

Chapter 6 - Soundwalking as Subjectivity in Environment: Kits Beach Soundwalk

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In the mid-1970s, two events coincided that have changed the way I think about sound: the World Soundscape Project and the founding of Vancouver Co-operative Radio. (Westerkamp 1994: 87)

As a researcher with the World Soundscape Project, directed at Simon Fraser University by R. Murray Schafer, Westerkamp studied the soundscapes of various places in Europe and Canada in terms of their sociological, aesthetic, philosophical, and scientific significance. Also, through her contact with Schafer and his attitudes towards listening, Westerkamp developed her own approaches to listening to the sound environment, including a practice of soundwalking, individually and in groups (see also Chapter Four, pp. 138-142).

Her involvement with Vancouver Co-operative radio gave Westerkamp a place to actualize some of her ideas about sound ecology, particularly through her Soundwalking show. Her intention with the Soundwalking show was to take listeners to various locations in their immediate area, the Vancouver region, then to play back the sounds of these environments to listeners, framing and contextualizing them through on-air commentary. Sometimes, as in a program about Lighthouse Park, she would read excerpts of others' writings (in this case, Emily Carr). The shows often had a political point made acoustically for instance Silent Night contrasts the name of the Christmas carol with the reality of acoustically crowded reverberant shopping malls in the weeks before Christmas, juxtaposing cash registers and holy music; Under the Flightpath repeats the words of residents saying they don't hear the planes any more, with the roaring of jets overhead.

Soundwalks and Composition

In her 1974 article about soundwalking, Westerkamp says that the functions of a soundwalk are orientation, dialogue and composition. We can use a soundwalk for orientation when in an unknown environment, as a mariner would use sounding to understand unknown waters.

Or go 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. (Westerkamp 1974: 25)

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

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? (Westerkamp 1974: 25)

To further understand Westerkamp's approach to soundwalks in composition, I first describe a soundwalk that we did together in Queen Elizabeth Park, Vancouver on August 17, 1997. This description indicates some of the issues that arise about listening, improvisation in response to chance events in the environment, and recording techniques that arise during a soundwalk recording. I then analyze Kits Beach Soundwalk (1989), a piece which Westerkamp describes as a compositional extension of her approach from the radio shows.¹

A Soundwalk in Queen Elizabeth Park

Queen Elizabeth Park, situated close to where Westerkamp lives in Vancouver, is a place that she has visited frequently. It is a landmark of the area, described in tourist brochures as "Vancouver's oasis," containing the city's only tropical garden under the triodetic dome of the Bloedel Conservatory at the highest point of the park (also the highest point in the city), which provides a beautiful view of the urban area and surrounding mountains.

Queen Elizabeth Park is visually extremely attractive. It is a post-card park which captures the eye with such immediacy that the other senses are easily neglected. On this walk however, do not neglect your ears. Listen to the "soundtrack" of the park, and explore how much it harmonizes with your visual impression. (Westerkamp 1974: 21)

I had thought about Queen Elizabeth Park many times, as I read Westerkamp's description of her soundwalk there in 1974. I remembered visiting the park when I was a

teenager, and being astounded by its profusion of flowers. My soundwalk with Westerkamp in 1997 was my first visit to the park since becoming acquainted with her article.

As we moved through the park on that soundwalk, we were connected by our ears. Westerkamp carried a portable DAT recorder and stereo microphone, while I had two still cameras: a good 35 mm., and a lower quality automatic, for surprise moments. I wanted to keep a visual and aural record of our walk, so that I could reflect on it later and make a multimedia presentation.

Being connected by our ears was intensely intimate: we were sharing a private, amplified perspective on the park. Occasionally, I would disconnect my headphones in order to take a photograph, instantly changing the relation. At that point, I no longer shared the auditory connection, and in the process of framing Westerkamp, separated myself from her perspective momentarily before returning. When Westerkamp was doing close-up recording, I took photos without disconnecting. In these cases, I was restricted by the length of the headphone cord just a few feet. I remember this being particularly obvious when we investigated the area around a creek that ran through the park. As I leaned backward to take a photograph, and Westerkamp leaned forward to close-mike the creek, we teetered just on the edge of balance, almost falling more than once, and laughing in our precarious choreography. Somehow, these three positions of listening connection, photographic framing, and framing while listening seem like my relationships to Westerkamp as a composer, a musicological researcher, and as a friend. At times, I am listening with her, at times reflecting on her work to comment on it or frame it from the perspectives of various critical theories, always attempting to balance these perspectives, at times teetering on slippery ground, seeking balance through the choreography of friendly dialogue and laughter.

Our walk took about ninety minutes, generally following the path that Westerkamp had mapped in 1974, through different areas of the park. It was a warm, sunny summer Sunday evening, and there were many visitors enjoying the evening there.

