Document generated on 10/12/2024 1:24 a.m.

Imaginations
Journal of Cross-Cultural Image Studies
Revue d'études interculturelles de l'image

Listening to and Living With Networked Media During a Pandemic

Anne Soronen and Karoliina Talvitie-Lamberg

Volume 12, Number 2, 2021

Massive/Micro Sensemaking: Towards Post-pandemic Futures

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1085746ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.17742/IMAGE.MM.12.2.15

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

York University

ISSN

1918-8439 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this article

Soronen, A. & Talvitie-Lamberg, K. (2021). Listening to and Living With Networked Media During a Pandemic. *Imaginations*, *12*(2), 297–321. https://doi.org/10.17742/IMAGE.MM.12.2.15

Article abstract

This article explores mediated listening from the perspective of intimacy during the first weeks of the coronavirus pandemic. The theoretical frame builds on the literature on listening and presence in mediated environments, audience engagement, and intimacy as meaningful connections. Methodologically, the study is connective ethnography, and the data was collected by collaborative autoethnography. Our data show that listening was an individual sensemaking strategy of the outside world and a means to form connectedness. Threading between different screens on digital platforms caused the collapse of public and private contexts, and through these, particular types of intimacy arose. When the position of academic mothers is often that of a 'knower,' the severe crisis compels them to look for receptive ways of knowing, such as careful listening of others. Listening is a means to form belonging and understanding, but from a silent position. We should pay more attention to the silent presences and audiences in contemporary mediated environments.

© Anne Soronen and Karoliina Talvitie-Lamberg, 2021

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

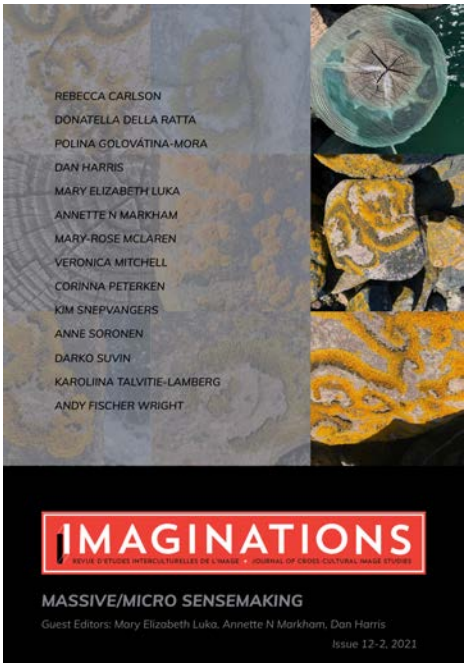
https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

https://www.erudit.org/en/

IMAGINATIONS
REVUE D'ETUDES INTERCULTURELLES DE L'IMAGE • JOURNAL OF CROSS-CULTURAL IMAGE STUDIES



IMAGINATIONS:
JOURNAL OF CROSS-CULTURAL IMAGE STUDIES | REVUE D'ÉTUDES INTERCULTURELLES DE L'IMAGE

Publication details, including open access policy and instructions for contributors:
http://imaginations.glendon.yorku.ca

Massive/Micro Sensemaking: Towards Post-pandemic Futures Guest Editors: Mary Elizabeth Luka, Annette Markham, Dan Harris
December 23, 2021

Image credit: Annette N Markham

To cite this article:
Soronen, Anne, and Karoliina Talvitie-Lamberg. "Listening to and Living With Networked Media During a Pandemic." *Imaginations: Journal of Cross-Cultural Image Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2, December 23, 2021, pp. 297–321, doi: 10.17742/IMAGE.MM.12.2.15.

To link to this article:
http://dx.doi.org/10.17742/IMAGE.MM.12.2.15

The copyright for each article belongs to the author and has been published in this journal under a Creative Commons 4.0 International Attribution NonCommercial NoDerivatives license that allows others to share for non-commercial purposes the work with an acknowledgement of the work's authorship and initial publication in this journal. The content of this article represents the author's original work and any third-party content, either image or text, has been included under the Fair Dealing exception in the Canadian Copyright Act, or the author has provided the required publication permissions. Certain works referenced herein may be separately licensed, or the author has exercised their right to fair dealing under the Canadian Copyright Act.

LISTENING TO AND LIVING WITH NETWORKED MEDIA DURING A PANDEMIC

ANNE SORONEN
KAROLIINA TALVITIE-LAMBERG

This article explores mediated listening from the perspective of intimacy during the first weeks of the coronavirus pandemic. The theoretical frame builds on the literature on listening and presence in mediated environments, audience engagement, and intimacy as meaningful connections. Methodologically, the study is connective ethnography, and the data was collected by collaborative autoethnography. Our data show that listening was an individual sense-making strategy of the outside world and a means to form connectedness. Threading between different screens on digital platforms caused the collapse of public and private contexts, and through these, particular types of intimacy arose. When the position of academic mothers is often that of a 'knower,' the severe crisis compels them to look for receptive ways of

L'article explore l'écoute médiatisée du point de vue de l'intimité pendant les premières semaines de la pandémie de coronavirus. Le cadre théorique s'appuie sur la littérature, sur l'écoute et la présence dans des environnements médiatisés, l'engagement du public et l'intimité en tant que connexions significatives. Méthodologiquement, l'étude est une ethnographie connective, les données ont été collectées par autoethnographie collaborative. Nos données montrent que l'écoute était une stratégie de perception individuelle du monde extérieur et un moyen de former une connectivité. Le filetage entre différents écrans sur les plates-formes numériques a provoqué l'effondrement de contextes publics et privés et, à travers ces derniers, des types particuliers d'intimité sont apparus. Lorsque la position des mères universitaires est souvent celle d'une "connaisseuse", la crise grave les oblige à rechercher de manières réceptives de savoir, comme une écoute attentive des

knowing, such as careful listening of others. Listening is a means to form belonging and understanding, but from a silent position. We should pay more attention to the silent presences and audiences in contemporary mediated environments.

autres. L'écoute est un moyen de former l'appartenance et la compréhension, mais à partir d'une position silencieuse. Cela suggère que nous devrions accorder plus d'attention aux présences silencieuses et aux publics, dans les environnements médiatisés contemporains.

