Reassembling a Cosmopolitics as Subsensorial
Pia Lindman

I’m an artist and a healer: in both practices, my point of departure has often been personal experiences, guiding my inquiries and leading me to investigate the body and its place within the cultural space, as well as its relationship with the larger ecosystem. Affected by the powerful visceral experiences of a dis-ease in my bodily organism due to environmental toxins, I have moved beyond the human body to explore multiple realms of organic and inorganic life, and what I have termed the *subsensorial*.

The subsensorial refers to a realm of experience that is beyond the capabilities of our human everyday sensory equipment. It signals events interweaving our mind, bodies, and our environment together. These events are registered on a molecular and cellular level, yet, usually do not rise to human consciousness. Nevertheless, these events have an effect on our minds, bodies, and our sense of belonging to this world, our sense of connection.

After being poisoned by Mercury (a neurotoxin), I discovered I suffered from heightened sensitivity to a number of environmental factors and processes in my own body. Not only did I suffer from lowered immunity and digestion difficulties, but I experienced curious warps of my cognitive capabilities - sometimes causing sensory effects similar to hallucinations. My symptoms forced me to give up many habits that dull our sensory equipment, such as smoking or consuming alcohol, but also certain foods. Undergoing a new regime, my sensory system further tweaked to what is commonly viewed as an ‘over’-heightened sensitivity. I have come to view this sensitivity as empowering and indeed a valuable messaging system in regards to our contemporary lives and environments.

My heightened sensitivity is a medium that allows me to receive more signals from the cells of my body - of, for instance, chemical and energetic events. These events take place in the cells precisely because elements in the environment are entering and interacting with the organic system that is my mind and body. Things of the mind and of
matter intermingle in a mix of energy and life. These interconnected events cause the cells to emit signals, for instance, by way of changes of pressure in the walls of the cells and microbial movements or secretions. These signals reach some sort of pre-conscious-consciousness of my mind. Human consciousness usually filters these signals out, but in my mind, they are translated into various mind “things”, i.e., visuals, melodies, words, movements, and colors. I call this interstitial work of mind and body, this intermediary space and time of signals and synesthesia, the subsensorial.

Becoming familiar and skilled with the subsensorial, I have turned my debilitating sensitivity into a capability and a tool for my art. My knowledge of the subsensorial helps me tune in and express human conditions and, for instance, the atmosphere of a space. Now, I work as a multisensory system and organ mediating between experiences of various sensory entities and systems, i.e., human, air, water, microbes, minerals, to name a few.

The subsensorial is in fact, to a great extent, a shared realm, shared with the rest of the world, more than human life, and existence in general. Although the subsensorial incorporates events that might not directly include the human mind and interactions at all (such as events in the soil, plants, rocks, atmosphere), our human actions, social structures, political processes, and cosmologies bear great meaning to what happens in this realm, and how in turn this realm affects us and our interconnected lives.

My curiosity takes me to explore these many human and more than human structures and fields, in which the subsensorial is also shared. Subsensorial sessions, which I consider part of my artistic practice, are collaborations with members of the audience (as in Nose Ears Eyes), landscapes (as in Big Toe, Brain, Rock), or, for instance, other existing entities (as lead in Laulu lyijylle - Song for Lead, 2021). In these sessions, I often facilitate a mutual exchange in which all participants express their state of being at that particular moment. This exchange is a fine-tuned listening to one another, an invitation for all the diverse experiences of living on this planet to manifest as expressions, pressures, tensions, tenderesses. In processes of slowly learning to connect, I try to read the particular language(s) of a body, a place, or a space – all embodied experiences of particular lives. The individual forms of a session may vary, including physical healing treatments, ceremony, painting, writing, or other forms of passing of time. While creating subsensorial sessions, I often sense energy of and in the entities-in-session as halos, movements, and blockages. Sometimes these energy flows appear to me as distinct visualisations, narratives, characters, or sounds. These appearances are the basis of the
writings, sound recordings, and paintings that I make during or after sessions. I will return to these works later on.