Parking lot area

The most exposed area of the park is the parking lot ... Walk towards the fountains and continue to listen to the city sounds until they disappear behind the sounds of water. (Westerkamp 1974: 21)

We began our walk by the parking lot area, where we immediately noticed a difference from Westerkamp's initial walk there in 1974: the fountains that she described in this entrance area were no longer functioning. There was nothing to mask the city sounds, so they were omnipresent. For a park which was originally designed around water sounds, this was a significant absence.

At the beginning of the soundwalk, Westerkamp identified the place, date and time of recording. She believes that it is important to recognize that places sound different from time to time, and of course the results of the soundwalk differ depending on who is doing the recording.

Knife-Edge

Close to the fountains you will find a metal sculpture ("Knife Edge" by Henry Moore). Explore it visually as well as acoustically...Produce a wide variety of sounds...Put your ear against the surface and listen to the inside (Westerkamp 1974: 21)

A group of students were passing, and Westerkamp invited them to play the sculpture, which they did quite enthusiastically and loudly. As she circled the sculpture, I could hear the character of the sounds change according to the players' motions, and our shifting perspective. Afterwards, the players were curious about what we were doing there, why we were recording. We talked for a few minutes, then went on.

As we walked over from the sculpture towards the Conservatory, an airplane passed overhead, with its characteristic falling glissando. Westerkamp guided the microphone towards the building vents of the Conservatory, timing her motion so that the sound of the airplane seemed to be swallowed by the rising amplitude of the broadband vent sound, in one continuous gesture.

Conservatory

When you walk into the conservatory, you are entering an artificially created, tropical environment ... Does it look and smell and feel tropical? Does it sound tropical? (Westerkamp 1974: 21)

The Bloedel Conservatory is a miniature tropical rainforest, constructed by BC's largest lumber company, an exotic gem perched in an urban centre, no chainsaws in earshot. Once again, Westerkamp noticed a difference from her earlier walk. The waterwheel in the conservatory was not working properly; its characteristic sound was muted and uneven. The conservatory was filled with tropical plants, fish and birds, including some very vocal and hilarious green parrots who were mimicking children's greetings and screams.

Sunken Garden

...a section of the park which is acoustically of special interest. Can you hear the sounds of the city disappear while you walk down into the garden? Observe its formations and explore how much these influence its acoustics. (Westerkamp 1974: 23)

The Sunken Garden is built in an old quarry, and the high stone walls of this area block outside sounds. I heard the sound of traffic almost disappear, with the exception of the occasional siren, providing an experience with more acoustic clarity, the quality that Westerkamp identifies with wilderness. Next to the path, which wound down to the lower level, some Sunday drummers were playing, reminding me of High Park in Toronto, and Mount Royal Park in Montreal. Their drumming accompanied us as we walked down towards the waterfall, and by chance intensified as we approached the water, seeming to mimic the intensity of the water from our perspective. In the flower beds of the sunken garden is a large, prickly plant like a giant rhubarb, several feet tall. Westerkamp says that it disappears entirely in the winter. We stopped and recorded our fingers touching the underside of the leaves. Again, a passerby approached to ask what we were doing, and we talked for a while. Here we altered Westerkamp's original route slightly, and went towards the creek.

Creek

Sit down and let the sounds of the flowing water soothe you. The water winds its way through channels and gaps between rocks and murmurs in new voices, which you have not heard yet. And if you were to listen to more water there would be more new voices, an endless variety of them.... (Westerkamp 1974: 23)

We spent more time at the creek than anywhere else. Westerkamp is fascinated by the endless variety of water voices, and her approach to close-up recording articulates them well. She shifted from one stepping-stone to another, moving the stereo microphone to highlight how the water found its way through crevices, over boulders, around branches in its path, illustrating the architecture of the creek bed, and the dance of the water through its sculptural forms. I was fascinated by the timbral diversity of the different water sounds, and the sense of flow in the recording, created by the dance between the creek waters and Westerkamp's movements around them.

When we reached the pasture at the end of the creek, we noted a loud motor sound like a leaf-blower or something of that kind. It was partly masking the quiet, high-pitched trickling of the water, but we couldn't locate the source.

Quarry Garden

We walked up the hill towards the quarry garden, which was cut into the mountain below the Conservatory.

The main acoustic feature of the Quarry Garden is its echo. Discover it and find out where and how it is produced. (Westerkamp 1974: 23)

We could hear the echo quite clearly off the side walls of the garden. We could also hear the motor sound, even louder here. It diminished as we moved to one side of the quarry and climbed the steps to the top. It was only later, as I worked with the recording to excerpt sections for the website, that I located the source of the motor sound: the building vents in the Conservatory. The quarry, cut into the mountain, acted to funnel the building vent sound down to the creek.

