

# EMERGENCY

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**Listening Session: Seeing Through Flames:  
Hollows and Resonances by David Toop**

**David Toop 00:04**

Thank you for coming. I hope the rain stopped. What I said when we were talking about how to make the transition between you coming in and me, starting with, there shouldn't be as little drama as possible. That music by Pauline Oliveros and Stuart Dempster, even though it's acoustic instruments is somehow incredibly dramatic. And the instruments are played in a huge cistern underground cistern with an extremely long reverberation time. And hence the fact that incredible drama is produced from very simple means. I've decided to divide this event into three parts. One is what you might call up playing and sounding. One is a sharing a text part. And the third is a conversation part. Which is partly up to you, of course. For me, they're all equal parts of my practice. And the difficulty of course, if you do a playing and sounding part and a sharing a text part, that one can seem to be either an illustration of the other or an explanation of the other. So I don't think there's a perfect way of dealing with that problem. So I decided to start with the planning and sounding part followed by the sharing and text part

**David Toop 33:44**

Now with a very wet arm, I'm going to move on to the second part

**David Toop 33:58**

which of course sharing a text part What preoccupies me is foraging for resonance. In other words searching out cavities, small acoustic

**Transcript**

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spaces, and amplifying surfaces as if they were food

**David Toop 34:31**

finding and constructing containers, hollows, perforated spheres and caves. In other words, the resonance of tiny rooms once they may have contained food sometimes these rooms are dimensional. They have depth, or sometimes they're flat paper thin, translucent rather than dark. But rooms are always in conversation with other rooms. The sound only exists in relation to other sounds and within the resonance of acoustic space, which is always emerging and emergent space. As Donna Haraway says, through their reaching into each other, through their prehension, or grasping things, beings constitute each other and themselves. beings do not pre exist the related things. For each resonance are found resonance can be like a shanty roof, not belonging to only borrowed from another part of the world. The way that leaf hole and mole crickets borrow a leaf surface or cavity in the ground to amplify this song. Or the way in which a crab can live in a tin can. Or an octopus can use a class jaw as a base for foraging on the seabed. Sound can't be an autonomous object, it comes into being and then decays as a mixing event, relational, an ambiguous position. Thinking about speaking in a cave and the implications of that enclosure and resonance Yes, but also fear

**David Toop 36:47**

not every cave is made from stone. As Ralph Ellison said in *Invisible Man*. The point now is that I found a home or a hole in the ground as you will now don't jump to the conclusion because I call my home a hole. It is damp and cold like a grave. There are cold holes and warm holes. Mine is a warm hole. And remember, a bear retires to his hole for the winter and lives until spring. Then he comes strolling out like the Easter chick breaking from his shell. I say this to assure you it is incorrect to assume that because I'm invisible, and live in a hole, I'm dead. His cave is equipped with 1369 filament lights and one radio phonograph. Oh, he plans to have five. There is a certain acoustical deadness in my hole he wrote, when I have music, I want to feel its vibration. Not only with my ear but with my whole body. I'd like to hear five recordings of Louis Armstrong playing and singing. What did I do to be so black and blue? All at the same time. Sometimes now I listen to Louis while I have my

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favourite dessert of vanilla ice cream and sloe gin. I pour the red liquid over the white mound, watching it glisten and the vaporising as Lewis bends that military instrument into a beam of lyrical sound

