

Maja Bjelica*

Rhythms and Silences of Salt-Working: An Essay on Elemental Listening

Abstract

This article is an account of how elemental listening to the rhythms and silences of the specific processes of salt-working allows for the generation of forms and contents of knowing that were previously mainly assumed and transmitted as obvious. In this essay, situated within the field of posthumanities, the author attempts to connect a variety of research fields through a common grounded experience—elemental listening. First, the text presents its wider context, that is, the broad field of environmental (post)humanities, stressing the crucial role of affirmative ethics within its framework. The author then moves to the theoretical background of listening and its ethics, which is subsequently connected to conceptualizations of rhythms and silences beyond the usually assumed dichotomies. Only at this point is the research field introduced, namely the old heritage of salt-working, an intricate process employed in the saltworks of the North Adriatic, in this case the Sečovlje saltworks in Slovenia. As a final step, the author attempts to connect all these research fields and themes into an experiential insight into the possibilities that listening opens up for generating new ways of knowing as a posthuman path that encourages affirmative ethics and enables connections with the more-than-human.

Keywords

Listening, Rhythms, Silences, Salt-Working, Elemental Philosophy

This original scientific article was funded by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS) through the research programme “Liminal Spaces: Areas of Cultural and Societal Cohabitation in the Age of Risk and Vulnerability” (ARIS P6-0279), the research project “Grain of Salt, Crystallizing Cohabitation: Salt-Making as Experiential Environmental Wisdom” (ARIS J6-50196), and the bilateral project “Rhythms, Silences and Polyphonies: Echoes from Environmental Humanities” (ARIS BI-LV/25-27-003), all implemented at the Science and Research Centre Koper, Slovenia.

* Science and Research Centre Koper, Institute for Philosophical and Religious Studies, Slovenia
Email: maja.bjelica@zrs-kp.si

The following pages are an attempt at a condensed presentation of certain themes of intricate research conducted in recent years within the framework of different research activities. Embracing the risk of being highly fragmented, this text is truly an essay, a trying, an experiment in thinking through diverse themes of cohabitation, rhythms, silences, environmental (post)humanities, experience, and the elements—connecting them all to my main research interest, the ethics of listening, through a very specific case study, namely salt-working.

This article is therefore an inquiry into the possibilities that listening to (or better, *listening-with*, as I will propose) the “rhythms and silences of elements might have to offer for a further development of a posthuman ethics that would rise beyond anthropocentrism and technocracy of the present world; an ethics of a caring cohabitation in (and of) the more-than-human world that would be inclusive not only of the living, but of the so-called non-living as well, such as objects, materials and other elements” (Bjelica 2025, 68).¹ In order to resonate with the concept of posthuman ethics, I turn to the philosophy of Rosi Braidotti and her colleagues, who, in the edited volume *Posthuman Ecologies*, engage with a project of

affirmative posthumanist ethics that responds to trenchant inequalities, exacerbated now by cognitive capitalism. And this achievement, for us, refocuses the true purpose of knowledge: not to control, nor merely to describe the world; but to transform it for the betterment of all (Bignall, Braidotti 2019, 14).

The so-called “posthuman turn” is understood as a convergence of overcoming anthropocentrism and humanism, in the sense that the human is no longer at the center of our (philosophical) thinking, and as a drive toward

¹ Parts of this article were presented over the past few years at several scientific symposia and conferences, and I would like to acknowledge the importance of the conversations I shared with the participants, not only about my own research, but also about theirs. Mutually sharing the wonder and amusement we encounter on our research paths is invaluable for fostering renewed posthumanities that allows for liberating sciences. These events included the CENSE International Symposium on *Sonic Ecologies Beyond Listening I: Agency, Art and the Environment*, held in November 2023 at the Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design Budapest; the International Interdisciplinary Philosophical Conference *Rhythm in Transformation Processes*, held at the University of Latvia in Riga in May 2024; the Festival of radical soundwalk *TO)pot Living-with-spaces*, organized by CONA in Ljubljana in September 2024; the international symposium *Philosophy, Poetics, and Arts of Liminality*, organized by the Science and Research Centre Koper and held there in June 2025; and the International Transdisciplinary CENSE Symposium *Beyond Listening 2025: Walking-with Changes*, held in Ljubljana and the Sečovlje Salina Nature Park, Slovenia, in September 2025.

a “more inclusive practice of becoming-human” and the power of “thinking beyond the established anthropocentric frame, towards becoming-world” (Bignall, Braidotti 2019, 1). Let us also emphasize that the “posthuman paradigm” is primarily a tool for understanding the nature of knowledge as perspectival and situated; it does not omit the human but rather values the non-human in order to elaborate new possible interrelations beyond human exceptionalism and, in this way, to design “posthuman ecologies” (Bignall, Braidotti 2019, 2–7), which are, in a sense, “systems” of knowledge formation developed through relational, nonlinear, and heterogeneous processes.