INTRODUCTION

The uncertainty of what to think and feel is an experience many of us have shared during the COVID-19 pandemic. From the viewpoint of communication (research), the exceptional and uncertain situation created a sudden outburst of COVID-19-related communication. Suddenly, threats related to the coronavirus filled all communicative situations we could imagine: affective social media shares, state council press releases, eye-witness reports on television, and daily statistics on the spread of the virus. COVID-19 filled official press, human-to-human encounters, and social media platforms. Every bit of information, experiences, *anything* about COVID-19 seemed important. Interestingly, we faced not only information about and experiences of the pandemic. We faced an enormous increase in screen time and time spent at home (e.g., Hardley and Richardson). We reached across screens for sensing the bits of COVID-19 communication to make sense of the situation.

At the same time, the lockdown forced us to sustain connections (in working life, in spare time, with our friends, family) through screens, on numerous digital platforms. As recent studies show, the pandemic has caused a significant increase in digital communication, including social media, messaging apps, and video conferencing tools (Nguyen et al. 2020; see also Kemp; Koeze and Popper). What became evident is that our everyday life was suddenly filled with screens and captivating, disturbing, and woeful voices arising out of them. Consequently, it seemed that a specific attention economy arose in the middle of the screens, with their competing voices and some undertones.

The main symptom of our mediatized environments (Couldry 2009) is that in and through digital platforms we encounter a vast array of voices that would deserve an attentive orientation towards them. As Honneth argues, individuals aiming to become part of a society are deeply dependent on recognition. Various digital platforms intensify the quest for recognition. Through recognition, we may form belonging in various social realities (Hjarvard; Kaare and Lundby). Consequently, the voice and the capacities for listening are crucial components when living in a mediated society (Hjarvard; Kaare and Lundby). Indeed, in cultural studies, a key idea has been that those who are oppressed and excluded need to be heard. Accordingly, literature on the politics of listening uses the concept of voice to highlight the emancipatory idea that for previously silenced individuals and minorities, having a voice is a way to power and agency (Weidman; Lawy).

According to Couldry, the discourse of "having the voice"—the voice without any processes for listening and registering it—can become "the banal oxymoron of neoliberal democracy" (Couldry 2009 581). Following him, the mere voice is not what counts, but more the ability to listen, recognize, understand, and be co-present. In this article, we focus on specific communication situations during a global crisis, in which the listening was intensified and enabled receptive orientation to 'others' (familiar and unfamiliar others). At the same time, listening was a central part of coping with change and facing fears: it made our relation to the world possible altogether. We aim to widen the knowledge of listening in and through mediated environments as a mode of intimacy in exceptional circumstances.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In the beginning of the 2000s, many studies of digital culture privileged the user as an active doer. Consequently, terms like DIY media practices and participatory culture (Jenkins) highlighted users' active agency, such as producing and sharing the content. New digital communication technologies enabled voices for previously silenced and invisible ones, from the bottom up. Idealistic hopes of im-

proved citizen participation arose (see Gillmor et al.). Meanwhile, media scholars took notice of the role of lurking as online engagement in which users observe other users' discussions but rarely or never contribute to them (Crawford 2011). Lurking was perceived as continuous with or nearly similar to sensemaking practices that people were already involved in with broadcast media. As a mode of participation lurking was understood as relatively uninteresting compared to users' visible production of content. However, some internet researchers indicated that active posting in online communities is the work of only a few, and the majority of users are mainly 'lurkers', observing and following others' activities (e.g., Nonnecke and Preece). They described lurking as a form of receptiveness and participation that is central to the dynamics of online communities (Crawford 2011).

The user-centered perspectives of media studies have contributed to understanding the user as an expressive and creative actor engaged in making sense of self by creatively writing themselves into being in different networks (e.g., Bechmann and Lomborg 775). These studies have produced essential knowledge about participation and "produsage" (Hine 2017) in digital and social media, but, at the same time, they have to a large extent ignored other important aspects of media uses that are closer to the position of audiencehood. As Christine Hine (2017) states, to explore networked life as an embedded social phenomenon and as a component of contemporary lived existence, we need to acknowledge diverse forms of engagement with online spaces, including their roles in people's calibration of themselves as social beings. Relationships managed through networked media are always part of a broader bond of social proximities and distances, mediated presences and absences bleeding beyond any binary divisions between the online and the offline (Paasonen 2021 53).

Since the rapid emergence of Web 2.0, the question of how media uses are meaningful to audiences-as-practitioners has been reconfigured many times. Joke Hermes has argued that new media ecology demands an open approach to audiencehood as practices that highlight thematically organized media uses. Hermes suggests theorizing audiencehood as a layered palette of activities, attachments, and in-

vestments, widely differing in intensity and importance, paying attention to how audiencehood is caught up in everyday social relations (Hermes 115-116). The idea of understanding audiencehood as practices, investments, and attachments, captures well everyday uses of media in an ever-changing media environment in which fleeting attention is a major form of investment (ibid., 114). Application and platform-oriented media use have in many cases sidelined the thematically organized use of media. However, the idea of audiencehood as investments and attachments still offers a lot of potential for investigation, especially during the ongoing pandemic, when the thematically organized use of media focusing on COVID-19 information intermingles with the platform and application oriented uses of media technologies.