**David Toop 38:50**

while thinking about talking about materials, I came across an interview with Eva Hesse, in which she spoke about materials, pouring thickening, thinning, Order Chaos, stringy versus mass, huge versus small, non anthropomorphic, non geometric, non non material she used often had a relatively short life stuff like latex and papier mache. So the idea of impermanence was built in decay as a consideration and her work just as it is with acoustic resonance, temporary shelter, or the softness, fragility and sickness of the body. Cindy Nemser interviewed her for Art Forum in January 1970. The article was published in May of that year, the same month that Hesse died at the age of 33. Nemser knew she was dying from the effects of a malignant brain tumour when the interviews were conducted one of the questions or should I say the answers that really interests me was about craftsmanship. I do think there is a state of quality that is necessary, Hesse replied but it is not based on correctness. It has to do with the quality of the piece itself and nothing to do with neatness or edges. It's not the artist and quality of the work but the integrity of the piece. I'm not conscious of materials as a beautiful essence. For me, the great involvement is for a purpose to arrive it and an end, not that much of a thing in itself. I am interested in finding out through working on the piece, some of the potential and not the preconceived. As you work, the piece itself can define or redefine the next step. Or the next step connected with some vague idea. I want to allow myself to get involved in what is happening, and what can happen, and be completely free to let that go and change. There was an element of absurdity in Eva Hesse's work. Just as there's an element of absurdity in bodies or being an artist or being an object. Why am I even talking about Eva Hesse other than the fact I love her work? I think because it offers a strategy, a way of talking about music, without talking about instruments, musicians, notes, rhythms form performance. We can talk about materials and resonance, physicality, and fragility, and the parts of things, their movement and the way they work together as a whole.

**David Toop 42:26**

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There's a relationship in my mind between Hesse sculptures and biological entities, like holobiont. It's a term used to describe an injury in an individual host and its microbial community, or invertebrates such as jellyfish or octopus. For time thinking about the complex instruments or devices through which contemporary sound work is activated. I found the concept of assemblage useful. But now I'm not so sure. Maybe too mechanical, implicitly at least. This is what curator Chus Martinez wrote about the octopus. Unlike humans, the octopus brain does not have a centralised encephalization which shows that a centralised brain is not the evolution not the only evolutionarily advantageous form of intelligence. The octopus is unusual neuronal distribution allows for its arms to be autonomous. They can carry out activities on their own, or coordinate among themselves, without needing the head to be involved. It is very difficult to imagine this she writes. It is like imagining a finger that is self sufficient totality but also part of a body. It is like a small institution that is individually operated, but also an essential part of the cultural organism. This image shatters our notions of how information flows and how the senses think. It cannot yet be expressed efficiently in metaphoric language. I thought about breathing, partly referring back to Charles Olson's influential essay projective verse from 1950. In which he wrote about breath, allowing all the speech force of language back in speech is a solid verse is a secret of a poems energy he wrote. Because now a poem has by speech solidity. Everything in it can now be treated as solid objects things. In relation to my own practice I wrote, every sounding as a variant on breath. Breathing is the essential act for humans and many other creatures. The sound of breath is always with us resonating within the cave of nostrils, mouth, lips, teeth, and beyond the body's face, entailing friction percussion, complex tambours, nonverbal connections, speech, vocal cries, wind instruments, a register of pleasure, fear, anxiety, exertion, exhaustion, sickness, calm, arousal, communality, self awareness.

David Toop 46:08

Expense and I were asking ourselves why it was adding water to an empty snail shell should make it easier to play as a whistle. She asked, how does the snail make it shell? To which the answer is snails use an organ, called a mantle. to secrete layers of calcium carbonate is crystallised and hardened mollusks mostly possess rightward pointing

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shells. A few point left and a very few show mixed her mixture of Dextral and sinistral individuals. For years I've been obsessed with the whole Fel's flute one of a number of flutes found in caves in the Swabian Alb. They were made from Griffon vulture, Winburn, Swan radius and mammoth ivory. carbon dated to suggest ages of at least 35,000 years for the vulture bone flute and one of the mammoth flutes maybe 39,000 years for the others. It's worth thinking about the animals who became unwitting partners in this work of caves, cavities, hollows and sound. Abroad winged vulture living on carrion. And the huge mammoth both creatures that could inspire or perhaps terror. David George Haskell devoted a section of his recent book sounds wild and broken to these flutes. He spoke about the hardship of life for these people living just north of the glaciers covered Alps in the early Aurignacian period. Yet these people devoted the highest forms of their technologies to making music he wrote the flutes the mammoth flute in particular, emerged from the application of the most sophisticated craft possible at the time. Their work events, deep understanding of material properties and skillful use of tools. soundless solid animal tusks, were transformed by human hands and imagination. Into hollow multi pitched wind instruments, precisely wielded stone tools carved voids, spaces where human breath could enter and reanimate the dead. Last part of what he wrote may or may not be true. It's certainly true that breath reanimated the bone tubes of dead animals. Did they reanimate dead humans? Impossible to say? Maybe they were exclusively for the living a bringing together of small communities through the pervasive outreaching of sound into resonant enclosures of shelter, and the barely known lands beyond.