Posthuman thinking is post-identitarian and, first and foremost, relational—it turns its focus toward a horizon of becoming. In her book *Posthuman Knowledge* (2020), Rosi Braidotti reflects on the reinvention of the humanities through the establishment of Critical PostHumanities, which include the Environmental Humanities. What makes them critical is their methodological supradisciplinarity, their thematic transversality, and the conceptually multilayered interdependence of “naturecultures” (Braidotti 2020, 100–102). Braidotti emphasizes that the knowing subject, the posthuman, is not a single entity but a complex ensemble, collaboratively linked to non-human agents. She advocates an affirmative ethics that allows for the emergence of a

different practice of ethical care and containment of the other, based on the constitutive affective ability of all entities to affect and be affected, to interrelate with human and non-human others (Braidotti 2020, 169).

In his work *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, Tim Ingold reveals “a conception of the human being [...] as a singular locus of creative growth within a continually unfolding field of relationships” (Ingold 2000, 4–5). His thoughts on experience as intrinsic to life in the world; on the work of people as establishing the conditions for the growth and development of plants and animals, rather than producing them; and on the context of continuous engagement with the land and its inhabitants as generative and formative of bodily substance and cultural knowledge are crucial guidelines for approaching and generating new posthuman forms of knowing, since they describe what he calls an “ecology of life.” Another important aspect is his elaboration of a “sentient ecology,” a certain intuitive knowledge based on feelings and consisting of skills, sensitivities, and orientations that are formed through long-term experience, that is, through living in a particular environment.

We relate this understanding of experience to aesthetic experience itself or, more precisely, return to the original meaning of aesthetics as the study of sensory perception. We understand aesthetic experience in terms of its original meaning, namely as the exploration of sensuous perception. The term derives from the Greek *aisthetikos*, meaning “of or for perception by the senses, perceptive,” and *aisthanesthai*, meaning “to perceive (by the senses or by the mind), to feel” (Douglas n.d.). Therefore, the experience that generates the knowing posthuman is always already aesthetic; it employs senses, perceptions, and feelings that are not always definable scientifically or rationally.

Having introduced the wider conceptual framework of this research, let us now move forward to explore the connections between posthuman affirmative ethics and listening, or the ethics of listening. As the following pages will demonstrate, listening, as an opening of perception and a welcoming of the yet unknown, enables an ethics that takes into consideration the radical other, including the non-living. This will be presented through the already mentioned case study of salt-working, through listening to rhythms and silences, specifically those of the four elements: water, air, earth, and fire.

The research in which I engage stems from an anthropological and philosophical background and concentrates mainly on ethnographic fieldwork, namely the method of participant observation. Through its implementation, I have been regularly exposed to the field, that is, the saltworks, where I dedicated myself to salt-working, which allowed me to experience “living-with-the-saltworks,” or even “listening-with-the-saltworks,” in the sense of cohabitation. I approach the field through listening as well. It allows me to expose myself to the soundscape of the place, to experience it attentively, and to remain open to it, allowing the unknown to emerge. I believe that approaching the field in such a manner, through listening, allows us to address it ethically, to perceive it as a living entity that is not there to be exploited by humans but is rather a subject of cohabitation, co-being, and a knowing post-human.

Listening as Opening to the Unknown

Listening thus forms the perceptible singularity that bears in the most ostensive way the perceptible or sensitive (*aesthetic*) condition as such: the sharing of an inside/outside, division and participation, de-connection and contagion (Nancy 2007, 14).

