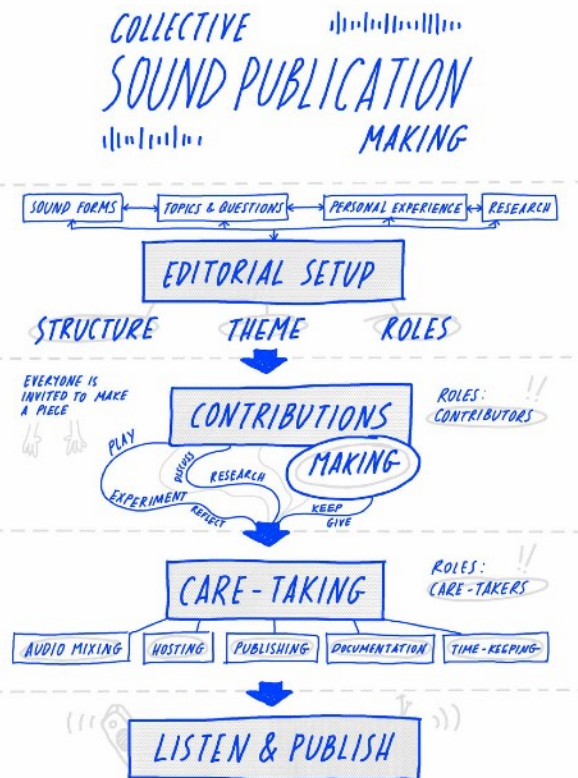
the workshop process //
by Alexandra Nikolova

_facilitators // Alexandra Nikolova and Naomi Jansen
_dates // 9~20-01-2023
_location // Willem de Kooning Academy, Rotterdam
_number of participants // 18
_format // Elective class
_instruments // Voices, kalimba, electric guitar, field recordings, sound editing with Adobe Audition
_schedule // A 2-week workshop with daily classes facilitated for bachelor students at WdKA. During the first week, Naomi introduced experimental exercises to work with sound: to introduce their work through sonic pieces, to discover the way they approach sound, and what part it takes in their research and artistic practice. Each day had a theme and invitation for focusing on listening, collecting, translating, playing, and resonating. The second week followed a sound publication-making process: after reflecting on their experiments during the first week, the students brainstormed on what were the themes that brought them together. Then, the week followed the collective sound publication-making process, described below.
_process // The students were invited to start by creating the concept of their collective piece (which we called *editorial setup*), divide into smaller groups to create audio contributions (which they did on Monday and Tuesday) and then split into *care-taking groups* to finalise the different elements of the sound publication (Wednesday and Thursday). Finally, on Friday the whole group experienced the final outcome. For it, they decided to make

a public sound installation at the academy and publish an audio mix on Soundcloud.
_observations // The structure of this method was quite strict and precise – there were steps and deadlines the participants had to follow. The participants shared that the process was clearly presented and made it easier to focus on the creative part rather than stress about how to organise themselves in the group. The students did not know each other before the elective – they shared that this process helped them to understand how the others are working and gave them space to choose what roles to take, so they could feel safe but also challenged enough to develop new skills. Their main motivation to join this workshop was to discover working with sound – most of them did not have experience with this medium, and the ones who had, shared it was limited and never in such a collective process.
_publication // sound publication

## 4 // re#sister impro jam session



the selected cards for the visual score of the performance // photo by Alexandra Nikolova

_facilitator // Alexandra Nikolova
_dates // 4~12-02-2023
_location // Radio Worm Expanded with re#sister community at Wunderbar, Rotterdam
_number of participants // 3
_format // Live performance and radio streaming
_instruments // Fretless electric guitar, microgranny 2, bastl kastle v1.5, voice (microphone with applied reverb and delay effects), supermarket receipt, kalimba and harmonica
_schedule // The preparation of the jam was divided into 3 sessions on the 4th, 9th and 11th of April 2023. Session 1: free writing (warming up by writing down whatever was on our minds at that moment) and then extracting research questions from those