At the top of the quarry garden, the steps led out to the lookout area, crowded with sunset-viewers. We listened for a moment, then ended the soundwalk.

We walked again through the park this April, when I visited Westerkamp. It was earlier in the day, earlier in the year. The park was in full spring bloom, and the waters were lower. Shouldn't they have been higher in spring? But of course, the parks department controls water levels, not the seasons, and without the amplification of the recording equipment, we had to lean closer to hear the water voices whispering.

This experience of doing a soundwalk with Westerkamp, and listening to how she records the sound, was a very interesting one. I was amazed by how the final sound document, over an hour long, was practically seamless. Each moment flowed into the next. Even though, in order to describe the structure of the park, we spoke of it as having different areas, in the recording there are segues or border regions (walking down into the quarry of the Sunken Garden, for instance, the acoustics would subtly change over time) rather than the rigid boundaries that appear on a map.

I was taken by moments of synchronicity, like the intensification of water sound juxtaposed with the intensification of the drumming, and how Westerkamp immediately responded to these opportunities. I also enjoyed how people would ask what we were doing. I am used to recording with smaller microphones, and the large, shock-mounted microphone that Westerkamp used on this day seemed to make people curious and invite them to approach us, leading to conversations with other park visitors in the middle of the soundwalk. Other than these conversations, we said little. Westerkamp would announce each area on the tape, and make short comments about what we saw. Mostly,

we listened in silence. As I listened to the tape months later, I had visceral memories of events and sensations in the park.

Kits Beach Soundwalk

Kits Beach Soundwalk (1989), a composition that begins with a soundwalk recording at Kits Beach, comes out of Westerkamp's experience with the Vancouver Cooperative Radio show:

About ten years ago I produced and hosted a radio program on Vancouver Cooperative Radio called Soundwalking, in which I took the listener to different locations in and around the city and explored them acoustically. Kits Beach Soundwalk is a compositional extension of this original idea. (HW: Transformations liner notes. 1996: 23)

I have presented Kits Beach Soundwalk to listeners as it appears on the Transformations CD, as a recorded piece. Westerkamp also includes it in performances, doing the commentary and diffusing the sound live accompanied by the rest of the piece on tape. Her program note indicates her interest in the acoustics and cultural significance of the place of recording:

Kitsilano Beach colloquially called Kits Beach and originally in native Indian language Khahtsahlano is located in the heart of Vancouver. In the summer it is crowded with a display of "meat salad" and ghetto blasters, indeed light years away from the silence experienced here not so long ago by the native Indians. The original recording on which this piece is based was made on a calm winter morning, when the quiet lapping of the water and the tiny sounds of barnacles feeding were audible before an acoustic backdrop of the throbbing city. In this soundwalk composition we leave the city behind eventually and explore instead the tiny acoustic realm of barnacles, the world of high frequencies, inner space and dreams. (HW: Transformations liner notes. 1996: 23)

Musical Structure

The tape part of Kits Beach Soundwalk is structured in dialogue with the spoken commentary. I will describe it here interspersing initial commentary with Westerkamp's score for the spoken part. The score does not include any timings, since Westerkamp uses specific sounds on the tape as cues. I have added timings from the CD version to facilitate my discussion.

The piece begins with about twenty seconds of the Kits Beach ambience, with waves lapping the shore, birds in the background, and the deep hum of city traffic as an acoustic backdrop.

[00:21]2 (Bird)
It's a calm morning,
I'm on Kits Beach in Vancouver.
[Ducks quacking]

It's slightly overcast and very mild for February.
[CD version says January]3

It's absolutely windstill.
The ocean is flat, just a bit rippled in places.
Ducks are quietly floating on the water.
[A slightly louder wave]

(Waves)
I'm standing among some large rocks
full of barnacles and seaweed.
[Louder waves again]

The water moves calmly through crevices.
[Seaplane overhead]

The barnacles put out their fingers to feed on the water.
The tiny clicking sounds that you hear, are the meeting of the water and the barnacles. It trickles and clicks and sucks and...

(Trainhorn, crow)
The city is roaring around these tiny sounds.
But it's not masking them.
[Louder waves and crow]

(Wave)
[1:42] I could shock you or fool you by saying that the soundscape is this loud.
(INCREASE LEVELS)

But it is more like this. (LOWER LEVELS AGAIN)

The view is beautiful in fact, it is spectacular.
So the sound level seems more like this. (LOWER LEVELS FURTHER)

It doesn't seem that loud.

But I'm trying to listen to those tiny sounds in more detail now. Suddenly the background sound of the city seems louder again. (INCREASE LEVELS)
It interferes with my listening. It occupies all acoustic space and I can't hear the barnacles in all their tininess. It seems too much effort to filter the city out.

[There is a major shift here, starting at 3:00, as the field recording is slowly faded out and the studio-manipulated sounds fade in].

