



SOUNDWALKING

What is a Soundwalk?

- Hildegard Westerkamp, a founding member of the World Soundscape Project and an early proponent of soundwalking and soundscape composition, positions a soundwalk as “any excursion whose main purpose is listening to the environment. It is exposing our ears to every sound around us no matter where we are” (2007: 49).
- Andra McCartney further defines soundwalking as a “creative and research practice that involves listening and sometimes recording while moving through a place at a walking pace. It is concerned with the relationship between soundwalkers and their surrounding sonic environment” (2014: 212).
- Joanna Demers explains how listening and taping sounds can make us aware of the “ecological, social, historical, or cultural dynamics of a specific location, which both personalizes and politicizes the act of listening” (2010: 120).¹

Objective

The objective of this work is to learn how to listen to, reflect on, and critically articulate your experience of the sonic world.

Soundwalk:

1. **Compose a sound walking route :**

- **For our purposes today, make sure that your route includes 4 different “nodes”— basically places where you pause for a few minutes and listen. Your nodes can be inside or outside, or a mix of both.**
- You should do this on your own, though of course you will hear sounds from others!
- Your walk/route should last at least ten minutes, but no more than twenty. [I’ll give a little guidance on exact timing and when we should meet and where].
- You may select a route and location that is familiar to you or one that you have little familiarity with, you can walk inside or outside, or a mix of both.
- a slow to moderate walking pace will help you to focus on listening, with a relaxed frame-of-mind.

¹ Thank you to Kate Galloway for her quotes and frameworks for sound walks; see “Making and Learning with Environmental Sound: Maker Culture, Ecomusicology, and the Digital Humanities in Music History Pedagogy.”

2. Actively Listen: Listen closely and carefully during your soundwalk to the ways in which specific sounds shape, inform, condition, and communicate place.

What function do these sounds play in the soundscape? What would be lost in the soundscape if these sounds were no longer present?

Take some notes as you're walking about what you hear:

- **please note/describe at least 10-15 sounds during your activity this morning.**
- **A sound description should be *detailed*: think about duration, direction, timbre, attack, colorful adjectives.....**

A few tips/things to consider:

"Start by listening to the sounds of your body while moving. They are closest to you and establish the first dialogue between you and the environment. If you can hear even the quietest of these sounds you are moving through an environment which is scaled on human proportions. In other words, with your voice or your footsteps for instance, you are "talking" to your environment which then in turn responds by giving your sounds a specific acoustic quality." (Westerkamp)

- what is the loudest sound you can hear?
- what is the quietest sound you can hear?
- listen for natural sounds
- listen for buildings that - hummmmm
- what are the continuous sounds you hear? What intermittent ones?
- highest pitch? lowest pitch?
- can you hear interesting rhythms?
- What are the sources of the sounds?

3. Map your Soundwalk: During your soundwalk, stop to note the physical source of sounds at your "four nodes" and any other points of sonic interest during your walk. Jot an informal "map" of your walk on a piece of paper and make sure to note what you're hearing at these four moments of sonic interest. If you'd like to, you can take photographs of these sonic interest points.

After completing your sound walk & in discussion with your classmates:

Critically Reflect: If you were to speak (or later write) for a few minutes about your walk, what would you say that describes and analyzes your experience of the soundwalk? Please also think about your informal map of your walk/the location of your route.

What could you talk about?

- Your reaction to the sounds, as well as the reactions of those around you (e.g., members of your group, those who pass by)
- How do you think your listening experiences might differ from those of others?
- What do you think you may pay attention to/hear/notice differently from others? (hearing is not homogeneous—we all notice and hear differently).
- How do the sounds at this route change from one moment in a day to another?
- How did your approach to listening shift or change since the start of this activity?

Your Name:

Map your sound walk:

Descriptions of your 10-15 sounds