

FACT *stage one*

Preface (2023)

This research project was originally planned to start during 2019. However, due to the Covid pandemic, the case study was postponed several times and eventually happened two years later, in 2021 which somewhat shifted the outcomes of this project in relation to its original abstract.

Importantly, there has been some necessary, practical changes, such as the age and location of the target group (this has been changed in the abstract), which had to be adapted due to the pandemic restraints.

During these two years of delays, some things have also changed in relation to the project content, related to “the Arts” as whole and the sonic practices in which I operate, and foremost, within myself.

By now, *fragmenturgy practice* as a ritual, or even a method, is reasonably well documented. It is regularly practiced in various participatory, and community based, artistic and pedagogical contexts, both inside and outside of the art schools, which makes me very happy. However, I would like to dwell a little on some of the wordings in the original abstract and within the name itself; “FACT”, which stands for Fragmenturgy ACtion Tool.

Activity, Activation, Action and Actions

What does “being active” really mean – and why is it important?

Who has the privilege of being active – and who has not?

Inspired by postcolonial theory and the book “Digital Lethargy” written by Tung-Hui Hu, these are things that unsettle the present me.

In the age of “digital capitalism”, many Western people of privilege express their frustration over the persistent silence (or apathy) of the masses when it comes to “taking proper action” against the ongoing, global crisis such as the climate crisis or other injustices.

To a degree, I sympathise with this frustration, and from time to time, I certainly recognise it within myself and there are for sure traces of it in this project.

But *what if* the whole idea of “taking action” is a product of a “colonial brainwash”? Maybe “taking action” the way that we know it is not the way? And maybe, “taking action” is not a feasible option anywhere outside of the privileged domain of “white climateers”* in the affluent Western (Northern) hemisphere?

Maybe, “the rest” simply do not have the time, the energy, or the funds, required to do the same.

In his book “La fatigue d’être soi” (The Weariness of Being a Self), the sociologist Alain Ehrenberg, explains the consequences of the major, historical, industrial shift in the Western workforce of the 1950’s and onwards; from labour intensive, manual work to “immaterial

work”. By the 1970’s, these occupational changes led Western society to less idealise a subject who is a follower of norms and fixed rules, than one who takes responsibility and initiative to make their own rules.

As its glorification of entrepreneurs suggests, society began to understand the individual as the sovereign master of its own destiny.

But is this ideal image of the “problem-solving doer” still a feasible reality?

The philosopher Byung-Chul Han writes in relation to our status as people existing within the present era of a hyper individualised “digital capitalism” where the main purpose has become “being our most-selves”. The constant “clicking and liking” to build the personal brand has led to the creation of digital, disempowerment underclass characterised by “digital fatigue” or “digital lethargy”:

“There’s no way to form a revolutionary mass out of exhausted, depressed, isolated individuals.”, claims, Han.

In this context of the “action word”, the idea of creating a potential worldwide sonic “action tool” to fix these empathetic failures of today’s society seems quite absurd.

So let me re-frame this *Action Tool* into a set of “*sonic actions of endurance*”, “*a slight shift within the shift*”. Or a *plant-school* in constant transformation by its users, rather than “a tool”, containing various “gizmos” that may “tamper with system within the system” – or “muddle the waters in the big pool”.

* As well as articulating issues of race, youth culture and navigating sexual trauma, Michaela Coel’s smash-hit drama *I May Destroy You* detonates complex questions about Black British perspectives on the climate movement. In Episode 7, *Happy Animals*, main character Arabella is recruited as a presenter at a start-up vegan company that is looking to diversify its digital output. This yields intense criticism from her peers and ultimately culminates in a livestream hijack by Arabella who ruins the ad by diving into a box of fried chicken. Amid the hilarity, the episode’s provocations generate complex insights into how social problems have a different impact depending on someone’s identity.
<https://itsfreezinginla.com/articles/i-may-destroy-you>

FACT stage one

Abstract

The research project FACT *stage one* aims to test the sonic capacity of *fragmenturgy* (developed by Sunesson 2014–19) as a method to unsettle polarised positions of areas and sites existing outside of the visual power structures and political strongholds.