Luckily we have bandpass filters and equalizers. We can just go into the studio and get rid of the city, pretend it's not there. Pretend we are somewhere far away.

[This commentary is accompanied by the taped sounds gradually increasing in volume. The barnacle sounds have been filtered to emphasize their sparkling, crackling qualities. The sounds continue, solo, until about 3:30].

These are the tiny, the intimate voices of nature, of bodies, of dreams, of the imagination. (ssss)

[3:57] You are still hearing the barnacle sounds, and already they're changing.

[The barnacle sounds are becoming more delineated and seem more clearly pitched]

[4:07] Alfred Tomatis says that high frequencies charge our brain and give us energy.

[The sounds have changed again, having a more regular pulse, and sounding more like insect sounds]

[4:16] I often hear these tiny sounds in my dreams. Those are the healing dreams.

[The insect-like sounds cross-fade with sounds of gurgling in the flat part of a creek]

(Creek)

[4: 37] In one dream women living in an ancient mountain village were weaving the most beautiful silken fabric. It sounded like a million tiny voices whispering, swishing, clicking, sizzling.

[Insect and creek sounds together. Two distinct timbres in dialogue]

(Birds, Wende's sound [synthesized whirr])⁴

[5:21] In another dream, when I entered a stone cottage, I entered a soundscape made by four generations of a peasant family sitting around a large wooden table eating and talking: smacking and clicking and sucking and spitting and telling and biting and singing and laughing and weeping and kissing and gurgling and whispering [5:45].

[new timbre added, a sharper, more percussive scraping sound, panned to move quickly. Tape only to 6:35]

(Clicking, Piano strings)

[tinkling sound 6:33]

In another dream I heard bullets tinkling, bouncing like tiny marbles.

[6:42. New timbre: rhythmic clicking]

A man was pursuing me with a gun. I was frightened. But the bullets tinkled. Metallic, tiny seductive semen tinkling all around me.

[Rhythmic clicking becomes louder, dominating attention]

Like in Xenakis's *Concret PhII*, made from the sounds of the discharge of smoldering charcoal. Tinkling all over the Brussels Pavilion, "like needles darting from everywhere," as Xenakis says. You can hear excerpts of that piece right now. [7:17]

[7:41] (Shortly after Xenakis starts, piano arpeggios) [Arpeggios are in the same high frequency range as the other sounds]⁵

In another dream, sitting in the car with a woman friend, I heard sounds of glass blinking and tinkling, sparkling. On the car radio they announced that it was Mozart the way Tomatis wants us to hear Mozart. Tinkling and sparkling. [8:00]

[8:04. Introduction of Mozart in the background, filtered to emphasize high frequencies, from a Tomatis listening tape.]⁶

(Between Mozart) [8:17] These were the healing dreams. Energizing.

[8:21. Mozart is a bit louder]

(Neon)⁷

[8:47] As soon as I make space to hear sounds like this, or to dream them

[8:52. The sound of the city blows back in, gusting through the other sounds on tape to dominate the acoustic space]

then I feel the strength to face the city again or even to be playful with it.

[9:00. The city sound gusts more strongly, as Westerkamp's voice becomes more assertive in tone and increases in amplitude].

Play with the monster. Then I can face the monster.

At the end, the city sound becomes louder and louder, with its noisy quality emphasized, as the other sounds are faded out, 9:42.

In summary, the piece is in nine main sections which are characterized by changes in sound timbres as well as changes in text.

1. 0:00 to 1:42, soundwalk on Kits Beach
2. 1:42 to 3:00 play with levels
3. 3:00 to 4:16 transitional sequence: barnacle sound to dreams
4. 4:16 to 5:21 first dream: female generations; creek and insects
5. 5:21 to 6:35 second dream: stone cottage; birds and Wende's sound
6. 6:35 to 7:41 third dream; male pursuer; Xenakis
7. 7:41 to 8:17, fourth dream: Mozart car radio; Mozart
8. 8:17 to 8:52 transitional sequence: Mozart and neon to city
9. 8:52 to 9:42 city play

The tape part in the first section is characterized by a relatively unaltered recording which sounds as though it could have come from a soundwalk. Waves and bird sounds are heard, as well as the hum of the city. In the second section, the tape part continues as an unedited soundwalk recording as Westerkamp alters the sound levels, bringing attention to the constructedness of this soundwalk recording, focusing attention on the relationship between self and environment by changing the amplitude balance between voice and tape parts. In section three, she uses the sound of the barnacles to lead the listener into the world of high frequencies, as the city sound is filtered out and the intricacies of the barnacle sounds are revealed. She talks about the importance of high frequencies in healing and energizing. The first dream begins as other high frequency sounds are introduced: rivulets in a creek and insect sounds. These are differentiated on the basis of timbre and rhythm, since their pitch range is similar to the barnacle sounds. Each succeeding dream can then be associated with sounds of different timbres and rhythms: the second dream is juxtaposed with bird sounds and a sound given to Westerkamp by Wende Bartley. The third dream is associated with Xenakis's *Concret Ph II*. The fourth is juxtaposed with Mozart. Westerkamp says that she did not consciously associate certain sounds with the text, but that many of these juxtapositions are due to coincidence rather than intent.

