

Listening to the Unconscious

1. Introduction

This work was born through my ongoing fascination with the human being's inner experience and that which cannot be easily explained by science or traditional thought systems. Throughout my MA I have repeatedly returned to matters which sit on the edges of rational explanation: Tarot, NDEs, Carl Jung, consciousness, intuition, immersive learning and experiences which are difficult to articulate through language alone.

This project explores my interest in reflective practice at a deeper and more personal level through the medium of sound. I became interested in what might happen when an individual is guided, with the aid of my voice and quartz crystal singing bowls, then invited to create an image without consciously planning what that image should look like.

Through a series of experiments using the singing bowls combined with further research into psychological and meditative creative practices (Henriksen, et al., 2020), my research question gradually developed:

How can meditative listening generate symbolic imagery, and what might this reveal about the relationship between sound and the unconscious mind?

This project does not attempt to prove that a particular image has been elicited from an objective 'unconscious mind' and it's not claiming that singing bowls give exclusive access to these realms. Instead, I am using Jungian ideas as a conceptual framework to investigate our human ability to relinquish control of the thinking mind and explore the creative value of doing so to bring forth spontaneous imagery. This practice-led exploration can then open doors for further interpretation.

My contribution to the final exhibition consisted of an eight-minute prerecorded sound meditation combining my own voice as guidance with quartz crystal singing bowls (Lawes-Davies, 2026). I originally intended to deliver the experience as a live workshop, however, coordination for this proved difficult and with the nature of the exhibition being over a week-long period it meant that not everybody who attended the exhibition would be able to participate. With this in mind, I decided to adapt my offering to still incorporate the participatory element of the work and create a pre-recorded format which could reach a wider audience. I borrowed high quality recording equipment from the sound department at UWTSD (Lawes-Davies, 2026) and spent a day experimenting with the technicalities of recording to produce my final piece which could offer a consistent listening experience. Following the meditation participants were invited to respond creatively on a specially designed drawing sheet using the prompt, "What picture wants to be born through me?" They were encouraged not to worry about making something beautiful or understandable, but to allow colours, lines, shapes, symbols or images to move through the hand and onto the page.

Seven drawings were produced (Lawes-Davies, 2026). Some were recognisable and figurative, including turtles, a lotus-like flower and organic animal forms. Others were abstract, including spirals, repeated marks, radiating lines and a large inverted black triangle. Where participants

completed written reflections, words included calmness, groundedness, expansion, aura, warmth, quietness and freedom. The diversity of these responses became important. The same experience created a shared condition for seven individual and mostly unrelated visual responses, it did not produce one common image.

This report reflects on the development of the project from Jungian research and artist references through experiments with cymatics, generative AI, sound recording, meditation and participatory drawing. A central turning point occurred when my attempt to make sound physically visible through cymatics did not work as expected (Lawes-Davies, 2026). The failure redirected the enquiry, so instead of asking how sound could make an image in physical matter, I began to ask what image might emerge through a human listener. This created a shift within my work - from controlling a desired outcome to creating conditions for an outcome to be spontaneously born.

2. Jung and inner imagery

Carl Jung has been a recurring point of reference throughout my MA because his work offers a way of thinking about images that emerge from inner experience rather than solely through conscious intention. This became particularly relevant through my research into *The Red Book*, which brings together writing, image-making, visionary encounters and reflection as part of Jung's exploration of his own psychological experience. Fertel (Fertel, 2017) interprets *The Red Book* as an improvisational process and argues that its importance lies partly in Jung's willingness to move beyond rational consciousness and allow images to arise instinctively. This idea of receptivity became extremely important to me as my ideas developed.

What interested me was that Jung's images were not just illustrations of ideas that had already been rationally formulated. Instead, image-making became part of the process through which inner experience could be explored. Fertel (Fertel, 2017) describes this as an improvisational quality within *The Red Book*, where Jung does not decide in advance what will emerge. This connects with my own movement away from trying to control the visual outcome of the project.