David Toop 49:34

Theaster Gates talks about the black vessel is the celebration of the relationship between vessels and gathering. You make beautiful vessels, those vessels will cause people together. Bells also appear in his practice, on what's a bell but an upturned vessel. An inverted vessel whose vibrations ring outwards and in an expanding circle, inviting or commanding people to gather In Paul Celan's poetry, a similar transfiguration takes place, jugs turning into bells. Listen your way in with your mouth. He wrote in a poem called The trumpet part. This is what we do, through the cave of the mouth. Words forming an

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unforming unspeakable in search of a something in what we hear ideas of forage too. In Lisbon airport a few weeks ago, I picked up a book of poetry by Fernando Pessoa, as if a sign or reward for having passed through check in security and passport control to the inner sanctum, the page open to in broad daylight, even the sounds.

**David Toop 51:08**

In broad daylight, even the sound shine on the repose of the Wide Field they linger. It rustles the breeze silent. I have wanted, like sounds to live by things and not be there's a winged consequence, carrying the real far

**David Toop 51:34**

as I understand it, the poem dwells on a contradiction. That sounds never exist by themselves. I need spaces, air, obstacles, resonators and reflections to come into being. Yet these partners in existence have no rights of ownership. Mostly they are involuntary accomplices in acts of becoming. Sound is always mutable. The reel of sound is carried over distance by unwitting collaborators. When I returned home, I realised that I knew the poem already from a copy of Fernando Pessoa Selected Poems. This happens frequently.

**David Toop 52:28**

Sometime between 1876 and 1889, Gerard Manley Hopkins heard understood and articulated the role of Hollows and obstacles in sounding the ear as a well, pleasure as a leap, a spring, an echo and land as water and skin. Repeat that repeat cuckoo bird and open ear wells. Hot Springs, delightfully sweet. With a ballad with a ballad, a rebound of trundled timber and scoops of the hillside ground hollow, hollow hollow ground. The whole landscape flushes on a certain at a sound why bother to think about such things, empty spaces and anti spaces, materials or abject objects rather than notes, rhythms, harmonies, lyrics

**David Toop 53:50**

or history is the history of animation relationships, Peter Sloterdijk wrote in bubbles, the first volume of his trilogy on bubbles and microspherology. Not everything is useful to me in this fat book, least of all his musings on theology, but certain things about bubbles, spheres, foam sponges, heaps clouds of vortexes spring from the page, particularly

those concerned with auditory relations and spheres. Underneath the Leonardo da Vinci drawing of uterus embryo and placenta, for example, is this sentence on the way through the evasive underworld of the inner world, the schematic image of a fluid and auratic universe unfolds like a map in sound, woven entirely from resonances and suspended matter. It is there that we must seek the prehistory of all things pertaining to the soul. That word soul troubles me a hint of mysticism when we're thinking about life before being born. The constant internal noise within the cave like enclosure of a mother's belly, and how this shapes us as complex beings with mysterious workings, listening to waveforms in space, but also listening to internal murmurings without any apparent materiality. Emily Dickinson wrote this circa 1863. The spirit is the conscious ear. We actually hear when we inspect that's audible. That is admitted here. For other services, as sound, the hangs a smaller year outside the castle that contain the other only hear. So another perspective on internal hearing, a silent hearing within the cave of the self, or castle, as she puts it, and shared hearing external resonating within the outer world, which is of course also felt to be internal, because what we hear is simultaneously experienced as an external and internal event.