Surprisingly, much of the research on social media still seems to privilege the user as a producer, as in, for example, the studies on social media influencers and microcelebrities (Reade; Jerslev). Anja Bechmann and Stine Lomborg assess that less visible, audience-like engagement patterns with digital and social media are under-researched areas. According to them, social media research prefers to focus on what is readily and easily observable. They state that more studies are needed that deal with the meanings of reading social media without engaging in interaction with peers through content creation.

Against these prevalent scholarly approaches to everyday uses of digital media, Nick Couldry and Kate Crawford's suggestions for perceiving online media users as listeners who pay attention and recognize others' accounts of their experiences and lives deserve more empirical exploration. Couldry (2015) has offered an idea to approach the media environment in a way that highlights the media's social presence in our everyday lives. He considers our practices within and toward the media environment through the metaphor of listening, which aims to involve a complex mix of engagement and disengagement, enjoyment and distaste (Couldry 2015). Mediated communication is perceived as a relational space of interacting practices and positions, a space of recognition, refusal, connection, and dissent (O'Donnell et al., 423). Listening, or "listening out," is the act

of recognizing what others have to say, recognizing that they have something to say, or that they have the capacity to give an account of their lives that is reflexive and continuous, an embodied and reciprocal process of reflection (Couldry 2009 579-80). In the process of recognizing our claims on each other as reflexive human agents, an account of lives that needs to be registered and heard, our stories endlessly entangle in each other's stories. Couldry emphasizes that through listening, the value of voice is mutually registered between people (Couldry 2009 580). Consequently, listening involves ethical and relational stances towards others.

Crawford further develops Couldry's construction of listening in the context of social media. Crawford proposes the metaphor of listening to analyze forms of engagement and paying attention online. As she states, listening has not been given sufficient consideration as an effective practice of intimacy, connection, obligation, and participation online (527). It is a central part of experiences of being and connecting in networked environments. Crawford describes listening as a mode of receptiveness in which people contribute to the community by acting as a gathered audience that moves between the states of listening and disclosing online (Crawford 2009).[1] As a central part of the networked engagement, listening involves a deep sense of connection and shifting alternations between action and distraction. For example, listening to networks through mobile phones involves shifts in attention and presence across multiple platforms (Crawford 2012 220). Without calling online engagement a form of listening, Susanna Paasonen also illustrates how distraction and attention intermesh in our attachments during the use of social media. According to her, attention and distraction are variations in the intensities and zones that people's perception and experience take (Paasonen 2021, 65). Varying degrees of paying attention online, and the constant flow of small pieces of information, circulate to form a critical part of experiencing presence in a networked media environment (Crawford 2009 528).

The pandemic caused a significant change in everyday media practices. As Jess Hardley and Ingrid Richarson point out, the (habitual)

engagement with mobile media changed drastically, and domestic space became the primary site of net locality during the pandemic. They illustrate how during physical distancing in domestic environments, the dynamics between public and private space, work and leisure, and networked and face-to-face interaction were quite suddenly reconfigured. Hardley and Richardson observe the merging of the public/private space, work/leisure, and networked/face-to-face interaction as embodiments of mobile media use. For some of their research participants, the sudden collision of public/private enhances social connectedness and enjoyment, while for others, this boundary-crossing is more a burden.

But, most importantly, this collision and negotiation of the borders is also written into everyday practices, such as individual coping strategies of what to show/share when zooming. Hardley and Richardson argue that mobile intimacy emerges as the layering of place, technology, and social relations. Even though much of their framing of the exceptional situation resonates with our COVID-19 experience, it seems that the coping strategies that they reported are just the other side of the coin (or screen). While a crisis situation intensified the dependence on the networked media it also induced a short period of unstrained social media communication and a relational stance towards voices recognized through screens of several devices. The constant attunement to screens and reacting to voices heard and scenes seen from other people's homes was exceptionally strong during the early days of the pandemic.

We, the co-authors of this article, argue that the pandemic and its home-centric living intensified our attempts to pay attention to varied media texts and accounts of other media users in a way that highlighted recognition and orientation to others instead of concentrating on one's voice becoming heard. The mode of listening practices varied in relation to their intensity and importance, but those practices were central to our way of being. Through them, attention was keenly divided between diverse sources and different screens. The motivation for these audience-like practices is related to one's effort to understand the situation through others' reactions, journalistic content, and expert opinions. However, all these information sources

overlap and partly mix to form an affective basis for coping with the uncertain and stressful situation.

We examine our lived experiences through listening in times of crisis, when information and communication technologies allow for meaningful connections and vital information. As Crawford suggests, listening is a way to understand engagement and connectedness as a practice of intimacy (Crawford 2009). However, in this article, we do not highlight relations with technology, but focus more on *living with* different technologies and screens when they manifest themselves within interactions with other people or things used in the complexity of mundane situations (see Hine 2020 26). We examine how our coping with daily uncertainties was intensively interwoven with digital and mobile technologies and the deep connections they made possible.

To capture the nature of the attachments and intensities that recurred during a period of ongoing online presence, we supplement the notion of listening with the notion of intimacy. Crawford describes listening as a practice of intimacy, but she does not focus on the intensities and nuances of intimacy online. We perceive intimacy as a mobile process that emerges as "the kinds of connections that *impact* people and depend on living" (Berlant 284). As Lauren Berlant suggests intimacy involves an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, involving oneself and others. Intimacy figures prominently through connections and networks that matter. In this sense, it is crucial to consider the infrastructural role of digital technologies in the functionality of personal, social, occupational, and collective lives (Paasonen 2021 50). In crises, as during the coronavirus pandemic, populations and individuals sense that their definition of the real is under threat, resulting in a sense of anxiety about how to determine relations with others in a completely new situation. On the other hand, listeners on digital platforms, and their efforts to capture others' viewpoints and moods, can produce a strong sense of connection and presence. Different devices, screens, platforms, and information sources, as well as other users' posts and updates, afford an opportunity for multilayered co-presence that can function as an accommodation to changing circumstances.