The long-term purpose is to develop a Fragmenturgy ACTION Tool (FACT); a transitory toolbox for cultivating *fragmenturgy* methods and actions.

FACT *stage one* consists of a comprehensive case study carried out in collaboration with a group of students aged 18–23 based at Uppsala Community College in Sweden, which was explored as a site during 2021.

Research questions

The purpose of these questions is to gather new and detailed knowledge towards the development of "the FACT" (Fragmenturgy ACTION Tool):

- ☐ What factors define fragmenturgy communication and transformation?
- ☐ What are the possibilities of fragmenturgy communication and transformation?
- ☐ How may fragmenturgy actions be carried out?
- ☐ In what way can fragmenturgy actions engage with societies?

Aims

Already back in 1995, the philosopher Gemma Corradi Fiumara argued that philosophy had lost its sense of listening (1).

"We have inherited a limited, reduced-by-half, concept of language", she claimed,

Fiumara's biosphere without listening, oversaturated by the sonic distortion of mobile phones, much resembles the age of digital capitalism in which we are living in right now.

In another essay, Huw Hallam (2) points out how antagonism, born out of such indifference, corrodes human relations. How deafness to the impact of climate change, leads to ecological breakdown. And how ignorance to rising segregation, initiates a shift towards the total acceptance of capitalist narratives, leaving large groups on "the outside" causing polarisation and hostility between people and environments.

The objective of FACT is to examine *fragmenturgy* and its capabilities to shift such positions through a systematic and sustainable case study.

The outcomes of the study will determine the development of a Fragmenturgy ACTION Tool (FACT) as a practical, theoretical, and yet open-ended instrument for sonic engagement and listening.

Background

The term *fragmenturgy* (3) stems from my previous, published research project the Lost and Found Project (LOF) (4) which began as an attempt to challenge my own sound making and cemented aesthetics within in a capitalist, linear narrative system.

By exploring different forms of sonic multi-layering, including leftover sound scraps and live chance operation, I began to catch glimpses of alternative narrative sonic patterns, sites, and scapes.

During the process, I started to explore *fragmenturgy* through collaboration and experiments with other people. As I noticed a more significant potential of *fragmenturgy* – a socio-cultural, pedagogical, and critical capacity, reaching way beyond me as an individual artist, the research focus started to change.

One small, experiment which was carried out within the framework of LOF, proved particularly significant.

The experiment was called “Mitt Örbyhus” and performed in collaboration with pupils in sixth grade at Örbyhus school and their teacher Lena Öman, located in the rural council of Tierp, where I currently live.

The purpose of “Mitt Örbyhus”, was to apply *fragmenturgy* “in real life”, using it as a potential method for listening, sonic mapping (a sonic field survey) and re-construction of Örbyhus. The experiment resulted in six site-specific and very different sound installations such as live performance, interactive soundwalk, meditation, headphone concert e g) shown at a vernissage (5) at Örbyhus school in January 2019.

<https://soundcloud.com/user-808213323>

The evaluation of “Mitt Örbyhus” indicates two potential points of interest, related to alternate communication and transformation:

1. *Fragmenturgy* may be useful as a method to decipher polarised positions between individuals and re-establish ways for communication

During “Mitt Örbyhus”, experiments applying *fragmenturgy* were carried out – sometimes involving the whole group, other times the six smaller groups. In these experiments, mapping out familiar environments such as the school and the home through field recording, proceeded the live experimentation. The technology was kept very simple and practical, using familiar technology such as mobile phones, I-pads, and Bluetooth speakers for recording, editing and live interaction.

In comparison to vocal interaction, which was also tested, field recordings filtered by a device such as an I-pad or a phone, seemed to provide a particularly safe and enjoyable creative space for interaction. Entering their recorded, personal, and sometimes secret, sounds into the public domain gave the pupils an instant, yet unexpected gratification, especially when mixed with others. Especially interesting was how *fragmenturgy* influenced the dialogue within the six groups as the mode of communication gradually shifted from verbal to sonic:

“We argued a lot, for a long time in the group. But when it got nearer the opening we began to pull together. We realized that we had to work together somehow. The solution to our communication difficulties was for the group members to spread us out in the room, three meters apart and communicate only through the recorded sound. All three of us had an I-pad and a speaker each, containing our own sounds that we improvised with in the room. We

listened and communicated to each other through the recorded sound, without speaking – and it worked well in the end.” Pupil A

2. Fragmenturgy may be explored to alter people’s perception of what sound is and *what it can do*

In the evaluation of “Mitt Örbyhus” the pupils were asked about their individual learning outcomes of the project.