In my art practice, I investigate more and more what can be understood as belonging to the subsensorial realm, and how the subsensorial manifests itself in the world that human sensory equipment is capable of registering - and how we can indeed expand that realm of registration. What role does the subsensorial play in the formation of our human consciousness and could it be meaningful for us, humans, to learn to better hear its expressions? Finally, what messages does the subsensorial bring us?

I describe my practice of making subsensorial sessions as an explorative and creative practice where, for each session, the person or entities being treated, myself, and a shared idea of care and collaboration come together. The subsensorial is a realm of cellular micromessaging, outside factors, and sensory associations, in which internal corporeal and molecular events are in mutual correspondence with artistic expression. Together, we heal and learn about ourselves as well as about each other. To participate in a subsensorial session is to create, read, and mediate the particular language of a body - or many bodies - or, indeed, entities-in-collaboration: an embodied experience of a particular yet pluriversal moment in life. While in session, I come close to a very minute and ‘real’ reality of life: bones, ligaments, cells, fluids, but also will and emotions. If there ever was a mystery of life, I can sense it the strongest in these moments.

Kalevala: the Book - and the Kalevala Bone Setting

One night in the fall of 2008, I had a dream, in which I could see living people's bones through their skins. A few days later, I read an ad for a course in Kalevala Bone Setting. In my mind’s eye I once again saw the images of the bones that occurred in my dream. I followed my impulse and attended the course. As soon as I sat down in class and wrapped my fingers around a pair of feet of someone expecting to be treated, I reconnected with the feeling I had had in the dream. In fact, I felt something akin to ancestral roots shooting out of my own feet, going deep into the ground and locking into something. But my fingers felt the skin, flesh, and bones of a person, with whom I shared another connection – of being a living body.

1 These sessions include, among other, installation, architecture, microbes, plants, paintings, and sessions with Nose Ears Eyes (Sao Paulo Biennal 2016), architecture, paintings, and sculptures in SubsensorialXYZ (SOLU space, Helsinki, 2019) and landscapes, paintings, narratives, performance, exercises, and sound recordings in Subsensorial Lokka (Tallinn Biennale, 2019).
In thinking through and coming to some insights about knowledge, know-ability, and knowing otherwise, my sickness along with the experience of studying the Kalevala Bone Setting, which I started exploring in 2009 and continue to do, have played such an important part.

Although I feel conflicted about the idea of ancestral roots - with its risks of nationalism or other forms of isolationism and discrimination - I nevertheless must convey the strong emotional reality I have experienced, and how this healing practice is part of my ancestral belonging. From my mother’s side I’m connected to the Karelian tribe and from my father’s side to the Ostrobothnian tribe. These are Finnish tribes and the so-called Kalevala healing tradition is part of their, and therefore my, living cultural heritage.

Kalevala Bone Setting (Kalevalainen jäsenkorjaus) is an ancient medical practice based on an oral rune tradition that has sustained itself to this day among Finnish tribes around the area of the Baltic Sea, Ladoga, and the White Sea (Vienanmeri). It is currently taught only in Finland by the Association for Folk Medicine (Kansanlääkintäseura).

According to the Kansanlääkintäseura info bulletin “Introduction to Kalevala Bone Setting” (2017) Kalevala Bone Setting is a holistic and active form of treatment where the person being treated participates in the process. Kalevala treatment stimulates the nervous system, blood circulation, metabolism, the meridians, and corrects misalignments of bones and joints.

The name Kalevala refers both to a collection of poems edited by the anthropologist Elias Lönnrot and to the oral tradition among the Finnish tribes. This tradition is vastly larger than Lönnrot’s collection of poems. Nevertheless, as a result of a continued construction of Finnish national identity during the past two centuries, Kalevala has become a widely accepted term to describe the Finnish oral tradition and indeed Finnish identity and culture in general.

Not unlike most Indigenous practices, cosmologies, and other metanarratives, Kalevala has not survived without political, economic, and social currents shaping both its content

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2 “Kalevala” was published in Finland in 1840. Lönnrot culled the runes from singers in Finnish villages during the early 19th Century.