Listening offers the establishment of situated rationalities and contributes to forming intersubjectivities that would otherwise not emerge, as emphasized in the field of the ethics of listening. The ethics of listening is indicative of a practice of “letting things be” (Bjelica 2021) and a “practice of environmental awareness” (Bjelica 2022). I explore the ethics of listening mainly as an intersubjective space through listening-with thinkers such as Lisbeth Lipari (2014), who positions listening at the center of her ethics of attunement; or Jean-Luc Nancy (2007; 2008), who argues that subjectivity is constituted in resonance, as it is always already listening; or Salomé Voegelin (2023), who explores listening as a participatory process, its relationality, and experientiality. She engages with a “sonic anthropology of the in-between and of interdependencies,” emphasizing response-ability and togetherness with the more-than-human.²

In her most recent book, *Uncurating Sound*, she develops a reflection on the relations between art, politics, knowledge, and normativity. She addresses the perfidy of norms and engages the curatorial as a colonial knowledge project, whose economy of exploitation draws a straight line from Enlightenment’s desire for objectivity. She exposes

listening as a process that participates, that does not register distance but performs entanglements, through which contingent subjectivities and plural realities are revealed that are not representational but are a matter of relationality and of experience. It aims to narrate this entangled subjectivity not as an anthropology of the other but as a sonic anthropology of the in-between and of interdependencies; of my listening now as an ethical and response-able hearing of how I and you and more than human bodies are together and with each other. Such a relational listening unsettles singular actualities in favour of plural fictions that are not untrue but reveal the possibilities of the world and of how else we could think it (Voegelin 2023, 66).

² The thinkers with whom I am formulating a polylogue employ modes of thinking the lifeworld that distance themselves from research methodologies and understandings of listening, rhythms, and silences as they appear in the classical philosophical tradition and the sciences. Let me refer to Raquel Ferrández (2023), who, in her article “Listening to the Breath, Chanting the Word,” shows how philosophy, as a living form and as a set of concepts, has forgotten how to listen to words breathing: “[Philosophy] does not dare to initiate itself into the song that every language carries with it, to the rhythm that every idea is incubating” (Ferrández 2023, 229).

I am also listening-with Brandon LaBelle, a creative thinker and sound artist, who argues that listening draws us toward states of critical reflection, slowness, shared attunement, and capacities for understanding and care. He understands listening

as the means by which to learn the languages of the body, to attune to its inherent rhythms as paths of power and knowing, as well as healing. Within the conflicts over forms of life, and the biodiversity expressive of a common world, listening is wielded as a capacity to contend with genealogies of capture and enclosure by explicitly forging a path—an acoustic frame by which to cultivate more considered approaches for being on the planet (LaBelle 2021, 15).

In his most recent book, *Poetics of Listening: Inner Life, Social Transformation, Planetary Practices* (2025, 92–93), LaBelle proposes *listening-with* as a specific modality, which

must be understood to extend beyond a sound-centered perspective; rather, highlighting listening as a bodily practice, [...] as a *way of feeling*. [...] Integrated within these considerations is a focus on the affective tonalities or “currents” underpinning consciousness and being with others. [...] listening-with emerges as a critical means by which to attune to the body and all that it carries.

Listening is a gesture, an activity, a habit that allows us to remain open. It is an inclination toward welcoming the unknown, fostering a space in which we can be surprised. In this sense, it can also be valuable in research, not only as a method that allows us to “let things be” and perceive them “as they are,” for example without imposing hypotheses or theories upon them. It is also an aesthetic experience and allows us to generate knowing that would otherwise remain unconceived. Moreover, listening can also serve as a framework for already established research methods, reshaping them so that they become useful within Critical PostHumanities or similar contemporary scientific orientations concerned with posthuman knowing beyond anthropocentrism and exploitation, employing an affirmative post-humanist ethics.

Rhythms and Silences

The notion of “rhythm” is one of the ideas that affect a large portion of human activities. Perhaps it even serves to distinguish types of human behaviour, individual and collective, inasmuch as we are aware of durations and the repetitions that govern them, and also when, beyond the human sphere, we project a rhythm into things and events. This vast unification of man and nature under time, with its intervals and repetitions, has had as a condition the use of the word itself, the generalization, in the vocabulary of modern Western thought, of the term rhythm, which comes to us through Latin from Greek (Benveniste 1971, 281).