Jung's concept of active imagination provided a further connection between his work and my own. Active imagination involves engaging with images and emotions that arise spontaneously. McNiff (McNiff, 2013) discusses how Jung's active imagination draws attention to the role that creative processes can play in giving form to psychological experience. Fertel (Fertel, 2017) also connects active imagination with improvisation and suggests a form of knowing that allows greater space for non-rational experience.

I would not describe my eight-minute sound meditation as a formal Jungian active-imagination exercise, this would require a much longer process with extensive research to gain a deeper understanding of Jungian psychology. However, the broader idea of creating space in which images might arise without being consciously predetermined was important. It encouraged me to think about imagination as something we not only consciously manufacture, but as something we can become receptive to.

This became central to the structure of *Listening to the Unconscious*. In conventional art-making I might begin with an idea, decide what I want to communicate and then select materials to

represent it. In this project I deliberately disrupted that sequence. The participant first listened, then noticed, then drew, and only afterwards was invited to reflect. Delaying interpretation was important because I wanted to reduce the pressure to decide what an image should mean before it had been made. In this sense, my methodology developed a likeness to the improvisational quality Fertel (Fertel, 2017) relays, where the outcome was not fully known in advance.

This changed the way I approached symbolic imagery. Jung's work takes images and symbols seriously as definitive aspects of psychological experience, but I became increasingly cautious about treating symbols as if they possessed one universal meaning. It would have been easy to take the turtles, spirals, flowers, water, geometric forms and inverted triangle within the participant drawings and search for predetermined Jungian interpretations. However, doing so would risk imposing my theoretical interests onto somebody else's experience, which could potentially devalue the person's own ideas. And so, Jung's influence became not so much about decoding the image but about creating conditions in which the image could be encountered and taken as a starting point for further conversations.

For this reason, the participant's own association became more important to me than finding a meaning within a symbolic dictionary. Rather than asking, *What does a turtle symbolise?* I became more interested in asking, *What does this turtle mean to the person who drew it?* The image becomes the beginning of an enquiry rather than its conclusion. Questions such as *What does this image mean to you? Why might this particular colour, symbol or form have appeared? What does it bring to mind?* allow interpretation to remain open and relational.

Returning to Jung has also helped me recognise a continuity running throughout my MA. My earlier research into Tarot and near-death experiences may initially appear very different from a project involving singing bowls and drawing, but each returns to a similar concern: how do people create meaning around experiences that are difficult to contain within ordinary rational explanation? What forms and symbols do we turn towards when language feels insufficient?

3. Artist research

Hilma af Klint became a significant influence on this project because her work demonstrates how abstraction, geometry, colour and spirituality can coexist within a single artistic practice (Lawes-Davies, 2026). Her large-scale paintings combine vivid colour, abstract forms and symbolic patterns, whilst being deeply connected to esoteric spirituality and Theosophy (Week, 2016). I was particularly drawn to her idea of art-making as a receptive process. Af Klint believed that some of her visionary paintings were "dictated" to her by spirits and her sketchbooks also incorporated forms of automatic writing (Week, 2016). I became interested in what this approach suggests about relinquishing conscious control and becoming receptive to imagery that has not been predetermined in the thinking mind. This resonated strongly with my own developing interest in allowing an image to emerge. Af Klint's practice gave me permission to consider intuition and spirituality as legitimate areas of artistic enquiry.

Emma Kunz was relevant for related reasons. Her geometric drawings were created through a distinctive process in which she used a pendulum over graph paper, marking points where its movement changed and connecting these points using a ruler. Cavallo (Cavallo, 2023) states that

this process can be understood not simply as intuitive or esoteric image-making, but as a systematic method of recording movement and translating it into geometric form. Kunz's drawings are intriguing, bringing together intuition, pattern, measurement and visualisation (Cavallo, 2023). I began to think about geometry not simply as decoration, but as a possible trace of movement or an attempt to give visual form to the unseen.

Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn provided me with another important connection between Jungian thought and symbolic imagery. Fröbe-Kapteyn worked closely with Jung and travelled through major libraries and collections during the 1930s and 1940s, assembling approximately 6,000 mythological, ritualistic and symbolic images from different cultures and historical periods, forming what became the Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism (Higgie, 2026). Her own artistic practice also explored the relationship between inner experience and visual form. Between 1926 and 1934 she produced a series of *meditation drawings*, referencing forms like planets, pyramids and mandalas and combining them with abstraction and sacred geometry (Higgie, 2026). This was particularly relevant to my enquiry because it offered another example of an artist attempting to give visual form to experiences and ideas that are not obvious.

Zarah Hussain gave me a more contemporary inspiration point for exploration. Her practice embraces both science and spirituality, combining traditional hand-drawn Islamic geometry with contemporary digital technologies (Gallery, 2021). Her installation *Invisible Threads* uses an ever-changing geometric design capable of producing numerous colour combinations (Gallery, 2021). This relationship between repetition and visually fluid and changing geometry began to make me think about how repeated forms might create a visual sense of rhythm or movement, and how that might work in connection with the resonant sounds of the singing bowls. Hussain's work inspired me to think of how a sound experience might be translated through repetition, line, pattern and rhythm.

Across these artists, I became very interested in art as a material trace of an internal, spiritual encounter. This shifted my direction away from thinking that the purpose of the project was to represent singing bowls themselves. The bowls could instead function as a stimulus or condition. The visual work might then be produced through the encounter between sound and listener.

4. Cymatics

Cymatics was an important practical influence because it offers a direct answer to my interest in making sound visible. Sound cannot ordinarily be seen, yet vibration can move physical material. Cymatic experiments make that movement apparent through patterns formed in substances such as sand or liquid. I was fascinated by the possibility that an invisible vibration could organise matter into a visible structure.

My first experiments were deliberately simple. I used a metal baking tray with a speaker beneath it and experimented with sand and water (Lawes-Davies, 2026). I hoped that different tones or frequencies might generate recognisable cymatic patterns. The results were disappointing. I could produce movement, but not the clear geometric formations I had imagined from the cymatic

imagery I had encountered in research. This forced me to confront the gap between an appealing concept and the technical conditions required to produce it.

I immediately started to investigate more specialist equipment. I researched Chladni plates and contacted the university sound department (Lawes-Dvaies, 2026). The equipment required for controlled experiments was far more specialised and expensive than my improvised setup. There was discussion about the possibility of constructing a Chladni plate, but then I learned that a previous student had attempted something similar which was unsuccessful. At this point I could have continued to pursue the technical task of assembling the plate, but I began to question whether building a successful cymatics apparatus was actually the central aim of my project.

This was one of the most productive failures in the project. The experiment did not give me the visual outcome I wanted, but it showed me the deeper attraction behind the experiment. I was less interested in cymatics as a scientific demonstration than I was in the idea that something invisible could leave a visible trace. Once I recognised this, the enquiry really started to take shape.

The failure also made me question my desire to control the result! In the cymatics experiment, I wanted to select a frequency and obtain a pattern. The process was attractive partly because it suggested a direct chain of events: sound produces vibration, vibration moves matter, matter forms image. My later participatory work is much less certain. Sound enters a human experience that is shaped by memory, mood, expectation, attention and imagination. The resulting drawing cannot be treated as a direct diagram of a frequency - this confronted my desire to control outcomes.

5. Visual experiment with Generative AI

During the development of the project, I also experimented with generative AI as a way of producing visual responses to the seven notes or frequencies associated with the singing bowls (Lawes-Davies, 2016). The images were visually precise, intricate and offered me an immediate solution to the problem of visualising sound. This reflects one of the benefits of generative AI in creative practice - allowing ideas to be explored and developed quickly (Wu, et al., 2026).