David Toop 56:53

But we are also beginning to talk about sound and listening in the formation of community and politics. Returning to Peter Sloterdijk, who writes it is the constitutive listening community that encloses humans in the immaterial rings of mutual accessibility. The ear is the organ that connects the intimate and the public. It is only through the arousing extreme development of the hearing human existence within a Sonispheric hothouse became possible. In the wall less house of sounds, humans became the animals that come together by listening. Whatever else they might be they are sonispheric communardes. I have many questions about this. Not least this idea in the wall less house of sounds humans became the animals that come together by listening. Whatever else they might be, they are sonispheric communardes. So we've come a long way since the whole fel flutes were constructed in 30,000 39,000 years ago. And you would think that deep listening is at the heart of creating community, we would have got much better at it. But in fact, all the evidence is

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**David Toop 58:54**

listening now seems to be very difficult for people. And willful acts of not listening. Non non, as Eva Hesse said are pervasive throughout our societies. So that brings us on to the third section of this event, which is the conversation section. I think there's a microphone if Yeah, Canan has a microphone over there. If anybody has any, anything you want to say about the playing sounding section of of what I've done or what I've said in the tech sharing section or in relation to the exhibition itself. Interestingly enough, I wrote this text about a month ago without having any idea of what was in the exhibition and, and I was really happy to find that. There were these Gordon Parks photographs of reconstructing the Ralph Ellison cave of the Invisible Man. So that was a very nice resonance going on there. Somebody's over there.

**1:00:47**

And I noticed that most of the people that you've referenced in the text part, but people who weren't musicians, such as like Donna Haraway, or Ralph Ellison, I was just interested, whether most of your inspiration comes from people or from works outside of music.

**David Toop 1:01:14**

Yeah, it's an interesting question. Yeah, I think that's true. It's certainly now maybe, maybe not when I was younger. One of the devices I'm using here is cassette tapes played through bone conduction speakers. Bone Conduction, for those of you who don't know, this is similar to hearing aids. So it literally conduct sound through the bone bone. Which means I can use these foraged resonance objects to amplify them and transform them in different ways. But the cassettes themselves, I'm using a cassettes that I've had for nearly 50 years. And then cassettes I managed to get when I was given the opportunity to make a BBC radio programme in 1971. And they allowed me access to these BBC sound archives, and unbelievably allowed me to take records home, everything was on 10 inch vinyl. So they allowed me to take records home and I would take them home and and copy them onto cassette, which, of course I shouldn't have done, but I still have these cassettes. And what's on them is global music, I suppose. And, you know, hearing that music at that stage in my life when I was 21, 22 years old, was an

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extraordinary experience, because it opened me up to so many different ways of working with sound. And to me working with sound is to create a society you know, the structure of music proposes a society. And so, I had this great gift of having access to all of these different models of society, all of these different models of commonality articulated through music. So in that sense, and what followed, which was delving into ethnomusicology and you know, theories of sound and listening and, and environmental sound and so on. Was, to some extent the basis of my practice now, but it's much less likely I would say that I get inspiration from listening to music, or reading about music now. And yeah, you're right. I guess. Yeah, all of those references probably in this text I just read. Non musical, although there are some characters within it like Theaster Gates, for example, has a group he plays with. And music is very much part of what he does. You could argue that poetry borders on music. But yeah, it's true. Oh, thank you somebody else around there? Yeah. Oh, somebody

1:05:15

can you hear me okay? I had a look around your setup beforehan and how did you actually decide on what particular items to use tonight? What inspired you?