When we talk about rhythm, we usually think of it as a clear concept. We talk about it in music, everyday rhythms, keeping the rhythm, and so on. Inspired by the work of Pascal Michon, a French historian and philosopher who has thoroughly investigated this notion, its conception, and its usage, I would like to recall his observation that rhythm is often confused with, or used interchangeably with, the concept of meter. He returns to the Greek term *rhuthmos* and, with the help of Émile Benveniste, points out that “this term is formed from the verb *rhein*, which means to flow, and the suffix *-thmos*, which indicates a modality. It therefore initially signifies the form of something in motion or the modality of a flow” (Michon 2025).

In other words, rhythm in the sense of *rhuthmos* is not necessarily measured in equal units (musical measures, beats per second, numbers of syllables, or temporal units). This is one possible understanding, but in most cases it refers to a flow, a fluctuation, a repeating pulsation, a becoming. This is also how I understand rhythm when listening-with the elements. Similarly, for this research, silence is not understood in a conventional way, namely as the opposite of sound or its absence. Rather, I align myself with the composer John Cage, for whom sound and silence are not mutually exclusive, as he explains in the following words:

For, when, after convincing oneself ignorantly that sound has, as its clearly defined opposite, silence, that since duration is the only characteristic of sound that is measurable in terms of silence, therefore any valid structure involving sounds and silences should be based, not as occidentally traditional, on frequency, but rightly on duration, one enters an anechoic chamber, as silent as technologically possible in 1951, to discover that one hears two sounds of one’s own unintentional making (nerve’s systematic operation, blood’s circulation), the situation one is clearly in is not objective (sound – silence), but rather subjective (sounds only), those intended and those others (so-called silence) not intended (Cage 1973, 13–14).

It is important to recognize this rejection of the omnipresent dichotomy of sound and silence, which gives way to an understanding of silence as much more than simply the absence of sound. Silence, easily imaginable and understandable on the one hand, and unattainable yet still unsettling on the other, is only conceivable in this simultaneity or ambiguity, since in its many manifestations it is never fully representative of itself. I have written about this in another article (Bjelica 2023, 125), where I have shown that “silence also provides a possibility of communication, deeper attention and more accurate understanding, even though not necessarily by means of language. In fact, silence can be seen as an availability, an open space that can be offered” as a welcoming space. In this way, it allows for the arrival of the unexpected, the unknown. Silence is therefore also an atmosphere, a state that fosters the emergence of intersubjective relations with the more-than-human. It is a space where also the elements can come closer to the human to be acknowledged in their importance for cohabitation.

Drawing upon these unconventional understandings of rhythm and silence, we might prefer to think not so much about what rhythms and silences are, but rather about the how of their presence: How do rhythms and silences sound? How do we listen to them? How do we experience them? How do we become-with them? How do rhythms and silences relate to one another? These questions are not intended to be necessarily answered, but mainly to serve as a guide for furthering research beyond dichotomous thinking.

When rhythm and silence are placed side by side, the rationalistic mind tends to think of them as opposites, as a duality at best. Rarely are they conceived as an ambiguity in the sense of coexistence—namely, silence existing through rhythm and rhythm being facilitated by a welcoming silence. Or, more precisely, both may be understood as entering into a mutual liminal relation, each always functioning as a threshold to the other, the other always becoming toward the one.

One can find rhythms and silences interlacing and reverberating, for example, in quiet presence, heartbeat, breathing, the unknown, the unexpected, a surprise, or the full of wonder, the unimaginable. These are the undefinable rhythms that silence allows and the silences that rhythms expose. They point toward a posthuman ethics oriented to the more-than-human.

All of this is relevant to the Environmental Humanities (or PostHumanities), because it opens a space for the unknown of the environment. In the research I am conducting in the Sečovlje saltworks, I try to remain present while allowing the unknown and the unexpected to emerge. This is also what elemental listening, through the experience of rhythms and silences of the elements, contributes to.

Elements of Salt-Working

Fire, water, earth and even air itself come to dream in the crystalline rock (Bachelard 2002, 222).