Mobile phone users have habituated themselves to tuning into their networks frequently and checking the activity of their feeds (Crawford 2012 218-19). In mobile media practices, various forms of intimacy infuse public and private spaces and create co-present worlds (Hjorth and Lim). Consequently, plentiful online sources and communication channels affect how people make sense of COVID-19. Even though people may share the same global information sources, microscopic sensibilities and domestic ways of knowing make them experience the pandemic locally, privately, and as here and now.

MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, the study incorporated (auto)ethnography within a connective field site. Consequently, as ethnographic researchers, we constructed the field of investigation where we moved between different modes of communication and spaces (online or offline). Through this process, the researcher can trace forms of sociality according to theoretically-driven interests focusing on contingent connections that emerge as people make sense of online activities offline and vice versa (Hine 2017 9). The underlying ethnographic assumption is that we as participants enter into the social world, which is "created and sustained in and through interaction with others when interpretations of meanings are central processes" (Emerson et al. 2). An ethnographer learns culture from the inside, through immersion (Maanen 3; Emerson et al. 3). Through this process of immersion, we produce a "thick description" (Geertz 19).

We, the co-authors of this article, are two academic mothers from a Nordic country, and in the following, "we" refers to us. Our data collection started within a research project exploring datafied intimacies. We wrote diaries of everyday experiences in the early stage of the pandemic in March 2020. During the diary period, we made observations about our sociality and connectivity online and offline, and reported how our experiences of domestic life changed during the first weeks of the pandemic. In our diaries, we reported our daily uses of digital technologies, and reflected on the situations where

digital technologies had some role in our relationships. Through that, we generated data on our daily uses and relations to devices, connections, and information resources that Paasonen (2017 25) calls infrastructural dependencies. Further, we also reported on our lived experiences of physical distancing. Our interest was to seek out situated uses of platforms and networked media that we felt were personally relevant during the crisis.

We used two methods to produce the data: 1) during the first data-gathering phase, we made observations of our reactions through autoethnographic diaries; and 2) during the second data-gathering phase, we used reflexive interviews based on the diaries from phase one. Autoethnography enabled us to pay reflexive attention to living the pandemic life, looking at emotional and affective dimensions of daily encounters on digital platforms (see Hine 2020, 31) that emerged in our lived experiences. We kept diaries from March 17 to March 31, 2020. That is, the data collection started right after the Finnish Government declared a state of emergency in Finland over the coronavirus outbreak a few days later, on March 16, 2020.[2]

After the first data-gathering period, we wanted to use a more dialogical approach (Hernandez et al.; Geist-Martin; Sawyer and Norris; Toyosaki et al.) than the traditional autoethnographic approach in phase one. We applied collaborative autoethnography, which meant a shift to the more reciprocal collective agency (see Lapadat 599). The need for reciprocal agency emerged when we looked back to our diaries after six months of the first diary period, aiming to understand the complexity and messiness of past experiences. We interviewed each other on the diary entries' affectively charged situations. In these, we noticed that online presence, communication, and sensemaking impacted us. We generated this observation through conversational interviews about our diary writings via Zoom. This combination of collaborative autoethnography and diary-interview method (involving the diary period and a post-diary interview) (e.g. Bartlett; Spowart and Nairn) served best our methodological purposes. A preliminary analysis of the diaries and interviews comprised our individual close reading of the material. After that, we dis-

cussed each other's interpretations of the affectively charged situations together. Listening was a key concept of the research to better understand our lived experiences in the data we had collected. Different phases of data collection formed a functional approach to our everyday knowledge, characteristically incomplete and in progress.

EXPLORING MEDIATED PRESENCE, CO-PRESENCE AND CHRONIC CONNECTIVITY

The first weeks of the pandemic concretized how domestic environments transformed quickly into the locus of remote work and school, the maintenance of relationships, information search, and sharing pandemic experiences. Different media and communication technologies were crucial for our daily lives with many overlapping contexts. It seemed that people's threshold of communicating and posting on social media platforms became lower during that time. Digital devices and their screens, various platforms, apps, and connections were essential to knowledge workers' working life. Still, their uses had a novel focus: scraps of information about the spread and mode of action of a virus.

The diaries were characterized by perplexity, the incompleteness and fickleness of the information, and the restless use of different media, as they played an increased role in our experiences at the time. There were frequent situations where we felt our connectivity and online presence primarily by recognizing other people's (friends, family members, acquaintances, and unknown posters) concerns, thoughts, and feelings. Many previous casual and affiliation interactions on social media platforms changed to meaningful connections that offered an important, reflective surface for our thoughts and questions. One of us wrote in her diary: "When looking at different social media posts that individuals are sharing, you tend to observe them through some type of corona filter, thinking [about] what their feelings and reactions in the situation are." This quote illustrates that a receptive activity of other people's posts resembled a coarse sieve that sorted out the pandemic moods from other experiences. It involved intense orientation to others' perceptions and feelings related to the

coronavirus in the moment. The coming weeks and months seemed to be far away. For a while, in those early days, the competition for other people's attention on social media changed to more approachable and inviting communications. The expression of a 'corona filter' refers to a sensitive and reflective approach to the content received in one's social media feed. A listener might focus on sensations and emotional states arising from the pandemic and how these 'resound' in her.

