

25. Hiss, 34.
26. See P. E. Vernon, "The Ear is Not Enough," in *Pleasures of Music: An Anthology of Writing about Music and Musicians from Cellini to Bernard Shaw*, ed. Jacques Barzun (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 33.
27. Paul Valéry, *Cahiers*, vol. 1, Collection "la Pléiade" (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 1206.
28. Hiss, 3.
29. Rüdiger Liedtke, *Die Vertreibung der Stille: Wie uns das Leben unter der akustischen Glocke um unsere Sinne bringt* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1985).
30. Hanns-Werner Heister, "Music in Concert and Music in the Background: Two Poles of Musical Realization," in *Companion to Contemporary Musical Thought*, vol. 1, eds. John Paynter et al. (London: Routledge, 1992), 66.
31. Louis Lavelle, *The Dilemma of Narcissus*, trans. W. T. Gairdner (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973), 84. See also Paul Valéry, "Le bilan de l'intelligence," in *Oeuvres*, vol. 1, Collection "la Pléiade" (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), 1069-1071.
32. Valéry, *Oeuvres*, 1426. Erik Satie emphatically deplored the eradication of "exquisite and gentle silence" and its replacement with "bad music." Perhaps his own "invention," the *musique d'aneublement*, served not so much as a joke but as a counterbalance to the "silly ritornellos" which, in his opinion, brought nothing but torment and ugliness into human life. See his *Écrits*, ed. Ornella Volta (Paris: Éditions Champ Libre, 1981), 24-25. On the cardinal theme of silence, see Jankélévitch, *La musique et l'ineffable*, 161-190; Steiner, *Errata*, 143-152.
33. See Bernd Riede, "Schadet Musik? Über einige negative Aspekte der Musik in unserer Gesellschaft," *Universitas* 49 (1994): 1183-1190. See also Josef Pieper, "Über Musik. Ansprache während eines Bach-Abends," in *Nur der Liebende singt: Musische Kunst - heute* (Ostfildern bei Stuttgart: Schwabenverlag, 1988), 33.
34. Liedtke, 212.
35. Harry Heft, "High Residential Density and Perceptual-Cognitive Development: An Examination of the Effects of Crowding and Noise in the Home," in *Habitats for Children: The Impacts of Density*, eds. Jochaim F. Wohlwill and Willem van Wliet (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1985), 39-75.
36. Béla Bartók, "Mechanical Music," in *Essays*, ed. Benjamin Suchoff (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1976), 296.
37. Heister, 65.

## Soundscape Works, Listening, and the Touch of Sound

Andra McCartney

Touch is the most personal of the senses. Hearing and touch meet where the lower frequencies of audible sound pass over to tactile vibrations (at about 20 hertz). Hearing is a way of touching at a distance and the intimacy of the first sense is fused with sociability whenever people gather together to hear something special.<sup>1</sup>

- R. Murray Schafer

Several years ago, I attended a college dance - a college that had a large program for the deaf. Some of the most expressive dancers that night were the deaf students. They took their shoes off, and felt the music through the soles of their feet, reaching up to animate their whole bodies in motion. They expressed with their actions what composer R. Murray Schafer writes above: sound is the language of vibration, and we hear this language with more than our ears. David Burrows describes this full-bodied hearing by distinguishing between hearing and seeing a bell:

The ringing reaches me with the intimacy of a touch, and this intensifies the feeling of self-confirmation. To see the bell I must turn toward it and focus on it, reach out myself and touch it with my attention; and nothing would be easier than to withdraw my touch by shutting my eyes or looking away. The sound, like the touch of a hand moved by a will other than my own, is not so easily ignored: I cannot shut non-existent earlids. And sound goes beyond touch, which respects the perimeter of my skin, and beyond its degree of intimacy in seeming to be going on within me as much as around me.<sup>2</sup>

Hearing is done not only with the ears, but also with every fibre of our beings as vibrations of sound move into our bodies. Sound touches us, inside and out. And this feeling of being touched by sound is heightened by technology: when microphones amplify and record sounds, they not only involve the ears, but also every other part of the body.

### Soundwalks in Research, Public Education, and Sound Art

A soundwalk is an exploration of, and an attempt to understand, the sociopolitical and sonic resonances of a particular location via the act of listening. Soundwalks originated

as a research tool by the World Soundscape Project, a team at Simon Fraser University in the 1970s led by Schafer. Travelling to various towns and villages in Canada and Europe, they sought to measure and record sonic environments. Each research expedition began with a soundwalk to orient the team to the area. However, these soundwalks were not recorded, nor were their results discussed specifically in the resulting documents. The role of soundwalks seemed restricted to orientation only.