In researching contemporary salt-working in the field of Environmental Humanities, we engage with a re-emerging philosophy: the philosophy of the elements. We were inspired to follow this path by the elemental philosopher Gaston Bachelard, who, in his work, addresses all the elements, and we have formulated our understanding of salt-working as a collaboration of the four elements, or even as a cohabitation of the four elements crystallized into a grain of salt. Bachelard's work on the elements is not the only source of inspiration. David Macauley, in his book *Elemental Philosophy* (2010, 13–14), reminds us how we have forgotten our interlacement with the elements, which was central in the philosophies of Greek thinkers, especially the pre-Socratics, or “natural philosophers,” who still felt and perceived themselves as connected to their environment and did not separate nature from themselves, as modern humans do. At the same time, they were particularly open and sensitive to beings, elements, and realms beyond the human: “By way of an engagement with the elements as well as living plants and animals, they searched for a hidden *arche* (ruling principle), an underlying *logos* (order) and a guiding *telos* (purpose or goal)” (Macauley 2010, 2). Macauley therefore argues that one of the tasks of ecophilosophy is to “encourage a renewed understanding of and critical encounter with air, fire, earth, and water and to make us aware of the complex—and sometimes very necessary—mediations that exist between us and the environment” (Macauley 2010, 2).

Let us now turn to the exploration of specific elements of salt-working in a particular environment in southwestern Slovenia, the Sečovlje saltworks, also known as the Sečovlje Salina Nature Park, which covers an area

of 673 ha.³ It is a unique, biodiverse wetland, a habitat of specific flora and fauna, species that have managed to adapt to the extreme salina life-world. This rich biodiversity is accompanied by an almost 700-year-old cultural heritage of salt-making, using traditional tools and natural materials. In recent decades, salt-working has declined drastically, which has led to several irreversible changes in the saltscape. The central objective of the research is to provide a transdisciplinary account of the present-day heritage of salt-working, perceived as experiential environmental wisdom⁴ that emerges from the unique relationship between salt-workers and the environment.

Within our research project, and building on ethnographic insights (see Fig. 1), we suggest that the salt-working heritage should be represented in a way that conveys the saltworks' interlacement between human and non-human actors.⁵

³ Information retrieved from the website of the Sečovelje Salina Nature Park (SSNP) (<https://www.kpss.si/en/about-the-park/identity-card>) indicates that the park covers 673 ha, whereas information provided on the website of the salt-working company differs, stating that the park "covers 750 ha" (<https://www.soline.si/en/salt-panning/nature-park>).

⁴ The concept of wisdom is central to philosophical inquiry, which has, since its inception, been grounded in the love of wisdom, or the search for wisdom. As an insight into our conceptualization of "experiential environmental wisdom" extends beyond the scope of this essay, I briefly explicate it here as a combination of knowledges (technical, processual, historical, ecological), embodied experiences, and collaborations with the environment, to which the posthuman subject should remain open and from which it should be prepared to receive new situated knowledges. The knowing that is experienced and received through listening-with rhythms and silences, as described in this essay, represents one component of such wisdom.

⁵ For further information about the park, please visit the websites www.kpss.si and www.soline.si. This is where the field research is conducted. However, in Slovenia, another saltwork remains active, namely the Strunjan saltworks, located approximately 6 km from the Sečovelje saltworks, within the Landscape Park Strunjan—for more information, please consult <https://parkstrunjan.si/en/>.

Fig. 1: Salt field “North 19,” where the experiential research is being conducted, in the Sečovlje Salina Nature Park



Source: Maja Bjelica

In this research, we are concerned with salt-working rather than salt production, as we understand salt as something brought into being by the elements—it is not we,⁶ salt-workers, who produce it. We only facilitate the conditions for the elements to connect and eventually become salt. We attend to the process; we “make it happen” insofar as we are familiar with the necessary conditions for its emergence in the form of salt crystals. The knowledge of the process has been transmitted to us through the experiential knowledge of our predecessors.

How can we recognize the elements, and how can we perceive their rhythms and silences? Our approach relies on embodied critical thinking,⁷ and therefore on embodiment and *listening-with*, all necessarily grounded in experience. This is also the main approach used in the research project on salt-working as experiential environmental wisdom, in which we seek to explore how salt—a crystal of salt—comes into crystallization through the cohabitation of water, air, earth, and fire (Fig. 2).

⁶ Since 2018, I have been part of a voluntary group of salt-workers working on one of the salt-fields in the Lera part of the Sečovlje saltworks. This is also what makes our research open to experiential knowing.