However, the communicative environment was also cacophonous. The number of different apps, platforms, and screens used during working and school days was enormous. Through them, family members kept the everyday going on, but they also asked for various types of attention. Hardley and Richardson similarly point out how the home became, all at once, the center of everything, which "meant renegotiating domestic space as a digital place and situating oneself and one's things in ways that maintained a sense of personal privacy…" (2020). This negotiation was one of the key experiences of the time, as one of our diary entries described:

> "Eventually, we found instructions on how to log in to Meets video conferencing platform. Found it from the teachers' messages in Wilma (digital communication platform between school and home), and in the distance school instructions stored in Drive. The teacher had created an automatic link, from which the schoolboy eventually got easily into the first remote lesson—a feeling of relief for all of us. At the first check-in, we [both parents] assisted. I thought maybe I should have put on day clothes before opening the connection; the man was in his pants too.
>
> "Feeling confused, suddenly we and our confused morning routine flicker on the screen of the school-at-home class. Who is the distance school student here? We did not remember to look for headphones in time, so each family member pops in and out of our home library, a space where school-at-home takes place. We appear there just like listening students. Our schoolboy got seriously nervous and showed some [emotion-

> al] expressions. After that, we tried to whisper (except, of course, not our preschooler). Our schoolboy is ashamed; he does not want to transmit an overly authentic stream of images and sounds from home."

When occupational, educational, governmental, and familial contexts collapsed into home environments in those early days of the pandemic, the actual possibilities for listening without distractions were scarce. A peculiar way of paying attention in an un-concentrated manner developed. This reminds us of the idea of background listening (Crawford 2009), as a way to cope with uncertainties and continuous updates of information. Hardley and Richardson argue that a hybrid experience of distributed and networked presences uncomfortably reconfigure the dynamics of public-private relations within the home. This was evident in our experience also. But the collapse also created listening that was oriented not as much to content (circulating) as to forms, material embodiments, and technicalities of the platforms.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the meaning of regular social media practices shifted. For example, birthday congratulations among Facebook friends proved to be an easy way to affiliate with friends and colleagues during the lockdown:

> "In addition to WhatsApp groups, my use of Facebook has increased to some extent. I noticed that although I have felt birthday congratulations via Facebook are a little silly, during this exceptional situation, they are again somehow more natural, or at least they are not so artificial. [...] I follow online news too actively. If I must concentrate on some work matter, I decide that I don't look at online news for three hours. But on the other hand, the employer's corona info also trickles into [my] email inbox or other emails that indirectly relate to the pandemic."

"Chronic connectivity" (Gregg xi) and the intensity of living with digital technologies required that people practice self-control to restrict themselves from continuously (obsessively) monitoring news

and stories about the coronavirus even while these were pervasively capturing the screens of laptops and mobile phones. As the daily world was filled with COVID-19 updates and guidance from different sources, it was impossible to differentiate between the use of home computer and work computer, since both operated as repositories of coronavirus information.

Listening was our way of relating to the world; it also highlighted the thriving growth on digital platforms we encounter in our daily lives. The following diary note exemplifies this and the affects it raises:

> "We find that an online webcam on the snakes, awakening in the spring, has been re-opened. Despite our long wait, the snake seems not to appear on the screen. My preschooler is curious and becomes impatient. She suggests that we should rewind the webcam stream to the point where the snake appears. I explain that the idea of live streaming is that the thing is happening right now, albeit somewhere else. She seems to understand but suggests that we should pause the watching and restart it again once the snake appears. I try to explain again that "live" can't really be on a pause. Suddenly I become anxious—what if the snake would slip on the screen, at the exact moment when we are not watching."

Initially, this episode seems not to have anything to do with the pandemic situation or with listening. Yet, our inability to keep up with the constant flow of content was a key point. It highlighted how internalized the idea of constant listening was, for making sense of what was happening in the world – through various platforms available to us. The whole idea that we could pause the watching of a livestream and that something could still happen out there without our witnessing it caused anxiety. In this episode, it was the snake, but in our diaries, we wrote similarly about the constant attunement and need to check if anything in the pandemic had changed. Endless watching and listening positioned us as witnesses of an evolving crisis, where one could react (for example, by commenting) and be remotely present but not act. Interestingly, this reminds us of the type of background listening that Crawford has discussed (Crawford

2009). Through it, one listens to online content as background noise, which only from time to time asks for a more attentive orientation. These occasional moments create a sense of intimacy and awareness of discussions online (Crawford 2009). For us, the endless listening was a means to 'know' the pandemic, and the shifting between different modes of listening, however, created a sense of connectedness. Through this, and as Crawford states, listening was a practice of enacting connections online. We further noted that in the pandemic context, this practice of listening to something online often intensified meaningful interaction and a sense of intimacy offline.

LISTENING AND FEELING INTIMACY IN A RITUAL FRAMEWORK

In the domestic mediated environment, 'listening to' friends and acquaintances' posts intermingled with following journalistic sources and future scenarios presented by the Finnish and international health authorities. In the context of societal upheavals, live press conferences provide a ritual framework for releasing information and managing public emotions. According to Valaskivi et al. (23-24), as a familiar repertoire of media production, press conferences help experts, administrators, and politicians coordinate their actions and messages quickly, even while informational content remains unpredictable. Press conferences offer ritual stability in which they open an immediate connection between the audience and the unfolding events during their representation (ibid.). The following diary extract deals with the situation in which one of us sat on the sofa in the living room on a weeknight and watched the Finnish Government's COVID-19 live press conference on television. As an audience member, she was very responsive to the content, but many details of the information faded quickly because of the situation's intensity.

> "I had already opened this [diary] file yesterday evening to write my thoughts after the Government's press briefing. However, I couldn't write anything. The briefing lasted probably over one hour, and I decided to go to bed after it. I became a little moved when the Prime Minister opened the event and

> when the Minister of Justice spoke. The whole situation felt suddenly more severe than previously. Their manners and words simultaneously expressed concern, demand for responsibility, and, if I interpreted correctly, a disguised uncertainty about Finland's possibility of recovering the epidemic in forthcoming weeks and months."