After the final dream, there is another transitional sequence from dream state back to reality, as the sounds of Mozart are layered with the buzzing of neon bulbs. A low frequency mix appears at the end, invoking the idea of city as monster, as Westerkamp relates:

It is an exaggerated low frequency mix, parts of which I had developed for a play years before to create the sense of a monster, gaping mouth, dragon, etc. It had the rattle snake sound as part of it and I think I may have added some of the Kits Beach ambience. (Westerkamp, email correspondence, April 1999) This is the most dramatic use of sound design that I am aware of in Westerkamp's work. She uses a technique that is used frequently in film sound design work: the juxtaposition of an animal sound (in this case, the rattlesnake sound) with a mechanical sound (the city traffic) in order to give the mechanical sound more of a sense of wildness and danger. Ironically, then, the city becomes more monstrous through its association with an icon of American wilderness, the rattlesnake. Although Westerkamp earlier set up an opposition between the quiet and intimate voices of nature against the dominating sounds of the city, she dramatizes this opposition through the use of a voice from nature that is frightening when heard up close.

Listener Responses

Because this piece is so clearly associated with Westerkamp's Soundwalking show on Vancouver Cooperative Radio, I wanted to be sure that I played it for some Vancouver residents to get their responses, as well as playing it for a number of other audiences. Accordingly, I set up a listening session at the Western Front, a well-known Vancouver performance space, with the help of composer Jean Routhier, in April of 1998. We advertised widely, in a local music newsletter, announcing it at a concert earlier in the week, and at the Front itself. We hoped to attract a wide range of Vancouver residents. Unfortunately, only four people attended. As well as playing Kits Beach Soundwalk, I also played two other pieces that could clearly be associated with the Vancouver area: A

Walk Through the City, and Talking Rain. These four responses are quite detailed, and engage clearly with the issue of sounds related to the Vancouver area. I only wish that more had been available. As well, I played this piece for a group of radio artists in Peterborough, which was interesting because their perspective was as experts in the field of community radio. I also played it for a number of undergraduate music classes.

Commentary on the piece focused to a large extent on the role of the speaking voice, which is more prominent in this piece than in others. There was also some commentary on musical structure, imagery, places, and spatial movement.

Musical Structure

Some listeners responded to the piece as radio art. Anomaly@zipcon.net (26m, contact by email)8 says "I find "Kits Beach Soundwalk" one of the few pieces of radio art to hold my interest and really take me in." Amelia (45f, Queen's gender and music class) says that the piece "reminds me of Glenn Gould's 'Idea of North' radio shows."

Other listeners question whether this piece can be considered music, suggesting instead that it is a form of documentary. "I don't know why it is considered a musical composition rather than an oral documentary" (Newton, 22f, Queen's gender and music class). Another listener comments "More of a soundscape story than a composition. Music used to supplement the narration, rather than vice versa" (Fredd, 23m, Queen's electroacoustic music). Both of these comments focus on the interaction between the spoken narrative and the other sounds in the piece.

Two other listeners did not question the musicality of the piece, but remarked on the balance between vocal narrative and other sounds in different ways. Melody (20f, Queen's electroacoustic composition) comments that the narrative is quite educational and says "programmatic because of this." DqM (22, Waterloo composition class) says "Funny how Mozart is secondary."

In radio art, the question of whether something is a composition does not arise in the same way as it does in music. Composition is considered the practice of putting sounds9 together in some way, and as I noted earlier in the chapter on epistemology, some radio artists consider radio art to be defined as concerned with meaning, privileging narrative. Within music, the working definition of composition as understood by students is that of abstract construction with sound. Compositions are not supposed to be expository narratives, or documentary. Narration should only supplement other sounds, and should not be prominent, should not challenge the supremacy of abstract construction with sound, the primacy of absolute music.

As I mentioned earlier in the chapter on epistemology, radio art such as Glenn Gould's "Idea of North" defies the restrictive polarity of meaning in radio art and abstract play in music by doing both simultaneously. This work is at times meaningful, and at times constructs fugal edifices in which meaning is harder to locate, and the listener becomes drawn into perception of other aspects of the sound, while at the same time hearing poetic fragments of meaning.