⁷ As a deeper insight into the methodologies used in this research exceeds the scope of this article, I suggest consulting relevant literature on this topic, such as *Practicing Embodied Thinking in Research and Education* (Schoeller *et al.* 2025.; see also Jóhannesdóttir 2025).

Water bears the chemical compound sodium chloride that eventually becomes salt. Water is patiently waiting in silence, with its own rhythm in the form of waves, to become a mother to salt.⁸ Water becomes increasingly dense until her salinity reaches the point at which the mineral of salt can crystallize into a cubic or pyramidal first solid crystal (Bjelica, Berndtson 2026). This process cannot occur without earth or soil enveloping the water basin—the bottom of the basins consists of impermeable clay, covered with a microbial mat called *petola*,⁹ which allows salt to crystallize without mixing with the underlying mud. The muddy banks also enclose the water basins and maintain a low water level, enabling more efficient daily evaporation. For this to happen, air and fire—the wind and the heat of the sun—play a crucial role. Their presence is strongest in summer, which is also the period when salt crystallizes. Wind, as moving air, facilitates evaporation and disperses water into the atmosphere. It is complemented by the sun, whose heat intensifies the evaporation process.

Fig. 2: Elements of salt-working: water, enveloped by soil, waved and stirred by windy air, heated by the fire of the sun



Source: Maja Bjelica

⁸ In the local Istro-Venetian dialect, the water that has already “given” salt is called *acqua madre*, which translates as “mother water.”

⁹ *Petola* enables the “traditional” harvesting of salt because of its solidity and elasticity. It is a microbial stromatolitic mat consisting of cyanobacteria, cemented gypsum, calcite, clay, and biosediment (Kovač 2009, 96).

Through *listening-with* the elements and exploring the silences of water evaporating, air welcoming it, soil supporting salt crystals, and heat drying them; and the rhythms of mud beneath our feet, wind sounding in our ears, the sun resting on our shoulders, and water guiding the way, salt-workers are able to follow the four elements (water, fire, air, and earth) crystallizing into salt. Through listening, salt-workers have an aesthetic experience that generates a different knowing and fosters cohabitation with the environment, approaching an affirmative posthumanist ethics.

Elemental *Listening-with* Rhythms and Silences

The posthuman subject is then embodied and embedded, and its relational affectivity produces a shared sense of belonging to, and knowledge of, the common world we are sharing. Relationality extends through the multiple ecologies that constitute us. Such webs of connections and negotiation engender a sense of familiarity with the world and foreground the simple fact that we are eco-sophical entities, that is to say ecologically interlinked through the multiple interconnections we share within the nature-culture continuum (Braidotti 2020, 47).

Through listening to the saltworks, the elements of salt-working, and their rhythms and silences, one can relate to the more-than-human and respect the radical other—if not fully, then at least more than before. By following the rhythms and silences of an element—for example, water—in the process of salt-working, I can attune my own rhythms to theirs and enable a cohabitation that contributes to the process of salt-working itself. Paying attention to such rhythms and silences and developing awareness of them allows us to understand the modes of being of these elements, the how of the elements of salt-working, as well as to establish an intersubjective relation toward them, contributing to posthuman knowing.

Listening allows us to recognize disruptions in the rhythms and silences of the elements by encountering sounds or reverberations that do not connect to the experienced rhythms and silences. This disconnection is usually identified through a felt sense (Jóhannesdóttir 2025, 52–53), which emerges through our presence in a place, through being-with the field. A firsthand example of this is the experience of the soundscape of salt-working heritage being disrupted by the regular coming and going of airplanes from the adjacent small international airport—especially in the summer season, when the frequency of panoramic flights and regular tourist flight routes increases.

When present in the field and such a disruption occurs, a felt sense arises that the sounds of airplanes have nothing to do with salt-working. This felt sense is supported by strong vibrations felt throughout the body when the planes pass overhead at relatively low altitude, and one can assume that these vibrations also affect the elemental rhythms and silences if they affect ours. Here we are reminded of Mark Peter Wright's statement that listening-with is not a comfortable practice, as we are here in the field to "listen-with responsibility" (Wright 2022, 51):

We, the listeners, must struggle to hear ourselves among vibrant worlds in becoming more familiar and estranged to the vast scope of geological time and the incomprehensible scales of climate change. [...] The process collapses binaries of the near and far and foregrounds questions of power, accountability, and care (Wright 2022, 101).