On that specific occasion, the affective and emotional reaction to the official briefing came unexpectedly. Intimacy here emerges from the macro context (an unpredictable threat of a virus to people near and far), the micro context (the publicity of the event and the privacy of one's living room), the nature of genre (the ritual stability of the press briefing), characteristics of representations (the appearances, facial expressions, gestures, and tone of the talk of ministers on the television screen), and the listener's position as an audience member in a moment of great uncertainty. The content received through digital television unexpectedly resonates in the listener without any 'second screens' or other actions online; right after the situation, she wanted momentarily to withdraw from online connections.

The listener's reactions were not based merely on the exceptional information, such as movement restrictions concerning the region of Uusimaa, but also a hunch that society will not be the same after the crisis. On the one hand, viewing the press briefing on television afforded ontological security that proved to be highly relevant in lockdown culture (Hermes and Hill 656). On the other hand, viewing brought on a sense of intimacy when affective intensities emerged unexpectedly while listening to the authority talk and by watching so many policymakers lined up onscreen. In this case, intimacy as unpredictable affective intensities emerged even though this public drama was easily recognizable as a form of familiar communication: a press conference. The situation brought on contradictory emotional and affective states because being 'moved' by the explanations seemed to turn up in the 'wrong' context: in most cases, authorities' press briefings are associated with the neutral release of information instead of engendering the sense of being affectively touched by the things heard and seen. If the politicians' purpose was to create "more

intense audience involvement in the ritual of public drama" (Valaskivi et al. 23), they succeeded very well. The excerpts above illustrate how something we felt as intimacy emerged as an affective and relational orientation in a situation where the words said (including the overwhelmingly constant digital information flow that was uncharacteristically highly official), and the listener's deeds or thoughts were slightly unbalanced.

Our means of adjusting to the information we listened to were occasions we felt as intimate moments of engagement. They involved an experience of sharing and belonging with family members or with other Finnish people in their domestic environments watching the same briefing at the same time: "The whole family at home, watching the news and the press conference, I don't remember such a common focus for a while. It, therefore, feels somehow comfortable and safe" (an extract from the diary). The lockdown brought out our deep dependence on digital communication platforms in everyday lives, which the diaries illustrate. These platforms, and the circulation of content between different platforms, also generated moments of emotional attachments to affecting stories, within and outside the platforms. The platforms were, in this sense, a breeding ground for intimacies that took place not just in our own homes but elsewhere—in our attempts to formulate shared day-to-day captured moments, alone or together with family members.

In many cases, attunement to another's voice and its tones enabled us to pull through daily anxieties. The diaries also involve listening situations, which intensified the listener's social stress and anxiety. There, the listening was attentive and receptive, but it resulted in experiencing demanding emotional states. The anxiety arose from the merging of close interpersonal communication with work-related communication, as well as official communication from nation-state authorities, resulting in an imbalance of the listener's attunement to any of the specific sources and messages received. These attentive modes of listening emerged in domestic environments, in which we witnessed close listening to digital channels and their sensitivity to incoming messages. Hardley and Richarson notice how at home, on mobile devices, the pandemic caused the enmeshing of public/private

spheres, and uncharacteristically, a fluidity among these different spheres. Diaries document this merging well, and how this caused affective anxieties which we felt as intimate instances of listening:

> "I still try to maintain intimate digital relations by calling, messaging, etc. A new form of remote digital connections also appears in this set; my husband tells and conveys the corona messaging (email) of a friend living in a big city in Europe. The message, among other things, is a description of the distress and despair of a situation when a girlfriend's friend has spent a very long time at home waiting for someone to dare to take her deceased mother away. Of course, the information touches and moves me. I don't know why I immediately think this is somehow intimate."

This episode demonstrates how a disquieting piece of personal news related to the social impact of the virus felt intimate for the listener in a way that involved contradictory feelings. The listener describes how she didn't experience emotions towards people she didn't know. She assesses that her strong reaction relates to processing such a significant thing as death through emails. Usually, email is felt to offer lower social presence (see Nguyen et al.), but in this case, the effects of an email message were emotionally intense. In a non-crisis situation, communicating someone's death through work messaging might have appeared strange. But this episode illustrates how the crisis and its unpredictability intruded into work-related mediated environments. From the listener's point of view, the traditional registers and loci of listening or attunement were suddenly invalidated. Listening as a way of orienting oneself relates to imagining how a bereaved person probably feels. But more than that, it involves considering that it is no longer possible to distinguish matters concerning one's work from the global health crisis and personal destinies involved in it. As much as networked technologies have changed our sense of availability and engagement with work, the presence "bleed" described by Gregg (2) seemed to rise to the next level. In our diaries, we documented many emotional overloads of varying degrees. These entries tell us that listening, as it means to connect and understand

the outer worlds, is a fragile position. It is fragile due to its openness. But listening, as a constant process where the attentive mode varies from a background listening to a highly concentrated attunement, also brings responsibility.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This article explores how listening situates us as audiences in mediated and networked environments, and what this listening produces in a social crisis. We build on the previous literature on intimacy as a relational act and listening to mediated environments as an open attunement. Throughout this article, we concentrate on how intimacy and relations emerged in our autoethnographic diaries and diary interviews. Using this autoethnographic approach allowed us to concentrate on our experiences of listening. Our data show that by framing listening as an individual sensemaking strategy for the outside world, we could also understand it as the practice of connectedness and belonging in critical times.