Later, a member of that research team, composer Hildegard Westerkamp, recorded soundwalks in the region around Vancouver. Her aim was different: she wanted to sensitize listeners to their immediate environment by playing it on community radio.<sup>3</sup> Her involvement with Vancouver Cooperative Radio gave Westerkamp a place to actualize ideas about sound ecology, particularly through her show *Soundwalking*. She took listeners to various locations in their immediate area, then played back the sounds of these environments, framing and contextualizing them with on-air commentary. Sometimes, as in a program about Lighthouse Park, she would read excerpts of writings (in this case, Emily Carr). The shows often made a political point acoustically. For instance, in *Under the Flightpath* (1981), roaring jets can be heard as long-term residents claim that they don't even notice the planes.

For Westerkamp, the main element of a soundwalk is not only orientation, but also dialogue and composition. It is possible to use a soundwalk for orientation when in an unknown environment, as a mariner would use sounding to understand unknown waters:

[G]o for an orientation walk in the city, any city, asking people for directions. Besides not getting lost that way, you will also get to know a little of the character of a city by listening to the way people answer. Listen to the sounds and melodies in their voices, listen for accents.<sup>4</sup>

Dialogue can involve responding to the call of a bird or animal, finding echoes in landscape formations and building structures. Both orientation and dialogue are necessary for the third element – soundwalk composition:



Andra McCartney  
*Textures*, 1998  
From the on-line interactive  
project *The River*  
[www.eartheat.com](http://www.eartheat.com)  
Courtesy the artist

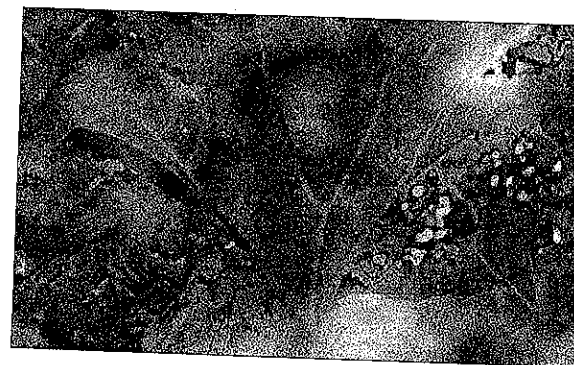
Go out and listen. Choose an acoustic environment which in your opinion sets a good base for your environmental compositions. In the same way as the architect acquaints himself with the landscape into which he wants to integrate the shape of a house, so we must get to know the main characteristics of the soundscape into which we want to immerse our own sounds. What kinds of rhythms does it contain, what kinds of pitches, how many continuous sounds, how many and what kinds of discrete sounds, etc.? Which sounds can you produce that add to the quality of the environmental music? Create a dialogue and thereby lift the environmental sounds out of their context into the context of your composition, and in turn make your sounds a natural part of the music around you. Is it possible?<sup>5</sup>

Westerkamp sometimes uses soundwalks as the basis of compositions – as in *Kits Beach Soundwalk* (1989) – and sometimes uses stationary field recordings, usually recorded herself. Either way, she always seems present in the work. To hear one of Westerkamp's compositions is to be drawn into her evocation of an acoustic environment, to feel her presence, and to experience her relationships with different sonic events.

#### Touching Sound Through Amplification

From the earliest days of sound recording, practitioners and theorists remarked upon the heightening of sound through touch and, conversely, touch through sound when using microphones. Pierre Schaeffer was one of the earliest composers to work with tape recordings of "concrete" sounds in Paris during the 1940s. Schaeffer described his recording technique in terms of using his fingers as if they were sound-sensing devices, extensions of his ears:

It is necessary to fasten the mike to the tip of the fingers, and that everything one experiences reach the mike and be formulated by the mike.... This is the musical exercise par excellence.<sup>6</sup>



Andra McCartney  
*Elephant Skin Plant*,  
1998-2000  
From the interactive art-  
work *Soundwalking*  
*Queen Elizabeth Park*  
Courtesy the artist

With the variety of microphone types and pickup patterns available today, it is possible to go further with this exercise of extending the placement of artificial ears. Microphones, for instance, can be attached to headphones, creating a listening perspective similar to one's own ears, with breathing sounds particularly present. If placed near the belt, it is as if the navel has grown ears. Other parts of the body will facilitate other perspectives. With a stereo microphone, monitored on headphones, listening can be extended to places that one's hands and legs cannot reach. Leaning over the edge of the pier, a microphone can be dropped down to water level, allowing the ears to focus on the sounds of water approaching as the cable descends. If the microphone enters a drainage pipe, listening can become metallic, resonant, echoing.