Learning about “the sonic environment” was the overwhelming response here. In the beginning the pupils predominantly thought of sound as music, beat – and noise. The field recordings were initially recognised as “noise” – but during the project their perception shifted very rapidly as they began recording and working with their own sounds. Towards the end all groups described their sounds as various forms like “beautiful”, “strange” and “interesting” art, sound or even music. This new sonic perception also resonated strongly through their performances, which were regarded as important and proud events.

“Before the project, I didn’t think that noise, or ordinary sounds, could be perceived as music. I didn’t know that noise can sound good”. Pupil B

“Before the project I didn’t even think about the sounds that surround me, that they even existed. Now, I listen to everything, I take notice of the sounds all the time. I think about what I would like to record, and what other sounds I could have used in the sound installation. For example, I have listened to a chainsaw on the other side of the street where I live. I would have liked to have used that”. Pupil C

“I never thought about how nice ordinary sounds can sound. I have realised that there are many more sounds in Örbyhus than you might think. I have started to listen to most things now. I notice the environment more and more”. Pupil D

FACT stage one – research questions

The outcomes of LOF and “Mitt Örbyhus”, provide direction for new research questions for this proposed, rural case study.

The purpose of these questions is to gather new and detailed knowledge towards the development of FACT:

- What factors define *fragmenturgy communication and transformation*?
- What are the effects of *fragmenturgy communication and transformation*?
- How should *fragmenturgy actions* be carried out?
- In what way can *fragmenturgy actions* be useful in societies?

Situation and relevance in the field

I want to frame this research within the fields of culture geography, sonic art, technology, feminist activism, and pedagogy.

In the last two decades, funding has been cut for commissioned, sonic work, as important public institutions, such as European public broadcasting corporations, have been forced to meet market demands.

This has led to a dramatic shift towards cheaper, music-based practices which has undermined more expensive, conceptual and site specific, sonic practices during a time when they are urgently needed as a critical agent in society.

Although, theory focusing on sonic practice, known as “Sound studies”, has expanded the last two decades, the theory base where this research project fits in, specifically dealing with sound as a critical practice, remains limited.

“Sound for sound’s sake” instead of “sound about...” (6) still appears to be the most common agency for those working with sound, overlooking the potential of sound as a critical agent in the field. This despite the progressive attempts to expand the field already made by the early pioneers such as John Cage (chance music), Maryanne Amacher (Music for Sound-Joined Rooms), Pauline Oliveros (Deep listening) and La Monte Young (drone music)

Except for La Monte Young, *fragmenturgy practice* engages with all of the above approaches of the 1940’s to the 1970’s.

Particularly the practices of Pauline Oliveros and Maryanne Amacher are significant to FACT, as they both labour collaborative listening processes.

Oliveros “Deep listening” (7) is a patented listening practice which engages with listeners at all levels according to Pauline’s own motto:

“I listen to everything all the time – and remind myself when I am not listening”.

During her lifetime, Oliveros travelled worldwide carrying out workshops and group performances according to written instructions, so called scores. “Deep listening” often engages with the local environment, which is also incorporated in *fragmenturgy* and the expansion of FACT.

However, while “Deep listening” predominantly operates as a vocal, bodily, and instrumental practice, often leaning towards a preferred aesthetic of “natural sounds”, *fragmenturgy* performs listening and live interaction through rough, digitally recorded sounds (field recording). *Fragmenturgy practice* is primarily facilitated by *listening through the machine* and importantly explores the recording device/machine itself *as a filter*, as described in the “Mitt Örbýhus” experiment.