Contrary to understandings of passive listening in networked environments, listening proved to be a position where attentive and passive orientations, as well as modes of listening, varied. Background listening (Crawford 2009) was a basic listening mode, which was quite constant. But during background listening, the listener also took part in the mediated pandemic, as a receptive witness of the situation, constantly in flow. This was also a means to form a sense of connectedness and belonging through the shared act of mutual witnessing, both to the outer world and with close family and friends. Interestingly, as some literature on the coronavirus pandemic has reported, the strategy against COVID-19 has primarily employed isolation, which consequently has guided us to stay at home, for "doing nothing does something" (Vallee 8). Thus, press conferences that at the outset reminded us to do nothing involved us in doing a lot. This is what background listening as witnessing is also about. It is a means to form belonging, connectedness, and understanding—but from a silent position, in a similar way to the lurkers of early internet years. However, the position of the listener is silent only at the out-

set. As we have explained, it involves changing orientations to the platforms, content, and others. Particularly in the beginning of a pandemic crisis the boundaries of different platforms and applications lost some relevance and the main attention focused on continuously updating coronavirus information as well as the joys and sorrows that people shared in social media and other messing services.

Our study suggests that we should pay considerably more attention to these silent presences and audience involvements in various mediated environments. Listening involves a lot of commitment and reflective consideration. Listeners are active participants in the mediated environments and in networked attention economies. However, to be involved in situations that ask for listening, digital media platforms play a central role. In everyday experiences, the need for material know-how of where and how to connect is evident, and this we encounter daily. That is the minimum prerequisite for listening in mediated environments. But at the same time, paths to digital media platforms are also a prerequisite for reaching towards a sense of belonging. These are also infrastructures of intimacies (Petersen et al.). They operate as socio-technical affordances that modulate intimacy. Through digital platforms, we unfold connections and relationships.

As a result of our study, we found two types of intimacy in our mediated lives at the beginning of the pandemic. First, the lived experience of intimacy is related to situations in which the *context and things heard are unbalanced*. In these cases, the listener's horizon of expectations is often disturbed, and her customary registers of listening are not competent to process information in the usual ways anymore. For example, the public sphere with official press releases invades the screens of computers, television sets, and laptops, whereas private matters may turn up in the middle of work interactions. The fluidity and intermeshing of private and public spheres often result in sensitizing one's receptive modalities as the listener. Second, intimacy emerged as *an unsuspected affective reaction during audience involvement*. When the listener handles an increasing number of uncertainties and reflects on the meanings of sudden transformations, she can react with strong intensity of affects and emotions. For example, one can be very familiar with press conferences and have

some expectations about the form of the content. Still, the insecurity in authorities' tones of voices and gestures and facial expressions may also bring about a sense of helplessness and a momentary desire to withdraw from the networked connections.

At any given point in our research process, our goal was not to substantially 'know' everything about this complex situation. It was, and is, an ongoing process in which the hunger for listening and curiosity to know more and recognize others' voices feed each other. When we have felt the pandemic situation to be so very fluid and constantly variable, our ways to orient ourselves and relate to the world happened by accepting the blurring of many spheres during the lockdown life. Finally, listening was about subtle presence, making sense of the suddenly changed world, and living daily lives with connections that matter.

WORKS CITED

Bartlett, Ruth. "Modifying the Diary Interview Method to Research the Lives of People with Dementia." *Qualitative Health Research*, vol. 22, 2012, pp. 1717-26.

Bechmann, Anja, and Stine Lomborg. "Mapping Actor Roles in Social Media: Different Perspectives on Value Creation in Theories of User Participation." *New Media & Society*, vol. 15, no. 5, 2013, pp.765-81, https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444812462853.

Berlant, Lauren, editor. "Intimacy: A Special Issue." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 24, 1998, pp. 281-8.

—. "Intimacy." *Intimacy*, edited by Lauren Berlant, University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Couldry, Nick. *Listening Beyond the Echoes: Media, Ethics, and Agency in an Uncertain World.* 2006. New York: Routledge, 2015.

—. "Rethinking the Politics of Voice." *Continuum*, vol. 23, no. 4, 2009, pp. 579-82, DOI: 10.1080/10304310903026594.

Crawford, Kate. "Following You: Disciplines of Listening in Social Media." *Continuum*, vol. 23, no. 4, 2009, pp. 525-35, DOI: 10.1080/10304310903003270.

—. "Four Ways of Listening with an iPhone. From Sound and Network Listening to Biometric Data and Geolocative Tracking." *Studying Mobile Media: Cultural Technologies, Mobile Communication, and the iPhone*, edited by Larissa Hjorth, Jean Burgess, and Ingrid Richardson, Routledge, 2012, pp. 213-28.

—. "Listening, not Lurking: The Neglegted Form of Participation." *Cultures of Participation*, edited by Hajo Grief, Larissa Hjorth, and Amparo Lasén, Peter Lang, 2011, pp. 63-77.

Emerson, Robert M., et al. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. University of Chicago Press, 2011.

Geist-Martin, Patricia, et al. "Exemplifying Collaborative Autoethnographic Practice via Shared Stories of Mothering." *Journal of Research Practice*, vol. 6, no.1, 2010, Article M8.

Gillmor, Dan. *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People*. O'Reilly Media, Inc., 2006.

Gregg, Melissa. *Work's Intimacy*. Polity Press, 2011.

Hardley, Jess, and Ingrid Richardson. "Digital Placemaking and Networked Corporeality: Embodied Mobile Media Practices in Domestic Space During Covid-19." *Convergence*, Dec. 24 2020, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856520979963.

Hernández, Fernando, et al. "Becoming University Scholars: Inside Professional Autoethnographies." *Journal of Research Practice*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2010, Article M7.

Hermes, Joke. "Audience Studies 2.0. On the Theory, Politics and Method of Qualitative Audience Research." *Interactions: Studies in Communication & Culture*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2009, pp. 111-27.