As Sara Pinheiro (2022, 137) states, "sound is a medium of respect for the other—and listening is a form of being attentive and staying connected and a tool of care." I agree with her when she continues: "From this perspective, both LaBelle's and Voegelin's proposals echo Nancy's view of sound as a medium of sharing." Jean-Luc Nancy's thought can inspire an understanding of the reverberation and resounding, the echoing of sound as a form of travel and connection among co-listening subjects through the element of air, which becomes an intersubjective space of sharing. Through sound, listening subjects refer to one another, becoming co-subjects—listening as a co-constitutive and mutually referential process of (inter)subjectivity.

This goes ear to ear with LaBelle, who emphasizes listening as essential: "listening is the basis of radical care. From being a caring individual to building caring communities and systems, listening is deeply formative" (LaBelle 2025, 2). Listening to salt-working processes is formative for the constitution of our own subjectivity, the subjectivity of the salt-working community, and also formative for those processes and the saltworks themselves. As Jacek Smolicki reminds us, listening "entails an enactment of relationships to the land," such as attitudes, habits, beliefs, or preconceptions, but it is also "a form of acknowledging other kinds of relationships to and within it" (Smolicki 2023, 194). Or, as Salomé Voegelin (2023, 68) reminds us in relation to acoustemology—"a combination of acoustic and epistemology, generating knowledge from sounding and listening," as introduced and practiced by Steven Feld—this form of knowledge "does not find meaning

through representation and correspondence but senses relationally, from how sounding is a listening with" (Voegelin 2023, 69). Beyond establishing relationality with the environment, listening also contributes to the generation of knowing. This brings us again to movements that help us step forward into posthumanism for the betterment of all.

In this essay, we approached the research field—namely, the saltworks, or more precisely, the old heritage of salt-working—through elemental listening to its rhythms and silences. To do so, we combined a variety of methods and approaches, such as fieldwork, participant observation, and sound documentation. This experimental mode of thought, which entails observing not from a detached distance but from a position of parity with that which—and within which—we are listening, represents an attempt to ground subjective inner contemplative experience by departing from an anthropocentric framework. Here we also combined these with a philosophical polylogue of listening thinkers such as Jean-Luc Nancy, Salomé Voegelin, Brandon LaBelle, and others, which allowed for an experience of enriching reverberations for thinking anew and imagining a possible environmental posthuman affirmative ethics. In this sense, listening to rhythms and silences was not only experiential but also generative of knowing that can be understood as an instance of posthuman knowledge, which we may cautiously describe as experiential environmental wisdom. Through such experiential listening, possibilities of a caring cohabitation in (and of) the more-than-human world were explored as a possible posthuman reality. We do not claim to have proposed a unified mosaic; however, we believe that, through interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research, posthuman knowing can eventually emerge as something beneficial to posthuman ethics, not only as knowledge that is “applicable” and useful for human commodity and domination, but as a form of knowing that contributes to cohabitation and mutual becoming.

As a researcher and as a salt-worker, I am exposed to the soundscape of salt-working. I listen to specific sounds, rhythms, and silences every day; I *listen-with* them, and I listen responsibly. Through listening, I continually reconstitute my subjectivity. Its fluidity is reflected in the salt I help to bring into being. I am *in* becoming.