However, the ease of producing these images also created a problem. An AI-generated image can look like a visual representation of sound, even though it has been created from the information and instructions given to the AI. This made me question what the image actually represented. It was not a physical cymatic record or a participant's personal response to the sound. It was simply an AI interpretation of my uploaded recording and written prompts.

This was useful because it gave me a distinction between an image that looks convincing and an image that emerges from an experience. I realised that I was more interested in the process of how an image came into being than in producing an attractive geometric result. The AI experiment definitely helped me clarify my intentions and redirect me.

It also made me think about authorship. If AI creates the image, who is the artist: the person giving the instructions or the AI itself? This question continued into my final exhibition in a different way. I created and recorded the meditation and designed the drawing activity, while the participants

created the images. The final work wasn't about me creating a finished artwork, it was about creating the conditions for others to produce their own visual responses.

6. Crystal Bowls

After the cymatic and AI experiments, I returned to the quartz crystal singing bowls. Initially, I had been interested in frequencies and in the possibility of translating those frequencies visually. I then began to focus on what it feels like to listen to sustained resonance in the body and in a quiet space.

I began to think about listening as an active creative state, the sound of the bowls creating a feeling and the gaps between sounds then creating space for attention to move inward.

Experiments in the Reading Room helped me consider atmosphere, pacing and the relationship between sound and space (Lawes-Davies, 2026). I developed a guided meditation that did not instruct participants to imagine a particular landscape or object. This was a deliberate methodological decision. If I asked participants to picture the sea and they later drew water, I would have predetermined the response. Instead, the guidance focused on settling the body, noticing sound, allowing colours, shapes, memories or symbols to arise and accepting that nothing might appear at all.

The central invitation became: "What picture wants to be born through me?" I liked this phrase because it positioned drawing as a receptive response. Participants did not need to prove that they could draw. They were not asked to create a successful artwork. They were invited to notice and translate.

7. My Manifesto

Writing a manifesto helped me articulate values that had been emerging through the practical work. The project was becoming less concerned with proving a theory and more concerned with creating a space for listening, intuition and uncertainty. The manifesto allowed me to state these ideas in a different register from academic analysis.

The act of writing it was important because it made me consider what I was prepared to stand for within my practice. I was increasingly drawn to slowing down, listening, allowing ambiguity and resisting the pressure to explain an image immediately. These values connected to my Jungian research but also extended beyond it. They became principles for how I wanted to work.

The manifesto therefore operated as both an artwork and a methodological checkpoint. It showed me that the project was no longer primarily about the technical phenomenon of singing-bowl frequencies. It was becoming a broader enquiry into receptivity. In future development, I would like to revisit the manifesto and test whether the values it declares are actually visible in the way that I'm working.

8. Exhibition experience

My original intention was to facilitate the sound meditation live. A live session appealed to me because the physical presence of the bowls combined with the acoustics in the reading room would allow participants to experience their resonance directly and would also allow me to respond intuitively to the group. In practice, however, coordinating participants within the exhibition context was difficult. The unpredictability of people, timing and availability made it hard to guarantee a shared live workshop.

This practical difficulty became another point of adaptation. Instead of treating the inability to coordinate a live group as a failure, I considered what a prerecorded version could offer. A recording would allow each participant to encounter the same eight-minute structure. It would also make the work repeatable and accessible at different times.

I borrowed high-quality recording equipment from the university sound department. This technical support mattered because the sound quality was part of the artwork. A poor phone recording would have flattened the resonance of the bowls and made the voice feel incidental. Recording with appropriate equipment allowed me to pay greater attention to clarity, depth, pacing and the relationship between spoken guidance and sustained tones.