Hermes, Joke, and Annette Hill. "Television's Undoing of Social Distancing." *European Journal of Cultural Studies,* vol. 23, no. 4, 2020, pp. 655-61. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549420927724.

Hine, Christine. "Ethnographies of Online Communities and Social Media: Modes, Varieties, Affordances." *The SAGE Handbook of Online Research Methods*, edited by Nigel G. Fielding, Raymond Lee, and Grant Bland, SAGE Publications, 2017, pp. 401-13.

—. "Strategies for Reflexive Ethnography in the Smart Home: Autoethnography of Silence and Emotion." *Sociology,* vol. 54, no. 1, 2020, pp. 22-36. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038519855325.

Hjarvard, Stig. *The Mediatization of Culture and Society*. Routledge, 2013.

Hjorth, Larissa, and Sun Sun Lim. "Mobile Intimacy in an Age of Affective Mobile Media." *Feminist Media Studies*, vol. 12, no. 4, 2012, pp. 477-84, DOI: 10.1080/14680777.2012.741860.

Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture; Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press, 2006.

Jerslev, Anne. "In the Time of the Microcelebrity: Celebrification and the YouTuber Zoella." *International Journal of Communication*, vol. 10, 2016, pp. 5233-51.

Kaare, Birgit Hertzberg, and Knut Lundby. "Mediatized Lives: Autobiography and Assumed Authenticity in Digital Storytelling." *Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories: Self-Representations in New Media*, edited by Knut Lundby. Peter Lang, 2008.

Kemp, Simon. "Report. Most Important data on Digital Audiences During Coronavirus. Digital around the World in April 2020: Extraordinary Times, Extraordinary Trends." *The Next Web*, April 24, 2020, Amsterdam, https://thenextweb.com/growth-quarters/2020/04/24/report-most-important-data-on-digital-audiences-during-coronavirus/.

Koeze, Ella, and Nathaniel Popper. "The Virus Changed the Way We Internet." *The New York Times*, Apr. 7 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/04/07/technology/coronavirus-internet-use.html.

Lapadat, Judith C. "Ethics in Autoethnography and Collaborative Autoethnography." *Qualitative Inquiry*, vol. 23, no. 8, 2017, pp. 589-603.

Lawy, Jenny R. "Theorizing Voice: Performativity, Politics and Listening." *Anthropological Theory*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2017, pp. 192-215.

Van Maanen, John. *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. University of Chicago Press, 2011.

Marwick, Alice. E. "Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy." *Public Culture*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2015, pp. 137-60.

Ngunjiri, Faith Wambura, et al. "Living Autoethnography: Connecting Life and Research." *Journal of Research Practice*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2010, Article E1, http://jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/view/241/186.

Nguyen, Minh Hao, et al. "Staying Connected While Physically Apart: Digital Communication When Face-to-Face Interactions Are Limited." *New Media & Society*, Feb. 10 2021, https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820985442.

Nonnecke, Blair, and Jenny Preece. "Silent Participants: Getting to Know Lurkers Better." *From Usenet to CoWebs*, Springer, 2003, pp. 110-32.

O'Donnell, Penny, et al. "Listening, Path-building and Continuations: A Research Agenda for the Analysis of Listening." *Continuum*, vol. 23, no. 4, 2009, pp. 423-39, DOI: 10.1080/10304310903056252

Paasonen, Susanna. *Dependent, Distracted, Bored. Affective Formations in Networked Media.* The MIT Press, 2021.

—. "Infrastructures of Intimacy." *Mediated intimacies: Connectivities, Relationalities and Proximities*, edited by Rikke Andreassen, Michael Nebeling Petersen, Katherine Harrison, and Tobias Raun, Routledge, 2017, pp. 103-16 .

Petersen, Michael Nebeling, et al. "Introduction: Mediated Intimacies." *Mediated Intimacies: Connectivities, Relationalities and Proximities*, edited by Rikke Andreassen, Michael Nebeling Petersen, Katherine Harrison, and Tobias Raun. Routledge, 2017, pp. 1-16.

Reade, Josie. "Keeping it Raw on the 'Gram: Authenticity, Relatability and Digital Intimacy in Fitness Cultures on Instagram." *New Media & Society*, vol. 23, no. 3, 2021, pp. 535-53.

Sawyer, Richard, and Joe Norris. "Null and Hidden Curricula of Sexual Orientation: A Dialogue on the *Curreres* of the Absent Presence and the Present Absence." *Democratic Responses in an Era of Standardization*, edited by L. Coia, M. Birch, N. J. Brooks, E. Heilman, S. Mayer, A. Mountain, and P. Pritchard, Educator's International, 2004, pp. 139-59.

Spowart, Lucy, and Karen Nairn. "(Re)performing Emotions in Diary-interviews." *Qualitative Research*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2014, pp. 327-40.

Tebbutt, John. "The Object of Listening." *Continuum*, vol. 23, no. 4, 2009, pp. 549-559, DOI: 10.1080/10304310903012644.

Toyosaki, Satoshi, et al. "Community Autoethnography: Compiling the Personal and Resituating Whiteness." *Cultural Studies/Critical Methodologies*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2009, pp. 56-83.

Valaskivi, Katja, et al. *Traces of Fukushima. Global Events, Networked Media and Circulating Emotions*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

Vallee, Mickey. "Doing Nothing Does Something. Embodiment and Data in the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Big Data & Society,* 2020, https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951720933930.

Weidman, Amanda. "Anthropology and Voice." *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 43, 2014, pp. 37-51.

NOTES

1. Crawford introduces three modes of listening: background listening, reciprocal listening, and delegated listening (Crawford 2009, 528-30).

2. In Finland, the declaration of a state of emergency occurred for the first time after the World War II.