performing at WORM //
photo by dagg3r

writings; elaborating on these questions in 15-minute interviews. Between sessions 1 and 2 each participant collected visuals that referred/responded/explained/dived into our research question, and then I turned the visuals into cards to serve as a visual score for the impro jam. Session 2: instruments check (we were deciding which instruments to use) and discussion about the cards, visual score tryout. Session 3: sound check, technical setup check and rehearsal for the jam. On the day of the jam, we performed live an improvised jam based on the visual score and all the conversations during the previous week. _process // The structure aimed at giving enough space for every contributor to bring their current interest and research question to the table. Thus, the process started with an exploration of our current interests and emotional state with a free writing activity. Once finished with it, everyone was invited to extract a nagging question coming out of the writings (such as *How not to perform, to embrace process, slowness, latency and failure?; Entry point in familiar and unfamiliar settings — how to navigate when it's blocked or find ways to create them? and What are the elements that make me feel fully present in the current moment and place — for my body, mind and soul?*). Then, in order to help each other to elaborate more and also keep a record of the conversations, we made 3 rounds of interviews. In each round, one of us was asking questions to another one about their question and the third person was taking notes. The homework after the session was to explore the questions individually by collecting images of our research. Each one of us selected 10 of the visuals and I turned them into cards and a small publication. The next step was to try out how to use the cards as a visual score

of an improvised performance. We talked about it in an open discussion and decided to pick up one card each. Then, at a jam tryout, we tested performing with the visuals as a starting point. Those visuals were also used during the final performance at WORM.

_observations // The contributors expressed that the overall process was quite fulfilling, using words such as "liberating", "valuable", "safe", and "amazing", and sharing they were "feeling really content". They appreciated the fact that there was enough space to bring their current research needs and topics. They found their role in the structure quite easily and it felt like a natural process. Being able to experiment with instruments they barely used before, or by disrupting their previous instrumental training, without feeling judged, was stimulating, experimental and liberating. They were interested in being able to sonically express their experience and to challenge themselves to be part of a sound-making with others while some of them still explored their instruments. Being able to share the process and experiment with the public was another strong motivation to join the sound jam, so it also helped them liberate themselves from the fear of rejection. In a reflective moment, they called this process and the "genre" of the performance "post-talk" as a joke, but indeed, the conversations happening at the three sessions were an important input for the performance and the whole process.

_publication // sound publication, cards

**5 // reversed words**

_facilitator // Alexandra Nikolova
_dates // 18-02-2023~15-03-2023

illustrations for the open call // by Alexandra Nikolova

_location // Open call at my MediaWiki at wiki.alnik.me
_number of participants // 7
_format // Open call for audio contributions
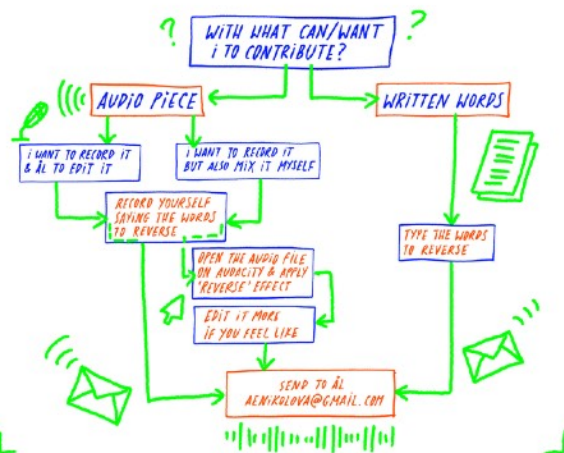_instruments // Smartphones for recording, Ableton Live 11 Intro for editing
_schedule // Open call to send in audio contributions between 18th of February and 15th of March 2023. The invitation was spread by email (newsletter to my subscribers, xpub and media design mailing lists) and social media (instagram, facebook, mastodon, twitter)
_process // The invitation was aimed at trying out a sound jam that takes place online and can accommodate the contributions of people no matter their current location. In order to make it as accessible as possible, I invited them to either send a written text or recorded spoken audio that could be edited with an applied "reverse" effect or not. Thus, the participants could take part no matter the level of their experience with sound recording and editing.
This sound jam was also topic-oriented. A big impact on the way the process was structured, was made by the particular concept of reversing sentences. The invitation to the participants was to write down and record things they would like to be taken back – words that people say and regret doing it later.
_observations // The contributions were recorded with the participants' mobile phones. Some of them did not have the opportunity to record or edit their works, so they sent a written text or quickly made voice memos. Most of them expressed that it made their participation quite easy and it felt accessible for them to join the publication-making. The main motivations for the participants to join this sound jam

were two: firstly, to try out a new way to approach sound — to use it as a reflection, as a tool in their healing process, and as a way to contextualise the act of editing. Secondly, most of them were attracted by the topic. They found it interesting to experiment with saying and hearing out loud words that haunted them and also to see if letting that out would have a healing effect on them. They expressed curiosity to hear how all of those contributions would be mixed and what the final piece would sound like.