The final MP3 was approximately eight minutes long. The duration was a compromise. It needed to be long enough for participants to settle and shift attention inward, but short enough to function realistically within an exhibition. I used my voice to guide participants into a relaxed state, then left space for the bowls and silence. I tried to avoid over-directing the imagery. The meditation suggested that colours, shapes, textures, memories or symbols might arise but repeatedly emphasised that there was nothing participants had to see.

The drawing sheet extended the meditation into material practice. It instructed participants to remain quiet briefly after listening, to let go of making something beautiful or understandable and to allow the first colours, lines, shapes, symbols or images to move through the hand and onto the page. The large drawing area was followed by a small reflection section asking how the meditation made them feel and what words came to mind.

9. Participant Drawings

The exhibition produced seven participant drawings. Taken together, they form the clearest material outcome of the participatory stage. I found it important to look first at what is visibly present and what participants actually wrote before moving toward interpretation.

One drawing contains a lotus-like flower rising from water alongside a long-necked bird-like form, repeated droplets, lily-pad shapes and a geometric pattern below the water line. The participant described feeling “grounded in calmness” and wrote the words “expansion” and “aura.” The image combines recognisable natural forms with repetition and pattern.

A second drawing is dominated by a strong red form against layered blue horizontal marks. The red shape can be read visually as tree-like, flame-like or as something emerging, but the participant’s own response is more important than my projection. Their reflection includes calmness, quietness

and warmth, and refers to a feeling “like fire” and to a red fish emerging through water. This response is particularly interesting because it suggests a moving sequence of internal imagery rather than a single static object.

A third drawing contains multiple turtle-like figures in a floating environment with a sun and surrounding forms. The written reflection describes the mind being in a faraway place and eventually arriving at “turtles flying in the sky.” The drawing is playful and recognisable.

A fourth response is more abstract. A central linear structure is surrounded by blue radiating lines, yellow marks and repeated pink spiral forms. The participant describes a calm, familiar feeling and associates the sound with something like raindrops. Here the image seems less like an illustration of a single object and more like a translation of rhythm and direction.

A fifth drawing is organised around a large spiral constructed from blue, yellow and darker repeated lines. There is little or no written reflection. The spiral is visually striking, but the absence of participant commentary is important. I can describe its repetition and movement toward a centre point but will not assign any psychological meaning without the participant’s input.

A sixth drawing uses flowing purple outlines, pale blue and peach curved marks and smaller crescent-like forms. It appears organic, but it is not clearly identifiable. Again, this ambiguity is useful.

The project did not only produce conventional symbols or recognisable scenes. Some participants responded through rhythmic pattern and form.

The seventh drawing is dominated by a large inverted black triangle surrounded by repeated small purple and orange forms. It has no written reflection. It differs strongly from the softer natural imagery in some of the other responses. Its presence prevents an overly simple conclusion that the meditation merely produced peaceful nature scenes. The same listening structure could be followed by dense, geometric and bold imagery.

Across the seven drawings, recurring qualities can be observed - water or fluid movement appears in several responses. Natural or living forms appear repeatedly. Spirals, repeated marks, geometry and radiating lines also occur. Where participants wrote about their feelings, calmness and related states are prominent. These patterns are suggestive, but the sample is too small and the method too exploratory to treat them as generalisable findings.

10. Reflection

Rowland (Rowland, 2010) discusses Jung’s understanding of the unconscious as a source of creativity and mystery and talks of the importance of symbolic forms in approaching aspects of the psyche that cannot be held purely within rational explanation. This helped me reconsider my approach - rather than attempting to explain what each drawing meant, I began to see the images as starting points for reflection.

Not every spontaneous drawing or encounter with inner imagery can be assumed to constitute Jungian active imagination (Schaverien, 2025). Although my meditation encouraged participants to notice colours, forms, memories or images as they arose and then respond intuitively through drawing, I don't claim that this was a formal active imagination workshop. The Jungian ideas provided a framework for me to observe the imagery and then decide to leave the interpretation element open.