David Toop 1:05:31

Well, partly what I use tonight was based on what I did last week in Copenhagen, I decided I need to unpack it will be silly to unpack, you know, and then pack again a day later. So I just left everything in the case. And the only thing I added to actually was the snail shells, which I don't often travel with, because for obvious reasons, they're so fragile. I mean, I put them in a box or something. But if you're travelling on a plane, and stuff gets smashed around, and and I wanted to bring snail shells today because of this theme of caves. Because a snail shell is a kind of a cave. Particularly interesting one unoccupied cave, and then an unoccupied cave. I pick them up in my garden, you know, and empty by the time the birds have got to them. But yeah, decision making, it's an interesting thing. And I think it's I can't think of it as more sculptural and music, which is maybe why I devoted so much time to talking about Eva Hesse and, you know, the way she made decisions in using materials is very interesting to me. And the way other sculptors make decisions. I'm

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not so interested in making what you might call musical decisions. It is about materials, and it's about materials to some extent, having a life of their own. So you've probably noticed that there was a certain amount of chaos going on as things were deciding to fall off the table or fall off the box that they were on or move around by themselves.

1:07:39

Well, I was wondering, if there was a particular element of kind of chaos, that you'd built into this, in order to make sure that there was an element that you had no control over? That would kind of do its own thing to some degree?

David Toop 1:07:55

Well, I don't have no control. That would be silly. Or maybe it wouldn't be. I don't have no control, I have quite a lot of control. But I do think of sounds and the materials that make sounds as living things to some degree. So you could equate them with plants or entities of various kinds. And to some extent, they do what they want to do. So you know, one of the characteristics of a cassette and this is one of the reasons for its obsolescence. And also, maybe one of the reasons for its recent revival is that it's very difficult to know where you are in a cassette. You know, if you want to get to the beginning or the end, you've got to fast forward or rewind, it's a tedious process. And if you want to know exactly where you are, you have to keep kind of testing. You know, so it's so unlike digital media, in that sense, or it's very unlike vinyl actually, where you can see and you can roughly know where a bit you want to hear is with cassettes. It's kind of occult mystery.

1:09:27

Have you sorry, they do have you at their mercy to some degree don't they.

David Toop 1:09:32

Yes, yeah, I do. So you know, I like that aspect that I put on a cassette and I don't actually know where it's going to be exactly where it's going to go. Because these cassettes have many different kinds of music on them, or sound. That's not just music, there are bio acoustic sounds.

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**David Toop 1:09:59**

**And I think the thing about it all is that it's personally collected, connected to me. So the leaves I use are collected from my garden, the snails feels collected from my garden, these cassettes have a long personal history, which is very much tied into my personal development, if you can call it that and so, to some extent, all of these elements deserve to speak for themselves, even though they're within my orbit, you know. So things will function and malfunction. And, you know, I'm practised in doing this, but there's an element of way witness. Yeah, definitely. And it doesn't give me a breakdown. If something falls, falls off the table, you know, it's like, okay, that's just stuff that happens. And you know the liveness, the aliveness is, all of these elements is what's important to me.**

**1:11:19**

**Thank you, David.**

**1:11:31**

**Hello, am I not encroaching with one? That's cool. Hello. You said during your talk that you've been performing, since you were 21? You're obviously at least 22. So I can imagine you performed in a variety of spaces. I want to know, like, how much do you truly think that the space that you perform in affects your performance? Because your table is obviously, it's quite an intimate setting to be performing in and by extension of that, have you in your time as a performer found any particular like acoustic spaces that really work well, with your performance?**

**David Toop 1:12:16**

**Yeah, I actually started performing when I was 14. And I'm now 73. So to be specific. And, yeah, because of that, I've performed in huge variety of spaces. And it's, it's another part of the language, you know, you, particularly when you're doing something like this, you can't go into a space and assume that it's a finished product. I mean, I made this point a number of times in the texts, you know, that sounds are not autonomous. That sound is collaborative. And to some degree, it's collaborative with the nature of a space. And by the nature of the space, I don't just mean the acoustics, although that's hugely important.**