Fragmenturgy also applies some of Amacher’s playful and hands-on approaches to listening and technology, for example used in the collaborative experience Music for Sound-Joined Rooms (1980). Rare video footage from this time repeatedly shows Maryanne patiently moving speakers around, whilst attentively listening to the room. (8)

In the essay “Beyond representation and signification; Toward a Sonic Materialism”, (9) the sound theorist Christopher Cox, argues that contextual and site-specific, sonic practices often disturb the music theorist’s analysis and therefore become degraded or overlooked, as they cannot match the compositional and aesthetic criteria of music. Cox claims that the absence of theory and sonic methodology, is due to a lack of accurate models for proper analysis of the broad, sonic field as he calls for a “*new, sonic materialism*”.

Another theorist, Seth Kim-Cohen, argues that the reason for the misunderstanding of critical, sonic practices is that they somehow missed “the conceptual turn” in the early 2000’s, when visual artists suddenly began to show an interest in sound.

“*Not much has happened since 1948, when Pierre Schaeffer launched his musique concrète*”, notes Kim-Cohen (6).

Adjoining the fields of *cultural geography, sonic arts, technology, feminism, and pedagogy*, I suggest that the proposed research project has the potential to significantly influence and further a much needed contextual, sonic research, not only in relation to the milieu at SKH and its faculties, but in a broader, societal perspective.

There are of course other efforts being made; Walter Gershon's two-year project "Resounding Science: A Sonic Ethnography of an Urban Fifth Grade Classroom" (10) is encouraging as it thoroughly investigates sonic empowerment in relation to maths through singing in the classroom. However, it is still rare that contextual sonic art's methodology is being examined in a pedagogical framework, outside the art world. In this context, the potential of the development of FACT may be considerable.

Driven by a genuine as well as a critical urgency to produce new sonic methodology and to engage communities in sonic world building it has scope to benefit future communities.

The *fragmenturgy ideal* of producing *sonic democracies* through the addition of multiple voices and layers within the familiar landscape, closely relates to the thoughts of the educational philosopher Gert Biesta.

Biesta promotes a model that creates democratic citizens through "democracy within education" instead of "education about democracy", pointing back to the very distinction of education; "learning" or "being taught" (11) and the educator Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" which argues that the key to enlightenment is always through self-empowerment. Freire regards each student as a collaborator, never a passive listener, as he writes:

"Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion". (12)

Towards a Sonic Activism

During autumn 2018, I read the text "Cultivating Activist Lives in Sound" by the sound activist Tara Rodgers (13) which made me seriously consider developing *fragmenturgy* into a tool for sonic action (FACT).

Previously, my sonic art practice had consisted of various forms of collage-based re-constructions derived from field recordings and interviews, re-assembled according to various conceptual methods. The work has often been site-specific and auto ethnographical, operating in the sonic field nearby, looking to generate alternative renderings of the political currents. This is highlighted in the trilogy "The White Suite" (14) dealing with the impact of the neo-liberal system in relation to the city, the human body and society in Sweden – and the UK, where I lived at the time.

Back in Sweden 2012, I started to search for something beyond the self-centred position of the artist, a more inclusive, sonic approach.

I started to incorporate live, transdisciplinary methods and collaboration, realising that I was probably not going to "change the world" alone.

In the text by Tara Rodgers, she speaks very practically about what such sonic activism might be. It includes an "all-inclusive" approach where all actions shape the outcome. This includes making critical choices everywhere; from collaborations and networks to the work itself,

the workflows and the choice of technology. Tara Rodgers challenges the sound artists to “honour their work and ownership” through actively resisting the neoliberal norm of viral success and the commodification of art and the artists in an era of capitalism on steroids, highlighted by social media.

The inclination of sound’s hidden and possibly obscure capacities for alternate world building, was again re-affirmed in a lecture by Salomé Voegelin, that I attended earlier this year. Voegelin joins the same path as Cox as she poetically describes sonic materialism as a temporal materialism, grounded in a contingent encounter of listening. Voegelin connects this sonic materialism, or sonic reality, to the invention and appreciation of possibilities; what things *could be*, instead of what *they are*. (15)

Locally, transdisciplinary artists and researchers are of course also operating in this critical field. Kajsa Dahlberg is a visual artist and PhD student at the Royal Art College in Stockholm. Working with the exploration of narrative glimpses and gaps in the capitalist system, she is confusing the capitalist model of constant progression through her practice based queer disturbances, which resemble *fragmenturgy actions*.