3 Finnish Literature Society Archives of Old Folk Poems in Finland (Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden seuran arkisto “Suomen kansan vanhat runot”); of this archive around 200 000 poems are available online, while an estimation of another 200 000 remain un-digitised.
and the various cultural, medical, and meditative practices connected to it (Anna-Leena Siikala, Itämerensuomlaisten Mytologia, 2012). Indeed, aspiring to become accepted as part of the Finnish national health care system and thus following the demands of a Western medical tradition of clinical trials and proof of effectiveness, today Kansanlääkintäseura also participates in modifying the tradition to meet its own interests. Kansanlääkintäseura, for example, has edited out of its educational material the tradition of creating healing spells and other expressions of a cosmology that is an underlying part of this healing and oral tradition. We could say that Finland is re-colonising itself.

Upon graduating from Kalevala Bone Setting in 2019, I had to do an exam, which included a treatment session with one of the teachers. As I moved my fingers along the spine of the body I was treating, I was able to tap into the subsensorial sensitivity that I have described before. As I approached the neck and head, I became very aware of the fact that I was giving the treatment as part of an exam, to the very person who was going to judge my performance. I lost the connection, but continued to proceed with the treatment as we had been taught to perform it.

As feedback, the teacher told me that he felt very clearly that I have “healing hands” and that I am tapping into the energy that is at the core of the healing. However, the teacher felt I had lost that energy when I came up to the neck. No doubt he was correct, and I explained to him that that was the moment I became aware of the situation and indeed lost the connection.

That same evening, the teacher was speaking about the experiences of energy transfer that inevitably become part of the work we do as Kalevala Bone Setters. He pointed out that what actually heals us, is this energy-part of the work, but he also made it clear that we can never talk about this part of the work publicly.

Ever since, this “healer-gag” has made it impossible for me to treat and heal without inflicting considerable pain in my own body. This is why up until now, I have chosen to do healing work only as part of my art practice and, even then, only as a subsensorial session shaped and defined in collaboration and by reaching a consensus with myself and the entity, or entities, participating in the session (be it another human, a landscape, a body of water, …).
Most cosmologies give guidelines on how to relate to life events that span beyond our rational mind and our sensory apparatus: typically, they offer explanations about events of which we cannot make sense, or cannot even be aware of.

Personally, I have chosen not to directly incorporate elements of the Finnish cosmologies or the Kalevala Bone Setting into my subsensorial sessions. Instead, I leave the sessions open for any kind of symbolic language and visions of the world that might be brought in by any entities participating. During these sessions, I enter a realm where I pick up micro messages from something that people usually are not aware of, nor have a language to describe. In this regard my subsensorial sessions are similar to healing ceremonies and ritual practices which also address this realm. I prefer to talk about the subsensorial, rather than ascribe to one specific cosmology or healing tradition, because then I can talk about it as something connected to microbiology, cells, movement of saline solution, minerals, i.e., going straight to the materiality of the body, what the earth is and what the air is.

Whoever wants to connect to these subsensorial events and bring their body as experience into this subsensorial realm can do it, without any proof of origin, belonging, or initiation- one does not need to have an authentic connection.

Santeri Lesonen and a Horse

Just as I have found a safe place for my healing practice inside art, so do I think of anecdotes as a way to access knowledge that otherwise would be crushed under the burden of having to expose clinical, scientific proofs. In this attempt to explain what happens when I do the subsensorial sessions and how these experiences relate to cosmologies, the Finnish oral tradition of healing, and some other contemporary healing traditions, my conversations with Santeri Lesonen and Lotte Tarkka might bring some interesting insights.

Santeri Lesonen comes from a family of healers, he is an electrical engineer turned healer himself. He is from Venehjärvi, a small village on the Russian side of the border with Finland, inside the border zone. One may not enter this area called Russian Karelia without a special border zone visa; regular entry visas to Russia are not enough. It is hard to imagine a more profound liminal zone in today’s world than this one. When I interviewed Lesonen in December of 2019, his first statement was: “Everything is
electricity!" He went on to explain that discussion is the central activity in his healing practice, and in his view, the work is very much about understanding the psychology of the person needing healing. After a lengthy discussion, that may last more than an hour, he is usually able to form an opinion about what he should say or do for the person seeking healing. Sometimes it can mean administering some medication, perhaps herbs, but other times, it could be an action of some sort. The key for Lesonen is to find the a(e)ffective combination of words, symbols, or mythical expressions, the mindset of the person in session and the nervous system of the person in session - and from this interconnected weft, to discover what will bring healing. What will compel the brain of the person-in-session to receive the symbolic meaning and transfer it to electricity, which will then travel through the nerves of the person-in-session to the parts of the body that need to receive this particular signal in order to effect its own healing process.