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But also the feeling of space and the way it's laid out. And yeah, the architecture of a space its mood, its colour. And the people in it. And I mean, obviously, you become practised, adapting, you have to, because, say, if you're touring, and you're in a different space every night, and you have to adjust, you know, you can't just pretend same things are gonna happen every night because they won't, particularly when you're working with, I don't know, say elements like feedback, which is extremely sensitive to reverberation in a space, or the size of a space or whatever and these tiny sounds that I'm working with, sometimes, sometimes I work with sounds that are so small, I can barely hear them at home. And I think, what's the point of bringing this and then I bring it, and I use it, and I can't hear it. But then 15 minutes later, suddenly I can hear it. And that tells me something about foraging as a listener. we rethink our idea of sound and listening Sloterdijk talks about this, but actually, I was I was thinking about it before I read Sloterdijk. So it was like a kind of affirmation, I suppose. But I think we tend to think about sound as something projective.

**David Toop 1:15:21**

Something forceful maybe. And then we tend to think about I mean, I say we, I don't know if how many people do but my experience is, people tend to think about hearing as a more passive

**David Toop 1:15:43**

way of being if we turn that around, so that listening is a foraging sense. In other words, listening is going out there looking for, to use a visual metaphor looking for listening for sound. And sound is a waiting element. Sound is waiting to be discovered. sense so that that gives us a completely different model, you know, of that sensory relationship.

**David Toop 1:16:24**

And, for me, it's a more productive model. I mean, certainly gets away from any kind of gendering.

**David Toop 1:16:31**

In terms of sounding and listening. So what you find is with these tiny, tiny sounds, is that they can't be have heard, and then suddenly they can and it's because a situation is being graded in which the listening part of

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the body is foraging, it's finding sounds, in a way normally wouldn't do so. So yeah, there's a, there's a constant collaboration there between, you know, the way we listen, and the spaces we listen within.

1:17:21

I was just going to cycle back to you the comment about kind of passing comments about chaos, you know, and yet on the others, for me on this side, as a listener, you know, that there's, there was a sense of form and shape, which was, you know, quite overwhelming. And I'm just, I'm struck by the way you were activating the acoustic objects and acts almost like them, the moving of the activation around the resonant object actually has a kind of psychological kind of sense of shape or form in and of itself. Is that something you're aware of? And is it something that curates the overall arching performance with within awareness or an intention? Or is it something you just respond to?

David Toop 1:18:18

Well, it's very nice of you to say that it's overwhelming. That's very pleasing to hear. Yeah, I am very aware of, you know, I'm very aware. I mean, I've, I've worked as an improvising musician. since well, since the beginning, really, but definitely since, you know, I started to meet other improvisers in around 1970.

David Toop 1:18:55

And teaches you a lot. It teaches you a kind of fluid listening. So you're identifying what's going on from moment to moment, from place to place, from source to source.

David Toop 1:19:18

But it's also it gives you the sense of how can I put it holding form within your grasp? So that you don't necessarily know where you're going, because things are happening that, you know, there's stuff happening here that I'm thinking, Where's that coming from? What's what's doing that, you know, but it's there so you can work with it, and you work with it, you know, in combination with all the other things and hopefully, does build a sense of form, but it's not form in terms of symphonic form, or classic song form, you know, intro bridge, first chorus, like that it's not even drone form or whatever, it's, I think of it more like sculptural form,

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you know that you make a thing with a thing, and when you made that thing was a thing, then another thing. Make sense with that, find you'll add it, and and then you take the first thing away you know, so you're working with dynamics, and there's a momentum and shape that comes from many different aspects, you know, like, frequencies or contrasts. One of the things I was talking about, you know, quoting Eva Hesse, and what she felt was the dynamic aspect of her making her work. And if you look at her work, I mean, she she, I think was she really stood out as having a different language a different approach at that time, you know, late 1960s early 1970s among sculptors most of whom were men and most of whom were making solid things you know, not these squishy bulby bodily decaying type things. So I find it incredibly valuable to study other people's approach in that way. And it helps me with what you're talking about, you know, this way of creating form you're right, it's not chaos, there's chaos going on within it, you know, when something decides to kind of go somewhere, physically, you know, and I'm my attention is elsewhere than it does and, okay. has a mind of its own. But generally speaking in terms of the way it sounds. That shape is what it comes from experience. It comes from working with many, many other incredible musicians who I learned from. It comes from thinking about materials rather than thinking about