Kits Beach Soundwalk is not constructed with layers of simultaneous conversations, as Gould's work is. There is only one voice, Westerkamp's. The longest time that we hear the taped sounds without any words is about fifty seconds (from 5:45 to 6:35), with several other segments around twenty to thirty seconds each. But this does not mean that the piece is a straightforward documentary. The vocal part is poetic, leading the listener into imaginary dream worlds linked to different sparkling sounds, what Augusta (46f, Queen's electroacoustic music) calls "ecological poetry."

Kits Beach Soundwalk is hard to place as music or radio art to people unfamiliar with the genre of soundscape composition. Even within this genre, recorded soundwalks are rare: I am not aware of any being publicly available before Westerkamp began her radio show in 1978. Even since then, most soundscape compositions do not reveal the presence of the recordist as clearly as Westerkamp's work, nor the relationship to a very specific place. A newspaper review of Kits Beach Soundwalk links the piece to *musique concrète*. Stephen Pedersen says:

Westerkamp works in the field of *musique concrète* promoted, if not invented, by Edgard Varese in the fifties. It was virtually abandoned by composers with the advent of synthesizers in the early sixties ("Sound Artworks Clear and Simple" Halifax Chronicle-Herald, October 28, 1991).

His review indicates how little this music critic knows about *musique concrète*, not to mention soundwalk recording. In this summary, he does not mention the composer who invented the term, Pierre Schaeffer, or anyone who has worked in *musique concrète* since the early sixties. The genre sounds like an anachronism, as it tends to do in electroacoustic music textbooks as well (see Chapter 2). It is not surprising then, that Pedersen also does not delineate how soundscape composition is related to *musique concrète* in its use of recorded sounds, or how it might be different in its exploration of sounds in their environmental context as well as, rather than only as sound objects.

Westerkamp describes how her soundwalking pieces work as radio art:

It is still relatively unusual to hear environmental sounds or soundscapes on the radio.

This type of radiomaking presents the familiar as though artificial, through a loudspeaker, second hand, framed in space and time, and therefore highlighted. Daily life is thus presented from a new acoustic angle. Such radio can assist us in listening to our everyday lives, to who we are as individuals and as a society.

In some soundwalks I speak "live" from the location of the recording directly to the listener. My voice forms the link to the listener who is not physically present. I speak about the sounds or soundscapes that are audible but also about aspects extraneous to the recording such as the weather, time of day or night, the feel of the place, the architecture, how the environment looks. The voice transmits information about a place that would otherwise not be apparent from raw environmental recordings and assists in transporting the listener into each specific soundscape that is broadcast. It is also a constant reminder of the recordist's presence in the environment and of the fact that this presence creates a specific acoustic perspective for the listener that this particular microphone, this particular recording presents only one truth about the environment. By doing so, it is intended to create an awareness or curiosity in each individual listener of a unique acoustic perspective. (Westerkamp, 1994: 90)

Kits Beach Soundwalk emerged out of Westerkamp's work as a radio artist, and has since been presented as a performance tape-vocal piece in concerts, and as a pre-recorded work on CD. Westerkamp uses her voice as a link to listeners, leading them from the beach soundscape into her dream world. She comments on the sounds to focus attention on their social meanings.

... [environmental sound] also has a social meaning ... That's really what keeps me in this area. The connection between the musicality of a sound and the social meaning of a sound. (Westerkamp, quoted in Young, 1984).

For Westerkamp, the connection between social meaning and musical meaning is important. This is one of the reasons that she likes to work with recognizable environmental sounds, that retain their original reference points. Westerkamp explores the musicality of sounds, pushing at the boundaries of what many will accept as music, inhabiting a marginal space in terms of style like a barnacle inhabiting the joining of two elements, or as Minfe expresses it, perhaps acting as a translator between the listener and the soundscape: "her spoken voice takes you for the soundwalk personalising and focusing it on you with her and nature. A beautiful idea!" (51f, participation by letter)

Voice Characteristics and Narration

Eight listeners said that they found the voice peaceful or soothing, while six listeners described it as annoying or disruptive. P-Ron (22m, Queen's electroacoustic music) says "Very soothing. I would love to listen to this before sleeping." Cherry (22f, Waterloo composition class) comments "sound of narrator and birds soothing." Misanthrop (25m, University of Toronto grad colloquium) describes the piece as "Deana Troy's soliloquy on sound," a reference to the ship's counsellor on Star Trek: The Next Generation who is known for her empathic abilities and her adeptness at calming people, a comment that is somewhat tongue-in-cheek, as befits this respondent's chosen pseudonym.