Bibliography

- Bachelard Gaston (2002), *Earth and Reveries of Will: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, The Dallas Institute Publications: Dallas.
- Benveniste Émile (1971), *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. M.E. Meek, University of Miami Press: Coral Gables, FL.
- Bignall Simone, Braidotti Rosi (2019), 'Posthuman systems', [in:] R. Braidotti *et al.* (eds.), *Posthuman Ecologies: Complexity and Process after Deleuze*, Rowman & Littlefield International: New York and London, pp. 1–17.
- Bjelica Maja (2021), 'Listening: an interdisciplinary path towards letting things be', *Horizon*, 10 (1), pp. 212–231, <https://doi.org/10.21638/2226-5260-2021-10-1-212-231>.
- Bjelica Maja (2022), 'The ethics of deep listening: a practice of environmental awareness', *The Polish Journal of Aesthetics*, 64 (1), pp. 37–56, <https://doi.org/10.19205/64.22.2>.
- Bjelica Maja (2023), 'Tišina: dialektičnost, nedoločnost, razpoložljivost in gostoljubnost', *Monitor ISH*, 25 (2), pp. 124–151.
- Bjelica Maja (2025), 'Listening-with elemental rhythms and silences: an essay on liminalities of salt-working', [in:] idem, *International Symposium Philosophy, Poetics, and Arts of Liminality: Interdisciplinary Perspectives. Programme and Abstracts*, Annales: Koper, pp. 68–69.
- Bjelica Maja, Berndtson Petri (2026), 'Z vodo do modrosti preko filozofije in izkustva elementov: primer solinarstva', [in:] Urška Perenič (ed.), *Voda v slovenskem jeziku, literaturi in kulturi*, Založba Univerze v Ljubljani: Ljubljana, pp. 69–81, <https://doi.org/10.4312/SSJLK.62.69-81>.
- Braidotti Rosi (2020), *Posthuman Knowledge*, Polity Press: Cambridge.
- Cage John (1973), *Silence: Lectures and Writings by John Cage*, Wesleyan University Press: Hanover.
- Ferrández Raquel (2023), 'Listening to the breath, chanting the word: the two breaths in María Zambrano's *Clearing of the Forest*', *Poligrafi*, 28 (111/112), pp. 225–242, <https://doi.org/10.35469/poligrafi.2023.409>.
- Harper Douglas (n.d.), 'Etymology of aesthetic', *Online Etymology Dictionary* [online] <https://www.etymonline.com/word/aesthetic> [accessed: 28 April 2026].
- Ingold Tim (2022), *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, 2nd ed., Routledge: London and New York.
- Jóhannesdóttir Guðbjörg R. (2025), 'Sensing and thinking from within: aesthetic perception and embodied thinking', [in:] Donata Schoeller *et al.* (eds.), *Practicing Embodied Thinking in Research and Education*, Routledge: London and New York, pp. 52–65.
- Kovač Nives (2009), 'Chemical characterization of stromatolitic "Petola" layer (Sečovlje Salt-Pans, Slovenia) using FT-IR spectroscopy', *Annales, Series Historia Naturalis*, 19 (1), pp. 95–102, [online] <https://www.dlib.si/details/URN:NBN:SI:DOC-YORS4TWD>.
- LaBelle Brandon (2021), *Acoustic Justice: Listening, Performativity, and the Work of Reorientation*, Bloomsbury Academic: New York and London.
- LaBelle Brandon (2025), *Poetics of Listening: Inner Life, Social Transformation, Planetary Practices*, Bloomsbury: New York and London.

- Lipari Lisbeth (2014), *Listening, Thinking, Being: Towards an Ethics of Attunement*, Pennsylvania State University Press: University Park.
- Macauley David (2010), *Elemental Philosophy: Earth, Air, Fire, and Water as Environmental Ideas*, State University of New York Press: New York.
- Michon Pascal (2025), 'Why we need the notion of rhuthmos today', [online] <https://www.rhuthmos.eu/spip.php?article3045> [accessed: 10 August 2025].
- Nancy Jean-Luc (2007), *Listening*, trans. C. Mandell, Fordham University Press: New York.
- Nancy Jean-Luc (2008), 'Ascoltando', [in:] Peter Szendy, *Listen: A History of Our Ears*, Fordham University Press: New York, pp. ix–xiii.
- Pinheiro Sara (2022), 'Field recordings: a manifesto', *Prace Kulturoznawcze*, 26 (1), pp. 129–146, <https://doi.org/10.19195/0860-6668.26.1.8>.
- Schoeller Donata et al. (eds.) (2025), *Practicing Embodied Thinking in Research and Education*, Routledge: London and New York.
- Smolicki Jacek (2023), 'Composing, recomposing and decomposing with soundscapes', [in:] idem (ed.), *Soundwalking: Through Time, Space, and Technologies*, Routledge: London and New York, pp. 181–199.
- Voegelin Salomé (2023), *Uncurating Sound: Knowledge with Voice and Hands*, Bloomsbury Academic: New York, London, Oxford, New Delhi, Sydney.
- Wright Mark Peter (2022), *Listening after Nature: Field Recording, Ecology, Critical Practice*, Bloomsbury Academic: New York, London, Oxford, New Delhi, Sydney.