**David Toop 1:23:09**

Actually, paradoxically, it comes from thinking about materials rather than thinking about form. And the form comes you know, if you focus on the materials, you know, the thing about paper, paper paper is very important to me. You know, I started off partly as musician partly is somebody who drew and painted. And I love paper. I love Japanese paper. This paper, I'm using years Korean paper. And paper has incredible potential, but paper is also what I use as a writer. I mean, most of the time, of course, I'm not using paper. I'm writing on a computer, but what the computer is showing you is an approximation of paper. You know, it's showing you a simulacrum of paper, imaginary paper on your screen. So paper is always there, you know, as part of our lives in that sense, you know, if you're using a spreadsheet or an even when I'm using, you know, music, composing software, logic or Ableton Live or something, you know, there's that sense that there's a fake studio

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**David Toop 1:24:45**

on the screen and there's fake paper. You know, it's because it's related to notation. So, yeah, what what does the material Do you follow that? And if you follow it faithfully, then it gives you a form

**1:25:30**

I was gonna ask, Are you relentlessly listening to? Sounds? You know, do you spend a lot of time just thinking?

**1:25:42**

hearing a sound and sort of logging it and thinking, could I recreate that? What can I do with that? Can I use these materials have created that sound? In your practice, are you an obsessive listener?

**David Toop 1:25:57**

I'm obsessive in some things about obsessive listener probably. Yeah. Probably that would explain a lot. I don't know. It's, if we think back to.

**David Toop 1:26:07**

To why do we do what we do? is very hard to have an answer. I mean, yeah, you can say, Oh, when I was this age, I met this person and, you know, this thing happened to me. But why did it spark that and not something else, you know, and there are things I go back to in my childhood I've written about in the past, you know, like, experiencing fear, from listening to the sounds of a house at night, that sort of thing and then I read Edgar Allan Poe when I was quite young, actually. And a lot of Poe's writing was about this kind of hyperacusis you know, this oversensitive hearing and, of course, the framework of his stories was, you know, this kind of terror, fear of fear of being buried alive and stuff that as a child, as I was, when I wrote it, read his books was I mean, it's quite a lot to be thinking about when you're a child, you know, being buried alive.

**David Toop 1:27:36**

So, yes, I think to a certain extent, I became an obsessive listener. Partly an obsessive listening to music, definitely. Listening to all kinds of music, listening to whatever sound I was hearing, and I wouldn't say that's so true now. I mean, I'm just that's the work has been done.

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You know, and then you work with it. But I don't know, I was. I was in Copenhagen last week and there was this interminable soundcheck and at one point, I walked out of the place and went down to the river. You know, Copenhagen is very watery place, I went down to the river, and there were line of boats tied up and I noticed that they were making the most extraordinary patterns in the water, you know, if you just looked at the reflection of the brow of the boat, and, and the ropes and the chains. They were making the most extraordinary reflections and, of course, it's all about waveforms, which is the same as working with sound on this refraction and diffraction of waveforms, and I started photographing them, and then I started filming them and as I was doing, so I was having to try and stay very still and I was listening. I was acutely aware of these isolated incidents of Birdsong, or two birds, you know, which kind of cut through the quiet and the most extraordinary way with a certain amount of reverberation. So very evocative, very poetic. And I think you hear things like that, and you're hearing the kind of detail and you're hearing what's around the sound and and why the sound is, is a noticing event for you. You know, there's something very emotional and all of that. You know that you're really experiencing a lot of things all at once. And they're making that moment very special for you qnd so yeah, you're when you hear that sound, it stays in your mind. I mean, I listen, I was looking back to these films I made and of course, the sound is terrible, because there was an amount of wind and I was using my phone. So the clarity with which you hear yourself and the way that achieves emotional significance. Yeah, I suppose it comes out of a certain obsessiveness practice focusing on what you need to do to develop your practice. Sorry, my answers are a bit long.