Once, Lotte Tarkka, Professor of Folklore at the University of Helsinki, gifted me, in conversation, with an anecdote about Lesonen: she visited Lesonen with her colleague, Professor Emeritus Siikala, who asked to be healed of an ailment from which she had been suffering for some time. After a conversation, Lesonen walked over to a horse in the village, brought it face to face with Siikala and then, as a healing action, he asked the horse to breathe on her. (Tarkka does not know whether Siikala was healed after this.) To me the thought of a healing horse's breath opens up a lot of possibilities: obviously of human and non-human relations, but even more so, of the generosity of this planet to all life (to give healing power to a horse's breath) and how these potentialities for healing exist everywhere. Lesonen says he figures out the psychology of a person in conversation, but I would like to stress that it is perhaps not psychology (with the assumption that there is a separated “mind” that needs to be corrected or socialised) that provides the healing insight to Lesonen. Rather, the insight comes from all that is conveyed of the life of this person in need of healing: the voice as well as words, the flesh as well as gestures, the microbiome as well as thoughts. And indeed, this kind of healing does not function on the basis of results from clinical trials. This healing story, told by a friend of a friend, highlights how an anecdote truly can be an antidote in more ways than one.

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4 Sound recording of interview of Santeri Lesonen by Pia Lindman, Venehjärvi, Russia, 16.12.2019. Juminkeko Archives, Kuhmo, Finland.
For more than a year now, I have attended weekly Zoom meetings, following the Tong Ren sessions imparted by Hardeep Mann. She conducts these sessions from Boston, USA, but participants join in from all over the globe. Previously, I had very little knowledge and no experience of the Tong Ren healing method.\(^5\)

Hardeep has developed a way to conduct these sessions quite unique to herself. One of her principles is that everyone coming together in these sessions also actively participates in the healing process of those partaking in the session with their own intentions, attention, and indeed, their whole "being" (a "being" that includes our social, mental, and spiritual forces).

During the session, Hardeep taps a miniature human shaped doll with a small steel hammer, similar to those a medical doctor would use to hit someone’s knee to check reflexes. She taps on marked points on the doll, following the meridians and lines of nerves present in a human body. As she is tapping, she tells about the points she taps and how these are connected to other parts of the body: organs, brain cortexes, nerves, arteries, glands, etc. In this way, Hardeep taps and directs our attention to different aspects and lines of connections in our body and in our "being" - a multitude of inner and outer connections.

The tapping and Hardeep's uttered words evoke in my mind visual associations: lights, color, forms, and lines. These visual associations are familiar to me from the work that I do with processes of the mind and my art practice, as in my work with the subsensorial.

Following the wonderful subsensorial energies evoked by Hardeep's tapping and words, I started drawing and painting the visual world I see growing in front of my inner eye during her sessions.

In the next section, I will walk through the internal and external events and processes to share, as an example, what emerged during the session on the 12th of August, 2021, outlined by the creation of one painting. I add notes from that session, including Hardeep’s words as well as my own thoughts and observations. I took images of the

\(^5\) The healing system is based on unblocking the autonomic nervous system and can be done also from a distance. For more information, check: www.tongrenstation.com
different stages of the painting process, so that it becomes evident how the taps, thoughts, words, and paintings are weaved together to become a co-creation.

Transcript from my notes
Hardeep Session 12-08-21
Session Part 1, Painting 1

Hardeep speaks of the session, and I paraphrase:
We work towards that everything in the body is open and the body has an easier time to heal and become balanced. We just give the body a nudge towards healing itself.

I choose the color light blue
Hardeep: …the brain stem

I draw a light blue blob, thinking this is being nudged… or is it the “nudging” that I am drawing?