_publication // the final mix will be published here in June 2023

# _principles

By implementing the sound jams and reflecting on what was
important for the participants, it was clear there were some
common elements from the different methods. Several factors
turned out to be if not universally vital for the sound—making
and publishing in a group, at least influential for the ideology
and intention of these processes. Understanding and taking them
as good practice can nurture liberating and enriching experiences
in the otherwise distant world of audio publishing.

In his article *Towards an Ethic of Improvisation*, *Cornelius
Cardew* was looking for virtues or strengths which a musician can
develop. In his immersive composing and performing practice he
experimented with improvisation and interpretation of various
sorts of scores — written, visual and less traditional. The
virtues that he found important, especially in the context of the
improvisation setting, can be seen as essential principles he
found during his facilitation practice. With his experience, he
saw the people who have "escaped a musical education and have
nevertheless become musicians" (Cardew, 1971), the ones who are
able to play to their full capacities, liberated from the
expectations of traditional training. The strengths they were
supposed to develop are related to soft types of skills — such as
integrity and selflessness. By looking for important principles
and factors for my sound jams practice, I also focus on ways to
liberate the participants in the process of sound—making rather
than train particular hard skills.

**Sound can be an enriching medium in a practitioner's artistic and
research work**
The experimentation with a new medium, tools and instruments,
does not necessarily make us amateurs. Not in the commonly
perceived way with negative connotations and a disrespectful
attitude. Allowing oneself to be an amateur can be instead
liberating. *Mariëtte Groot* is a key figure in the music and
performing scene in Rotterdam, running WORM's programme, working
with a vast number of artists and being a performer herself. With
her impressive experience and talents, she chooses to call
herself an "amateur in everything". She acknowledges that it was
her way to enable herself "to truly love art" (Groot, 2019). Such
an approach liberates us from aspirations to high status in a
particular field, but also from our egos. It is a way to create

space for connection, care, and understanding of others. Amateur means experimental and free of judgement. The do-it-yourself and do-it-with-others cultures bring artistic aspirations closer to people from any background and liberate them from the expectation of demonstrating proficiency in audio mixing and rehearsed performances.

Not looking at sound through the lens of the professional musician or sound artist makes this medium accessible. The process of the sound jams allows the participants to choose any instrument of sound-making – any object with which noise can be produced. They are encouraged to use the tools they already have for recording and there is no need to have a high-quality device to make a decent audio file. Using open-source software for sound editing, instead of expensive professional programmes, liberates us from the need of investing in equipment. It also allows us to slow down and take the time to experiment with less. *Supisara Burapachaisri*, an artist based in Rotterdam and a participant in the *re#sister impro jam session*, shared that the opportunity to use a very simple and self-made sound-making device was what intrigued her the most, which enabled her to "learn how to adapt and contribute given its limitations". It gave her the opportunity to take her time to get to know in more detail something less complicated but still new. Her practice is mainly focused on graphic design but now sound as a new medium in her work is opening up a world of possibilities that are still strongly connected and useful in her work. For instance, she discovered a new communication channel with her tools through sound – they give her feedback about their current state and if something is working in the way it's supposed to or not.

**Creating a safe space for experimentation with structure**
It sounds paradoxical to create a space with a strict structure and say the participants have lots of freedom to experiment. The purpose of introducing a process is to make the sound jams accessible because there is a format to fit in and anyone can take a role in it. It also keeps the participants safe from "drowning into the sea of possibilities" (Heijnen and Bremmer, 2020) and gives them an entry point and guidance. Heijnen and Bremmer, arts and music teachers and researchers, explore in their *Wicked Arts Assignments Practising Creativity in Contemporary Arts Education* the balance between limiting and enabling assignments, which seems to be the key to making the process work well for the group. This particular kind of "safe

space" is conceptualised by Australian scholar *Mary Ann Hunter* as "rules of engagement that scaffold the creation of new work and, somewhat paradoxically, invite a greater degree of aesthetic risk" (Hunter, 2008). In her article *Cultivating the Art of Safe Space*, she is exploring ways to create a "safe space" without losing the creative potential of pressure. She sees the necessity of such opportunity for the making in the sense of creating "a space of messy negotiations" where the group process unlocks the individual and collective powers. There is room for experimentation in such a setting because the makers are free from the fear of being judged — and on a practical level — from the difficulties to self-organise. As long as someone is taking care of the structure and the flow, they can fully dive into various creative tryouts and focus on the particular role they have in the making. A participant in the *Transverse Atlantis* sound jam expressed how important the feeling of a "welcoming and well-structured space" was and how it helped them feel less pressure. *Jarmo Willering*, another artist and student at Willem de Kooning Academy, who joined the sound jam, expressed that the contributors were on the same page throughout the whole process and explained that with the clear and structured organisation.