Wim (20m, Queen's electroacoustic music) says "the soothing voice seems to take hold of your focus." Genesis (23f, individual listener, participation by letter) says: "I listen to her dialog and I react against it. I cannot be her, I cannot hear what she is hearing." These two quotes, resulting in quite different emotional reactions in the listeners, in which one reacts against the voice while the other continues to find it soothing, point to the most persistent critique made about this piece: that the vocal narrative takes hold of one's focus, seeming to restrict people's abilities to go on their own journey during this work. Many people feel restrained to following Westerkamp's path. At the same time, the listener who says "I cannot be her" earlier comments "I've never been to Vancouver! Where's Terry David Mulligan?" Terry David Mulligan is a Much Music video jockey, and host of the Much West show, which is highly constructed and directed with little left to the imagination. In her question about where Mulligan is, this listener expresses a desire for a guide who leaves much less room for creative response than does Westerkamp in this piece. Perhaps this listener does not feel the same pressure to be Mulligan, but why? Is it because audio is "hot" and involving against television's "coolness," as Marshall McLuhan would say? Is it because she felt more familiarity with the popular music focus of Mulligan's commentary? Is it because Westerkamp is a woman, and this listener felt more desire to identify, but could not? She does not say.

30 something (43f, Trent radio art day) articulates the frustration mentioned by several listeners, commenting "The voice is actually the dominant sound-thread. We have to filter it out in order to pay attention to the sound imagery she has set up." What is different in this listener's reaction is that she is able to filter the voice out, while others are not. Rick (22m, Trent Radio Art Day) says:

When I started listening to this piece, I created a mental image of what I was listening to. She didn't let me do this however, she created her own view of the sound, with everything she says the picture becomes more clear. We are her followers, and she leads us by the hand through different worlds. Peter Hau (35m, Trent Radio Art day) perceives the voice differently depending on what sounds it is juxtaposed with: "Role of narrative, and constant set against Lows and Highs of environmental soundscape, is perceived differently; gratefully accepted in shaping (bad) city sounds, but a nuisance when interfering with good sounds." Another listener at the Trent Radio Art day says that s/he

only listened to the voice as long as the imagery matched her own: "useful initially then I disregarded it when her imagery did not match mine" (29, Trent Radio Art day, no other information about identity). It is interesting that the only two listeners of all the respondents who mention filtering out or disregarding the narration are radio artists. Also, the sense of the narration being too explicit or too dominant is much stronger in this group than elsewhere. In other sessions, only a few listeners reacted strongly against the narration, whereas in this group almost everyone did. Perhaps this is because of radio artists' desire to create their own narratives, or because of their increased listening sophistication, because of which Westerkamp's commentary seemed unnecessary or even invasive.

In every listening session, the group would laugh at the point where Westerkamp announces "Luckily we have bandpass filters and equalizers. We can just go into the studio and get rid of the city." This humorous demystification of the studio process is one of the elements that makes this piece different from a documentary: it shows its own process so clearly, rather than creating the smooth and distant glossing of an objective stance. Jon (23m, Queen's electroacoustic composition) points out this subjectivity when he says "sense of humour, manipulation of sound levels relate to personal experience." Westerkamp is self-reflexive as well as reporting on what she sees to supplement the listener's hearing, she also talks about her perception of sound related to what she sees and imagines. One listener had an angry reaction to this self-reflexivity:

The voice is lying. Sound is not natural. She is creating this world far from water and city. When she says that the view is spectacular/beautiful she is looking at a material possession in her studio. I cannot separate her narrative from the fact that she is creating the piece. Personally, I prefer not to hear the human voice. I receive no visual image in my mind's eye. She says so by referring to the studio instruments. This piece elicits anger, nervousness, and a desire to be somewhere else. (Mario Welsh, 22m, Queen's electroacoustic composition. This is the same listener who imagined an alien kidnapping in response to Cricket Voice.) This listener seems to want a complete separation between natural and technological worlds. He hears Westerkamp's reference to studio instruments as a vindication of his anger at her supposed duplicity. Yet she is being very clear about what she is doing, playing with the boundaries between natural and constructed sound. She explains this approach in a recent talk:

Environmental sound is a type of language, a text. As well, the technology through which we transmit the sounds, has its own language, its own process. If we truly want to reveal meanings through recorded environmental sound and truly draw the listener inside these meanings, then we must transmit precise information and knowledge and demystify technologically hidden processes. When we have done something as simple as condensing the duration of a dawn chorus in order to fit it into a predetermined time frame on a CD, let's say that and how we have done it. Let's name the voices of the place, let's mention the weather for example or the season, the landscape, the social and natural context. (Westerkamp 1998: 8) Westerkamp is refusing the role of the technical wizard, who magically whisks the listener off to an imaginary world. When she leads us into the studio, she tells us exactly what she is doing and why. To radio artists and composers, who do this all the time, perhaps this is unnecessary, whereas to less experienced listeners it may open doors.