Mara Lee is another researcher and writer, who I continue to learn from. During “The Lost and Found project” I read her book “När andra skriver” (16) as its investigation into construction and re-production of the other promotes the opposite. What Mara herself calls a “choir of voices”, provides a good foundation of *fragmenturgy* methodology, such as FACT. I am a collaborator in the PhD candidate Lina Persson’s PhD project “Climate-Just Worldings” (17) which labours a philosophical and practical manual for climate-just production methods in film. Lina and I share a similar, feminist framework (18) and methodology related to alternate world building. We also both rely on fragments and live methods according to so called remix aesthetics in our work; Lina through animation and I, through sound.

Methods

The work method of the FACT case study is *fragmenturgy* and the aim is to test it. The detailed concept of *fragmenturgy* is described in the publication VIS published in January 2019:

<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/372518/446999>

The work within each of the case study will follow the pedagogical work pattern of *fragmenturgy* which is based on three steps where each part will be evaluated and critically reflected:

1. Familiarisation (listening) (19)

The whole class is invited to notice their environment through practical listening exercises, walking and live collaborations, using tablets and mobile phones in the local environment such as the school and the approximate surroundings.

2. De-familiarisation (recording/mapping).

The class is divided into smaller groups and start re-mapping (re-familiarising) their environment individually (personal) and in collaboratively, in their group (collective).

3. Re-familiarisation (sonic reconstruction)

The groups choose a place where and how they want to work with their collected sounds.

The group interacts live with the material in relation to the chosen place. Discussions regarding how then groups want to display the material take place.

4. The work is performed or displayed at the school. How, will depend on the groups.
5. Oral and written evaluation of the whole process according to the research questions in the groups.
6. Collection and categorisation of findings. Time for critical reflection.
7. Work on an exposition of the project and outcomes.
8. Presentation of finished exposition.

Exposition and documentation

- ☐ This project will be logged and documented throughout the process with some parts open to the public as an ongoing process-based work via Research Catalogue. I will also take part in available research seminars at SKH or other where a discussion regarding the ongoing research can be had.
- ☐ A public presentation and a final exposition of the project will be made available in Research Catalogue and Diva.
- ☐ Video documentation of the work process by Ali Quaraishi.

Sustainability

Regarding the use of material resources in this project, one of its benefits is the content based and conceptual aspect, as it has very little impact on the environment through its lack of consumption. In this project, it is the socio-cultural aspect and possibilities of sound that are investigated rather than its technological capacities. This is also a calculated, sustainable statement.

The aim is to only use technology that already exists, either at Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts (SADA), or the participating schools, to avoid any further environmental impact.

In the “Mitt Örbyhus” experiment, we only used the technology that already existed at the schools such as tablets (I-pads), software (the Garage band app) and simple speakers (wall mounted sets, a selection from the music department, Bluetooth-speakers, borrowed within the community). Today, pretty much all Swedish middle schools use I-pads in their daily education and a doing-it-yourself aesthetic very much contributes to the sense of playful togetherness, that I want to achieve.

In the FACT case study, I will also be able to use existing, leftover technology from my workplace at SADA which I am very familiar with.

There is a lot of speakers that I can use, as well as I-pads, if needed. In fact, this project would be unfeasible any other way.

The same approach applies when it comes to premises. The project operates within the buildings of the participating schools with public exposition at SADA/SKH.

Ethical challenges

FACT stage one is based on working with a diverse, multicultural group of young adults aged 18–23 years studying to make up the grades that are required to enter higher education at Uppsala Independent College, Sweden. This involves several ethical issues that will be assessed and reflected through-out the project.

1. Respect of people's free will, no force. The project will be well anchored within the collaborating school, headmaster and teacher and incorporated in the curriculum. Detailed information about the project will then be addressed to the pupils and their parents, who will be given the option to give their consent.
2. There will be ongoing ethical discussion regarding the handling of gained information and documentation such as names, audio, and video documentation. Participants will be asked to give permission for public display and documentation, such as exposition of the project.
3. The pupils will be trained in ethics and ethical approaches related to working at a site, as well as rules for audio recording and display in the public domain.

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