The facilitation of the creative process by looking for a balance between being open and restricted is not new to the artistic educational field. *Melissa Bremmer and Emiel Heijnen* collected over 500 arts instructions from educators and artists to publish their *Wicked Arts Assignments*. Reflecting on their experience with facilitating processes for students, they acknowledge that when given complete liberty in the process of making, the students do not get more creative or inquisitive. What they suggest as a solution is a state of "controlled freedom" (Runco and Okuda Sakamoto, 1993, as cited in Heijnen and Bremmer, 2020) where the participants are encouraged for experimentation but it happens within a frame of a structure, or "flexible limitations" (ibid., p.25). The authors see this as a way to nurture the creative potential of the students and help make them take a new direction in their explorations. Guidance is also quite important in the context of experimentation with a new medium. Many participants in the sound jams enter the process with some level of fear, insecurity or hesitation. That is being addressed and tackled exactly with a good balance between limitations and openness.

**Accessibility and inclusivity, achieved with a clear process and roles in the group**

The structure of the sound jam proposes clear roles for the participants: there are facilitators, care-takers, and contributors. Why predefined roles are important unravels in the clarity of what to expect when being part of the making.

The *facilitators* and *care-takers* are encouraged to influence the process and experiment in that area. Depending on the particular method, they have the roles to take care of keeping the structure or transforming it according to the needs of the group. The instructions for the sound jams are a starting point, but in reality, each group is unique and changes might occur. Having someone to overview that and change the direction when needed is essential to keep the flow going and still keep the balance between experimentation and structure. In her essay, *The Amateur's Armour*, *Mariëtte Groot* interprets the word "curation" as *caring* (Groot, 2019). She sees it as connecting to someone via their work. It is also about being careful with it, making space for it, and appreciating it by talking about it. The care-taking roles perform the same act – they are the ones to take the sound-making through all the necessary stages and help the contributors to finalise their audio pieces. The facilitators and care-takers can also be contributors. During the *re#sister impro jam session,* there was a structured process to prepare the makers for the final moment of the live performance. During the reflection, they expressed that it felt quite liberating to go through these facilitated sessions and all the conversations about the work and the collective making process were the basis of the performance. *Supisara Burapachaisri* pointed out that she could even literary hear these talks (and the effect of them) in the sound jam performance at the end.

The *contributors* take the role of making a sonic collaboration. The invitation to be low-key, to use it as a space to play with a new medium and not be afraid to fail is a core principle of the sound jams. What is important here is to experiment with the medium of sound in a group of people. Similar to *David Toop*'s look at ambient music, when more musicians were drifting away from the traditional approach to their work, but seeking "music that searches for new relationships between maker and listener, maker and machine, sound and context" (Toop, 2018), the contributors are invited to discover new ways to approach sound and even music, without any restrictions on instruments and

towards a sonic outcome that fits their needs. For the *reversed words* open call, I tested the method of facilitating collective making in a remote setting. By providing structure and topic for the sonic publication, I tried to make it accessible for people who are not based in the same location but still are interested in the concept. What also made that type of jam accessible, were the various options to provide their pieces – written, recorded, or sound-edited. For this, the role of the care-taker was to edit and put the final piece altogether.

In the sound jams, all the contributors are also invited to be mindful of the others in the process. To take care of each other when needed and to make sure everyone is included. Thus, being aware of the soundscape they are part of is another key principle for the sound jams – to raise their attention and understanding of the process.