1:31:29

I was just wondering what your thoughts were on notation. Because everything, you were talking about how everything unfolds quite organically. So I just thought, do you see notation as something that can be organic? Or do you ever use it? Or do you feel that something that would constrict your practice?

David Toop 1:31:55

Yeah, I never learned to read or write music. And at certain points, I've tried to do something about that. And I've never been able to.

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**David Toop 1:32:10**

And music notation at its basic level is very simple, right? As I mean, you compare it to written and spoken language is ridiculous. You know, is what 12 notes I consider considerably more words. So what that tells me is that I actually don't want to learn I'm refusing to learn because I'm not so stupid that I can't learn to read music. I just really don't want to and I think one of the things that's important is conventional notation puts you in this world of equal temperament and I don't want it's not that I don't want to be in that world because I very much enjoy certain types of harmony. I play guitar, I my first instrument was was guitar so I still play guitar every day and I love playing nice chords, I love sort of 1970s soul music for example. So I like all those major seventh chords and minor ninth and all of that stuff. But you know, what I'm doing here is working with you know, if I'm bowing a leaf from we're not talking about equal temperament you know there and you know, doing this stuff for a long time over 50 years in my case, it changes your hearing you know, and you're not troubled by out of tuneness so called as much or at all I mean, it depends depends on the situation if if somebody is playing a conventional piece of music and they're horribly out of tune then yeah, that's the thing you notice and either like I don't like it. Sometimes I love it, you know, I play lap steel guitar and I never tune it. So when I play the eight strings makes this extraordinary chord and I liked that notation.

**David Toop 1:34:44**

I mean a lot of contemporary work in creating music I'm talking about fields like hip hop, for example, are a kind of notation in the way people work now and I find that fascinating that they're very often people who, like me who don't read or write music, but they have an instinctive grasp of the subtleties of notation, but it's just not notated. It can be notated afterwards, you know, like the possibilities, there in a particular programme to print something out notated, but it's also noticeable that they're not necessarily working with equal temperament either. Or, yes, no, you know, in between stuff, and I find that very exciting. It's a different kind of language. But yeah, writing is my notation. I suppose, you know, I could have, I could have come here and tried to just talk but there are certain things I wanted to say. So you prepare, so that you create a sequence of thoughts, and you lead to a thought maybe I

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wanted to think about this listening problem. Listening is such a huge, the lack of listening is such a huge problem. You know, and we talk about in relation to caves and so on, we talk about echo chambers, like social media echo chambers. For example. We talk about dog whistle politics. So it's interesting how these listening metaphors are very much bound up in the non listening society that we have now.

**David Toop 1:37:13**

So yeah, that's slightly strayed from notation. Thank you. Thank you all very much.

**Canan Batur 1:37:34**

Thank you so much, David, for this generous presentation. I just want to use this opportunity to kind of mention a few things that are coming up, but also want to kind of remark that if you haven't had the chance to come across David's brilliance, blog spots, I would definitely recommend you reading the in a cave of sound, which kind of creates such a brilliant kind of which which creates such a great constellation between our exhibition what he has been talking about, but also opens up some other ideas that our exhibition is also trying to bring about. And I also want to let you know that our last listening session is on November 22nd and will be led by Tim Lawrence and it will be looking into audiophile community partying history, but also David Mancuso and histories of loft parties. So if you're around, hopefully you can join us then as well. And that will be the last session of the series. So thank you so much for joining in and being here with us. Thank you so much, David, for you know, accepting the invitation and your generosity.