

Franziska Pusch SP3 Powerplay

Writing Assignment 3

Listening, Story Telling and overcoming Borders

How does listening help us realize where borders are and how can they be overcome? I investigate this by listening to and recording stories about overcoming something scary as a part of our group effort that looks at the intersections of the topic of borders, violence, intimacy and speech.

When we consciously make room for people to be heard and their stories shared, what can we learn from these stories? How can we become better listeners?

Making space is a political act¹, so who do we want to make space for? We choose listening and sharing lived stories that wouldn't usually be listened to. This space is supposed to be a welcoming space that supports the shared stories.

We are recording and sharing stories that wouldn't usually be listened to. We want to elevate these stories and simultaneously inspire our audience to think about their own listening habits. Who do you usually listen to? How do you listen? These questions are inspired by Rolando Vázquez's idea of decolonial listening, which asks you to be critical of the things you consider to be rational by listening to other perspectives.²

For the individual project I focused on a current struggle of mine: being afraid of things and building up courage to overcome them. I asked people who I am close to share a story with me of a time they were scared of something and how they overcame it. I also asked them to consider how and if overcoming this obstacle might have influenced them.

Because telling these stories might be difficult I asked people close to me. This way I was also able to more sensitively work with the recordings.

The conversations happened and were recorded over the phone and on my computer. I am very used to having interactions with my loved ones through digital media and thought it could be interesting to challenge this seemingly impersonal way of communicating.

The stories I was told are equally interesting as the insights gained from the act of recording them. The interviewees way of talking seemed rehearsed compared to our usual conversations, which is likely due to them knowingly being recorded. After a few minutes they started relaxing a bit more and emotionally shared their stories with me.

However, my way of listening has also changed. I kept thinking of things I could ask or stories and thoughts I could contribute. Since my goal wasn't to talk but to listen I just focused on that. The listening experience immediately became a lot more intense.

Even though I talk to them often, we actually rarely share our concerns with each other. It is eye-opening to realize there is an opportunity to grow so much closer to the people in my life and that there is so much more to learn from and about them, if I just listened more carefully.

To achieve a better understanding of others, one has to practice the act of listening. Listening to a speaker gives them power. Voices that stay unheard stay powerless. It is important to question ones own way of listening.

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