

Outlandish Lullaby as a Counter-Listening Device: Rest, Untranslatability, and Intimate Estrangement in NIME

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Website: <https://www.jyyou-park.works> | Project: <https://www.jyyou-park.works/featured/outlandish-lullaby>

Abstract

The alt.NIME submission for Outlandish Lullaby presents the work as an interactive sound art piece that seeks to establish a new discourse within NIME, redirecting focus from control-based interaction to the politics of listening. The conceptual foundation of the piece draws from two related experiences: listening to Buddhist scripture chanting during childhood, where the sounds were known yet the words continued incomprehensible, and engaging with multilingual conversations in New York, where the language was only partially understood but held substantial emotional meaning.

The piece is structured as a listening environment in which the incomprehensibility of the voices is not regarded as a limitation. Instead, it creates a sense of comfort, co-presence, and spatial distance with the voices. While the user cannot comprehend the language, they are able to manipulate the metric density, the multilingual voices, and the perceived proximity of the voices. I characterize this as a counter-listening device, serving as an interface for engaging with incomprehensibility rather than striving for comprehensibility.

1 Project Description

Outlandish Lullaby is an interactive audiovisual environment composed of spoken and sung voices, environmental sound textures, and real-time audio processing.

Its design intentionally rejects a straightforward decode-and-command logic. Instead of revealing a concealed message, interaction alters the temporal and spatial relationships among the voices. Participants modulate overlap, rhythmic drift, the multilingual voices, and perceived depth, navigating through dynamic zones of proximity and distance.

This design choice is intentional: participants may influence the atmosphere, yet they cannot reduce it to a singular, fully intelligible stream.

Within the context of NIME, this approach challenges the assumption that effective interaction must always be precise, transparent, and oriented toward mastery. In this context, ambiguity does not signify a lack of rigor. Rather, it serves as a methodological approach to cultivate attention, humility, and ethical proximity without appropriating what remains unfamiliar.

For alt.NIME, I am submitting this work as both artistic practice and theoretical argument: an installation accompanied by a critical framework exploring the potential of listening when understanding is partial.

At alt.NIME 2026, the work will be presented in two parts: a one-minute lightning talk during the alt.NIME session, followed by an installation at the poster/demo session. During the lightning talk, a

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brief overview of the piece's conceptual foundation will be introduced — specifically, the politics of listening and the role of incomprehensibility as a mode of connection rather than failure.

The installation is structured as a guided listening experience. Each visitor receives a brief introduction to the work, then listens as the presenter demonstrates the instrument's components — how each control shapes the rhythmic density, the multilingual voices, and the perceived proximity of each voice. (In shared acoustic environments, headphones will be provided.) Rather than reaching for meaning, visitors are invited to gradually release that effort: the voices become presences rather than messages, and proximity replaces translation as the primary mode of relation.

When participants take over the instrument, the act of adjusting the multilingual voices, the rhythmic density, and the perceived proximity is not about achieving a particular sonic outcome, but about making a series of relational choices without the pressure of full comprehension. The discussion that follows emerges naturally from this experience, circling around questions of familiarity, comfort, and the ethics of listening across difference — returning to the central proposition of the piece: that not-understanding, rather than being a failure of communication, can itself become a form of knowledge and connection.

The installation is designed to accommodate individual visitors or small groups of two to three people at a time, allowing for an intimate and attentive listening experience within the shared space of the poster/demo session.

2 Technical Notes

Proposed format: One-minute lightning talk during the alt.NIME session, followed by an installation at the poster/demo session. The installation includes a guided listening component (approximately one to two minutes) and an open interaction and discussion period.

Equipment provided by presenter: laptop, audio interface, headphones (available for use in shared acoustic environments), and controller/interface for instrument interaction.

Space requirements: table space and a powerstrip.

3 Media Link(s)

- Project page: www.iyou-park.works/featured/outlandish-lullaby
- Video documentation:
 - www.youtube.com/watch?v=pWx3eO4B_Mk
 - www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4Rwf4vVc5Y

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Ethical Standards

Voice materials are artist-produced and/or used with permission. No sensitive personal data is collected during presentation. Participation is voluntary and non-invasive; there is no biometric capture and no covert recording. The project does not claim to represent specific linguistic communities, and it avoids framing linguistic difference as exotic. Its ethical position is grounded in respectful intercultural listening and reflexive positionality.

References

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