Hardeep: Relaxing back, relaxing sensory organs, cortex, association…. 

I select a darker shade of blue, make the line thinner and transparent. I draw “nudges” in light blue.

Hardeep: …making sure our brains are working well. Cerebellum
I select a yellow, sun yellow, for cerebellum, draw on top of the blue a dandelion-like rim of yellow and then I change my mind. (I think I am trying too hard to “present” something).

Hardeep: *Through the prefrontal lobe that is the eye area - all that: relax! It is all about relaxing the muscles, relaxing the brain…*

I select red, and enlarge my drawing. I am drawing bright red small twinkles from the cerebellum going outwards. I think about the prefrontal lobe and eye area. I feel tension in and around my eyes and going up across the front and middle of my forehead.

Hardeep: …*limbic brain, that is connected to your autonomic system*
I select a dark-ish blue color, very transparent, and draw a conical mesh on the right hand side of the cerebellum. I think I might be working on the idea of the nervous system connected to the autonomous system.

Hardeep: *I am going to the proprietal lobe, tap on muscle tone and flexibility. Mirror neurons. Sensory cortex.*

I select a light violet (Lavender?) color with a small tip. I draw small drops going under the cerebellum and the red autonomous system (muscles, too).

Hardeep: *Tapping for J and A, for movement.*

I draw red lines the … frontal lobe… to all over the blue blob (body) - not really the body, but the nervous system and other tissues together in the body.

I draw more densely red lines around the area under the cerebellum and blue blob - and then again down and extending the lines to the sides as well.
Hardeep: …trigeminals, facial artery, stomach meridian, and I will open up the bladder meridian in a minute… let’s tap on the jaw…

I select a brighter red with a wider oil-paint-like tip. I make the trace semi-transparent. I draw an orange blob in the shape of a half-empty sack. The oil-paint-like lines create a material, uneven, feel.

This sack is on the lower left part of the blue blob. I might be thinking of the stomach.

Hardeep: Tapping on - just for relaxation - tapping on the face.

I select a darker light shade of pink/violet with the tip of an ink brush. I enlarge the painting around the sack, and the cerebellum. Making the tip very small, I draw pink lines from the stomach to the cerebellum and all other things around the cerebellum.
Hardeep: *memory… relax the face, help it!*

I draw the pink from the cerebellum all the way down to where I imagine feet. “Memory all the way from facial tension, muscle memory, going all the way down to the feet” is what I hear Hardeep say.

Hardeep: *OK, here we go! Prefrontal lobe, frontal lobe, ears - guys - ears, opening up the ears!*

I select (cued by frontal lobe) a yellow
and draw a mesh of lines forming cones on the sides of the cerebellum (I guess I switched to ears!)

Hardeep: *And then we go to the sinuses...*

My yellow continues from the ears and while transforming into a thin line wriggles in between the various glands in the brain only to re-emerge as a thicker line on the other side around the area of the ears.

Hardeep: *Larynx, pharynx... just doing the face at this moment. And I am going to tap in those eyes, guys. Beautiful eyes!*
Hardeep: *Lovely, tiny, gorgeous eyes. So we add moisture, to open up.*

I select a light blue color and enlarge the painting around the eyes. I draw light blue lines in the shape of an ellipse around the place where I imagine the eyes.

Hardeep: *And for the muscles around the eyes. From the eye brows tap TL2, TL3, …*

I select a bright red color, make it slightly transparent and give it a fine tip. I draw fine red lines around the yellow and light blue lines marking the nervous system of the eyes.

Hardeep: *and of course: line in the back, right where the cerebellum is.*

I seek out the cerebellum. I draw small lines from the eye muscle-lines to the beginning of the cerebellum. The cerebellum is almost disappearing under all the other lines.
Hardeep: *Medulla, the midbrain, and the brain stem.*

I select a darker, bluer red, and make a thicker but transparent tip. I draw a red, smoky blob over the cerebellum.

Hardeep: *Tap on dopamines and serotonin - to make you feel great!*
I select a bright and strong green color (for serotonin). I use a fine tip.