I noticed similar forms across the participant drawings, including spirals, water, geometric patterns and natural imagery. Although there were similarities, I do not assume that they had the same meaning for each person. For example, one participant's turtles may have had a very different meaning from another participant's circular or organic forms. Instead of treating the drawings as evidence of a shared meaning, I see them as starting points for conversation. This has sparked my interest on what participants might say about their own drawings rather than giving the images a fixed interpretation.

11. What the work said

One of the most useful reflective questions for this module is: when did the work start speaking back to me? Looking across the project, I think this happened when the cymatics experiment failed to produce the patterns I expected.

Before that point, I was trying to make the project conform to an idea. I was fascinated by cymatic imagery and wanted to reproduce the phenomenon. I imagined that the successful outcome would be a visible geometric pattern generated by sound. When the improvised tray, speaker, sand and water did not produce that result, I initially saw a technical problem. I needed better equipment, a Chladni plate or a more controlled setup.

The deeper shift occurred when I questioned why I wanted the pattern in the first place. The answer was not simply that cymatics looked beautiful. I was interested in the transformation of something invisible into something visible. Once I understood that, the work could move away from a literal cymatics demonstration.

The AI experiment reinforced this realisation. AI could give me beautiful sound-inspired geometry almost instantly, but the speed of the result made the absence of lived experience more obvious. I did not just want an image that looked as though it represented sound. I wanted to understand what might happen through listening.

At that point, the human listener became the responsive material of the project. In cymatics, vibration leaves a trace in matter. In my final work, an encounter with sound is followed by a trace made through drawing.

The failure and uncertainty was not a weakness in the project but worked as the mechanisms through which the project developed. The practical problems of cymatics and the difficulty of coordinating a live workshop both forced decisions that ultimately shaped the enquiry.

12. Conclusion

Listening to the Unconscious began with a desire to make sound visible. My early interest in cymatics attempted a direct physical model in which vibration could organise matter into pattern. Through experimentation and technical difficulty that model became less important than the underlying question: how might an invisible experience leave a visible trace?

Jung's work, particularly *The Red Book* and the broader idea of embracing spontaneous imagery, provided a conceptual framework for considering the relationship between internal experience and image-making. Artist research into Hilma af Klint, Emma Kunz, Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn and Zarah Hussain further developed my interest in geometry, symbolism, spirituality, repetition and visual systems. The AI experiment then exposed the difference between generating an image that looks related to sound and creating a process in which imagery emerges through experience.

The final exhibition work brought these strands together through an eight-minute prerecorded sound meditation and intuitive drawing activity. Seven participants listened to the same sound work but produced markedly different images. Some were recognisable and organic; others were geometric or abstract. Several written reflections referred to calmness, grounding, warmth, expansion or imaginative movement. These responses demonstrate the creative potential of meditative listening as a condition for intuitive image-making.

The most significant development in my practice was methodological - I moved from trying to produce the image myself to designing the conditions in which an image could emerge through somebody else. Authorship became distributed between my recorded work, the internal, intuitive experience and the participant's drawings.

I can now describe the evolution of the project through two sequences. The original enquiry was sound to matter to image. The final enquiry became sound to listener to inner experience to image to drawn marks on paper.

This has changed how I think about creative practice - I am becoming more interested in what happens when making begins with stillness and listening rather than with a predetermined outcome. The phrase "What picture wants to be born through me?" has come to represent this shift. It asks the maker to become receptive and to embrace not knowing.

Future possibilities could include more participants, further documentation of participant associations, comparison between live and recorded bowls, repeated sessions, or different sound environments, follow up sessions to discuss imagery and experience and the development of longer live workshops.

The failed cymatics experiment, the AI imagery, the manifesto, the recording process, the meditation and the seven drawings are not separate experiments. Together they document a movement from a controlled outcome toward listening. That movement may be the most important outcome of the project and the clearest direction for my future practice.

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