Schaeffer's compositional process often unfolded directly from the experience of recording:

Always [put] the mike at the tip of the fingers, and [let each] "thought," each movement of the back of the throat, of the cerebellum be transcribed into suitable sounds on tape by the mike. Formul[ing] as one goes along....<sup>7</sup>

This is similar to the way I observed Westerkamp doing soundwalk recording. Rather than beginning with a defined objective (except that of listening), she reacted to interesting sounds, allowing her movements to be affected by events as they happened. During a soundwalk in Vancouver's Queen Elizabeth Park, an airplane passed overhead, with its characteristic falling glissando. Westerkamp guided the microphone towards the air vents of a nearby building, timing her motion so that in one continuous gesture the sound of the airplane was swallowed by the rising amplitude of the broadband vent sound.

While Schaeffer was aware of a heightened sense of touch during the recording process, his works did not maintain this link to textures and surfaces. He developed a compositional process that attempted to sever sounds from their sources by removing the attack of the sound, or processing it to limit its anecdotal properties. He removed the sounds' connections with everyday existence, which he increasingly understood as being deficient. In contrast, some composers who work with recorded sounds are particularly interested in transmitting a sense of their experience of a place, a trace of their presence, to the listener. Composer and theorist Katharine Norman refers to this as "realworld" composing. In her description of the work of composer Michel Redolfi, Norman emphasizes how it is possible to keep in touch with an environment audibly:

In his recordings the sounds from the California desert are at times inseparably fused with the signs of his intervention: sounds travel as he moves the microphone about, we hear the sound of the microphone being handled, scrunching gravel, a rock moved and replaced. In fact all the natural but tell-tale signs of a mediating human being who, in this quest for the "desert tone," literally scratches the surface to activate aurally reticent surroundings.<sup>8</sup>

In a section of one of my own multimedia pieces, *Soundwalking Queen Elizabeth Park* (1998-2000), sound is particularly linked to the sense of touch. *Elephant Skin Plant* features a sound excerpt based on a close-miked recording of my finger stroking the leaf of this impressively large and statuesque plant, a stroke that took about fourteen seconds. The microphone, held in the hand, amplified the contact with the plant's surface, allowing the monitoring of sounds normally inaudible as well as intensifying the experience of touch. At the same time, the finger felt the textures of the surface, in this case rough, prickly, and bumpy. This biofeedback loop led to a heightened perception of both senses, through their interlinked association with each other. I eventually slowed the sound down during the composition stage, in order to hear the intricacies of the leaf's topography in more detail. This process of slowing sound increases the sensation of tactility: the bumps and ridges become much more evident. Tactile exploration, remarks Constance Classen, finds pleasure in gradual revelation, in "making sense of something not all at once, but in stages."<sup>9</sup> After layering various speeds of sound, filtering the frequencies to emphasize the finger's bumpy journey from stem to tip, I then scanned a single photograph of the leaf, and zoomed in close, focusing first on one part, then another, making sense of the whole through a close examination of different areas - adding vision to the fusion of tactility and sound.<sup>10</sup>

#### Presence, Place, and Engagement

A soundwalk is an improvisation with the sounds of a place. While saxophones and bongo drums are playing instruments, a microphone is primarily a listening instrument. Whereas a jazz improviser works with melodic and rhythmic lines and harmonic progressions, a soundwalk recordist improvises with perspective, motion, and proximity. In a jazz solo, it is possible to hear how intimately the soloist knows the other members of the band, how well he or she can anticipate their progressions, the energy that is born of surprises in the way the band works together. In a soundwalk recording, it is partly how well recordists know a place that determines a recording's success. Can they anticipate the weather? Do they know the environment well enough to plan a walk at a time when particularly interesting sonic juxtapositions occur? And then there are the surprises: an unusual sound occurs, out of the blue. Can presuppositions be let go of to deal with this new situation? The power and subtlety of a good soundwalk recording depends on the ability to respond to a sound environment actively and with full agency, and to remain in constant dialogue.

Soundwalks, however, are not innocent encounters. Using focus and perspective, it is possible to alter the dynamic hierarchy of sounds within a place. The microphone allows the recordist to discover and attend to the subtle sonic emanations of very small sounds. Often masked or too quiet to be heard normally, these sounds can be elevated into audibility. Their social significance may be heightened or altered dramatically. Soundwalks thus record a specific interaction with a place, one in which the microphone constructs a particular experience, and within which the recordist's motion remains

audible. These sounds trace the movements of everyday life, and are predicated on an ethics of place. Often soundwalks take place in busy urban areas. In order to avoid using sound recordings as a means of surveillance, it is important for the recordist to turn away from passing conversations, focus on the background ambience, and treat all recorded sounds with respect. To this way of thinking, the recording process is less like a mining of the sound environment, or a capturing of sounds for later manipulation, than a gleaning of unnoticed ambiences to be brought into active awareness.<sup>11</sup>

What is the source of the attraction to tracing one's movements through precise locales? I believe it is due to the holding power of places. For philosopher Edward Casey, the power of places is based on a combination of memory and novelty:

Minimally, places gather things in their midst – where “things” connote various animate and inanimate entities. Places also gather experiences and histories, even languages and thoughts. Think only of what it means to go back to a place you know, finding it full of memories and expectations, old things and new things, the familiar and the strange, and much more besides. What else is capable of this massively diversified holding action?<sup>12</sup>

Casey speaks of returning to places one knows, and Westerkamp's recorded soundwalks were initially played back to people who probably knew those particular sites. Her community radio listening audience could easily get into a car or bus, or even walk to where the recordings had been done. While she utilized electronic technology in the sound recordings, the broadcasting maintained an emphasis on the local. Westerkamp has since created soundscape compositions that speak of particular places and distributes them on CD for international audiences, yet wonders about the meaning and importance of such works to people in quite different environments. Such dispersed production and presentation tends to radically dislocate sounds from their sources, flinging them across the globe. To what extent do places continue to have meaning and holding power when heard in other, disparate locales?

The aim of soundwalks is to maintain presence and proximity in a work that takes a sound experience out of context, shorn from its original moorings in a particular place. Regardless of distance, soundwalks do maintain a level of presence. For those who have been to the soundwalk locations, it often leads to recollections of their visits. Others are reminded of places in their experience that were similar. It is sometimes the sense of human presence that is meaningful – a number of listeners remark on the feeling as if they were walking with the recordist, a form of sonic companionship. Often it is the emphasis on everyday sounds that is a revelation, causing people to listen differently in their daily lives. For some, it engenders an urge to begin like-minded activities and practice soundwalking themselves.

The contrast between visual and aural experience, and how it affects one's relationship to the landscape, is vividly conveyed by Constance Classen's discussion of

a scene in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. An individual standing in a park, seeing but unseen, dominates the space with his or her gaze until someone else enters. Authority is then displaced as the viewer becomes an object seen by another. But for someone who is blind, Classen notes, the situation is different. A blind person alone in a park would hear nothing outside of his or her own sounds. But when movement and activity commence, the world emerges into being. This changes the situation from one of domination to one of engagement:

The world thus exists for the listener not as a stable scene, but as a dynamic sequence of sounds. It is too changeable, too transient, to be dominated – as one dominates a landscape through sight – it can only be attended to and engaged with.<sup>13</sup>

A soundwalker's engagement with the landscape is at once sonic, tactile, and kinaesthetic. It is defined through what is heard of others' sounds, through interactions with the surroundings, and by the recordist's own movements. Amplification translates the subtlety of touch into an audible play with surfaces and textures. In soundscape works, traces of tactility are embedded that help to link distant and everyday places. They explore auditory experiences and memories of natural and urban environments, and attend to and reflect upon the depth of daily rituals.

#### NOTES

1. R. Murray Schafer, *The Tuning of the World* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977), 11.
2. David Burrows, *Sound, Speech and Music* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), 15–16.
3. Hildegard Westerkamp, “The Soundscape on Radio,” in *Radio Rethink: Art, Sound and Transmission*, eds. Daina Augaitis and Dan Lander (Banff: Walter Phillips Gallery Editions, 1994), 87–94.
4. Hildegard Westerkamp, “Soundwalking,” *Sound Heritage* 3:4 (1974): 25. For more information on Westerkamp, see Andra McCartney, “Soundwalk in the Park with Hildegard Westerkamp,” *Musicworks* 72 (autumn 1998): 6–15, and McCartney, *Sounding Places with Hildegard Westerkamp*, Electronic Music Foundation Website, <www.emf.org/artists/mccartney00/> .
5. Westerkamp, “Soundwalking,” 25.
6. Pierre Schaeffer quoted in Carlos Palombini, “Technology and Pierre Schaeffer: Pierre Schaeffer's Arts-Relais, Walter Benjamin's *technische Reproduzierbarkeit* and Martin Heidegger's *Ge-stell*,” *Organized Sound* 3:1 (1998): 3.
7. Schaeffer quoted in Palombini, 4.
8. Katharine Norman, “Telling Tales,” *Contemporary Music Review* 10:2 (1994): 106.
9. Constance Classen, *The Color of Angels: Cosmology, Gender, and the Aesthetic Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 148.
10. For other work, see Andra McCartney, *Le terroir sonore du phare Lachinois* (2000), <www.givideo.org> and “Soundwalking Blue Montréal,” *Soundscape: The Journal of Acoustic Ecology* 1:2 (winter 2000): 28–29, <www.andrasound.org> .
11. Agnes Varda, *The Gleaners and I* (Paris: Ciné-Tamaris, Zeitgeist Video, 2001).
12. Edward Casey, “How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena,” in *Senses of Place*, eds. Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 1996), 24.
13. Classen, 142.