**People's awareness and attention, raised with the listen-and-response method**
*Cornelius Cardew* speaks about "awakeness" in the sense of preparedness for whatever happens in group making (Cardew, 1971). He elaborates more by exploring this as a special case of clairvoyant prediction – the conviction that one or another particular thing will happen. The specific case he understands as being aware that something might occur or might not. Cardew emphasizes the constitution of awakeness as he understands it as an intense anticipation of the outcome in improvisation, coming from the maker's previous experience and training. Awareness is also widely explored in the practice of *deep listening*, developed by *Pauline Oliveros*. With her work, she puts focus on listening, understanding it as "to give attention to what is perceived both acoustically and psychologically" (Oliveros, 2005). Awareness in the sense that you are connecting to your environment by being aware of the sounds. In order to do that in the process of making, she invites the participants to a moment of listening before responding and adding their sound to the overall soundscape. That was the invitation to the contributors of the *deep listening impro jam session* – using a facilitated progression for playing inside a circle, the makers were invited to listen first to the sounds the person on their right side is making, reflect on them, and take a moment before joining the jam. They were invited to listen to those sounds and to respond to them. *Mitsa Chaida (mitsitron)*, a co-facilitator and participant in the sound jam, shared that this assignment made

them jam in a different way than usual. They had previous experience in guitar training and jazz playing and also had participated in many jamming sessions. Mitsa explained how usually you jam with a big focus on your own instrument and how you play it. With the invitation to listen and respond, they felt much more engaged with the others in the circle and also could identify the response of sounds while listening to the recording of the jam afterwards.


**Improvising and sharing the sound-making process lifts the pressure of the proficiency**
The participants of the sound jams are invited to improvise, no matter the particular form of the process — it is not necessarily needed to be a jamming session for it to create space for free-playing and collective making without a scenario. During the sound jam *what do books say?,* the participants had no idea of what sonic pieces they will make. One after another, they were invited to listen to the previous contributor's audio recording and respond with another one. As facilitators, we were also improvising during the jam — we changed the instructions on the go and tried out different ways to formulate the invitation, seeing how that shifted and shaped the sequence of pieces.

The invitation to improvise in such a setting is still guided, though. In 1967, *Cornelius Cardew* composed *The Tiger's Mind* for the musicians at AMM — a British improvisation group from London. The piece contained only words in order to be accessible for anyone, having in mind the almost-universal ability to read and write at that time. Cardew called this a "guided improvisation" (Cardew, 1971) — presenting a score to be performed in the wildest sense of the word, even if it is amateur or childish. For the *what do books say?* sound jam most of the participants recorded audio reading excerpts from books they picked up from the shelves, which made them experiment and improvise within a guided process and overall structure of the making.

During the *re#sister impro jam session*, an improvisation act based on a visual score, we questioned "performing" as a concept, seeing it oftentimes associated with perfection, pressure and preparedness. For it, we tried to focus more on the process and embrace slowness and latency. The contributors expressed how liberating it was to free themselves from the readiness and proficiency of the final outcome and be vulnerable in the making

and sharing their sonic piece live at the bar and on the radio. The result of the performance was indeed informed by all the experiences during the preparation – a week-long facilitated process of exploring various urgencies we had, talking them through and visualising them via photos, illustrations and screenshots. The performance was an experimental trial of what *Pauline Oliveros* sees in her work as an improvising composer and performer of being informed by her Deep Listening practice: "When I arrive on stage, I am listening and expanding to the whole of the space/time continuum of perceptible sound. What I perceive as the continuum of sound and energy takes my attention and informs what I play" (Oliveros, 2005).

# _outro

Creating collective sound-based publications can happen in a healthy and accessible environment. The key element is the care of all of the participants, no matter the form it takes — from creating a structure, through raising the awareness of the group members, to leading them all the way through the process. In order to make sound accessible for people from different backgrounds, we need to create space where they can experiment freely and be liberated from the fear of being judged. If everyone in the group is on the same page, then the climate is perfect for nourishing collective making.

As the experiments showed, there are some directions we can lead our facilitation to if we are to create such safe spaces to play with sound. Structure, clear roles and expectations help us establish the framework of protected space for the participants. It also makes the entry much more accessible for someone who is insecure about joining. Once the group's awareness is raised towards the structure and the role of everyone, the process is much more engaging and attentive.

Sound jams are a practice that could be a part of the legacy of the experimental and improvisational movements after the 1960s. It was built on the making of art accessible for people from various backgrounds and liberating artists from traditional constraints. But it also adds more elements to it in search of new approaches. It opens up a door to a practice of methods that combine arts assignments, improvisation, and experimentation, but also structure, clear roles in the process, and a special focus on the audio medium. The sound jams are an invitation to practitioners to try them out and create room for sound in their work. To build up on that practice and to share it with others. So it becomes collective, shared and public. And free — of fear, judgement and hostility.

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# _colophon

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