Hardeep: ...movement... for every movement in your body - through these things...

I draw green lines from eyes to the pink blob of medulla/brain stem. These lines extend also to the rest of the “body”.

I draw green lines all the way down to the “bottom” - to the imagined feet.

Hardeep: Frontal lobe and the visual cortex, the rays (fibres): when I tap on the visual cortex...

I select a light blue color

Hardeep: ...go through the parietal lobe and the temporal lobe...

I draw a light blue line from center of brain to top, above
Hardeep: Optic nerve, forward in the head, and from there to the eyes - what a complex! This relationship between the motor cortex and the eyes, through the optic, through the fibres is important.

I draw a light blue mesh of a radiating halo around the eyes and pink blob (frontal lobe)
Hardeep: Also important are the muscles from the eyes, also from the cerebellum. As we tap on the frontal, we also tap on the cerebellum.

I select a yellow color and as I hear that Hardeep will now work on the occipital lobe, I choose to stop this painting and start a new one.
Reassembling Our Cosmopolitics, or, rather, Auroral Snap, Crackle, and Pop

Discussing with Lars Bang Larsen, he suggested that to work in the subsensorial is a kind of a work of reassembling a cosmology, or a cosmopolitics.

It is easy to talk about and mediate subsensorial events with art. One can easily go off into a world of dreams and visions. The subsensorial can become very seductive and lush. But subsensorial events are as factual as anything that we think science is looking at - we are simply talking about it in a different way and listening to it differently.

Perhaps, one way to access and unravel the complex relationships we have to the natural sciences (and clinical medicine) of our Western culture and our own lives, as they are lived by the sensing and sensitized organisms that we are - is to contemplate the case of audible Aurora Borealis. Over a span of two decades, there have been some discoveries and debate about whether one can hear Aurora Borealis. Accounts of hearing this celestial phenomenon, rather than only seeing it, “are not unusual among both Indigenous and non-indigenous people living where the Northern lights regularly can be seen [...] so far [there] has been little scientific research into the phenomenon”. This is a perfect example of Western science assuming a certain neuro-homogeneity amongst us humans, thus disregarding some experiences as imagination, whilst some scientists themselves are opening up to the possibility that there are indeed people who have heard the Aurora Borealis. This evolving debate does not change the nature of Aurora Borealis nor the

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3 CNN Travel on the 1st of April 2021, reports on the recent research and indeed, scientific confirmation that there are sounds that can be connected to Aurora Borealis: https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/northern-lights-aurora-borealis-sounds-reports-scn/index.html

4 For a less polemic discussion, see for instance National Geographic of June 27 2016: https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/auroras-sounds-noises-explained-earth-space-astronomy
physical phenomenon of sound, but what is, or can be the human experience - and the relations within science, expanding knowledge around human neurodiversity.  

Questions to ask are; how is this part of our human world and politics? How is this making meaning in a larger sense? And indeed, how can we argue for research resources to be allocated towards phenomena other than those verifiable by a very limited mode of mediation, and quite frankly, tied to lazy convention and convenience?

I would like to be able to think that there are no obstacles for Western science to research and communicate phenomena occurring in the subsensorial realm. Events that can be registered only subsensorially could be phenomena observable by scientific methods - but only if scientists find the motivation to develop such methods. Methods that combine multiple scientific disciplines and incorporate an understanding of neurodiversity, bioelectricity, the complexity of life events woven with matter and energy, and the value of a human-decentered and de-colonized perspective. This different approach would improve an understanding of the interlinking of human life with anything and everything surrounding it and actively part of it.

Perhaps, one of the reasons human personal lives seem to increasingly struggle with both mental issues and autoimmune diseases is because we no longer have a functioning myth, something to give us the necessary symbolic resonance board for healing - our Auroral Snap, Crackle, and Pop. Especially in relation to the coronavirus, I am persuaded that science alone cannot resolve this pandemic. We see that science is not omnipotent and our faith in science - as the resonance board - is failing us.

We need myths to be able to locate ourselves in what we think of as the cosmos. We would like to have science with us in that cosmos.

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5 More about the research by Unto K Laine, see