

James Weeks

Gardening piece

for a single performer

2025

In your garden or allotment (or somewhere where you can do gardening), prepare by immersing yourself in the sound environment; with eyes closed, focusing on each sound in turn and gradually immersing yourself within their polyphony (see Polyphonic Listening). Continue until you feel calm, focused and attentive.

Pursue a gardening task such as digging, planting, weeding, pruning, mowing. Every so often (for example, after about a minute), pause for a while, then restart, then pause, and so on.

The aim is not to complete the task, but to listen.

As you garden, allow your attention to move from the task itself to the sound you are making as you perform it, and its place in the surrounding sound environment. Enjoy its rhythm and its sound quality in polyphony with the other sounds. In the pauses, listen to its absence, and what is left.

Work slowly. Break the task into small units (lifting a single weed, pruning one branch, etc.), and pause between each one, closing your eyes each time you are ready to act and listening to the sound it makes, leaving space to open eyes and move on each time. Find a rhythm of action that allows you to hear and appreciate your actions and sounds within the whole sound environment. Pause when you want a break to listen or rest.

Try to remain in listening mode and avoid getting pulled back into working efficiently, as you normally would. Arrange the physical demands of the task to allow you to do this (working more slowly should not be more uncomfortable, as this distracts you from listening). Find a way to be present physically in the musical action.

If necessary, slow down even further and take even more time, until you can really hear yourself.

Swap to a different task whenever you want.

Finish the piece when you want.

Variation: garden as normal, at your usual speed, pausing regularly as above, and record yourself. Then listen back to the sound of your gardening within the sound environment.

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