Several respondents point to the pedagogical importance of the piece. Eurom (22m, Queen's electroacoustic composition) says "almost an introduction to electroacoustics!" BJ (22f, Queen's University gender and music) says "Tells a story of what everyday life is like. Everyone's too busy to stop and take a moment to appreciate the beautiful sounds of nature." Augusta also mentions this sense of timelessness, of an ability to stop and pay attention to the small sounds: "also gives a sense of timelessness, re, living for the moment, a sense of total immersion into the soundscape and environment" (46, Queen's electroacoustic composition). Malaclypse the Younger connects his acceptance of the narration with his strong agreement with the message that he heard in it:

At first, I didn't like the voice-over. After a point started to emerge, I liked the message and so the narration was ok. The rumbling city in the background - very spooky and effective. Very important message. Have you ever wondered if there are primal panic reflexes which are constantly being triggered by urban life, without our consciously realizing it? I have. (21m, Waterloo composition) The piece makes Jemma realize that we hear everyday sounds transformed in our dreams. Even though at first she describes the narration as too obvious, it articulates relationships to sound that she had not thought about. The relationships between words and sounds in the piece alter her perceptions of the sounds:

Some of what's said almost seems too obvious, but yet we wouldn't know how to put it into words. Uses words to change our perceptions of sounds, i.e. barnacle sounds to sizzling to sounds of a family. Interesting: presence of every-day sounds in our dreams! We incorporate our sound environment into our lives. (23f, Waterloo composition) This piece, emerging from Westerkamp's Soundwalking show and her experience with the World Soundscape Project, has a more clearly articulated verbal message than others, related to acoustic ecology. She wants to make people more aware of the sounds around them, then to lead people into the healing barnacle sounds, away from the constant distracting hum of the city, so that they can return refreshed as she does. Certainly with these listeners she has succeeded. They are thinking more about living in the moment, the presence of everyday sounds in their dreams, and the panic reflexes that may be brought on by traffic sounds.

Some listeners responded with ambivalence to the message. Cora (25f, Queen's University gender and music) says:

the View is beautiful No it s not. This is the environment which I don t know. I don t know this space. It s a foreign space. I belong in the city. I have the city. But I don t have this environment. I dream nature. I often dream waves. Yet still it s external to me. Yet it s internal to me. My healing dreams include waves very often. A bird of ... black flying just above waves but without sound which is because it s too powerful, and makes my ears shut. This sound in my dream always exists in me, yet is foreign to me. I live in a building where I don t see fish, birds, waves. These exist in my dream. Inside of me. I don t like this sound externalized. Cora is clearly agitated by the piece, remembering her dreams yet not wanting to hear the sound of her dreams externalized (not even to herself, since her ears shut). She insists that she belongs in the city and the space is foreign to her while also internal to her perhaps because Kits Beach is simultaneously city and waves, reality and dream, external and internal. She wants to keep her dreams secret, separate from her waking world, whereas Westerkamp is bringing the two together.

High-Frequency Sounds in the Dream Sequence

Several listeners had strong reactions to the high-frequency sounds. Two listeners described the sounds in the Mozart section as like glass prisms. Earlier in the piece, reactions to the high frequencies were more mundane or domestic. Cooil (30m, Queen's electroacoustic composition) says "the barnacle sounds reminded me more of frying eggs giving more intense hot day feel." Four listeners in total referred to this sound as like frying eggs. Smitty the Rickety Old Man says "sounds like she s cookin up some eggs," (19m, Queen's electroacoustic composition) situating Westerkamp in the kitchen.

One listener said that she normally finds high-frequency sounds irritating rather than healing, but they did not irritate her during this piece. Another had a stronger reaction: "ultra-high frequencies make me cringe; make my head spin" (Genesis, 23f, contact by mail). However, most listeners liked the high frequency sounds, describing them as delicate, stimulating, sparkling or magical. Stephen Pedersen says "there was a magic in those sounds. It came from our sense of mingled delight and astonishment that such delicacy goes on under our very, very sophisticated noses, and that there is something in them of an unthinkable ancient past, as if a time machine had suddenly deposited us in the middle of the paleozoic."

Some listeners linked the barnacles sounds with intimacy: "can hear intimate sounds of barnacles [feel like part of something special]" (Cherry, 22f, Waterloo composition class). Tricam (33m, University of Toronto graduate seminar) associates the entire dream section with intimacy: "when she cuts the city sounds the impression changes from grandeur to intimacy." Cooil (30m Queen's electroacoustic composition) associates Westerkamp's voice with an intimacy that is almost invasive: "the talking made me feel that I was spying on her or reading her diary." This comment indicates a degree of discomfort with intimacy, perceived as an invasion of privacy. This issue also arises with Westerkamp's Moments of Laughter, which is the subject of Chapter Eight.

Interestingly, there were very few comments on the content of Westerkamp's dream narration. Jon (22m, Waterloo composition) says "comparing bullets to semen. Discharging, other sexual imagery" but this is the only comment on the remarkable sequence where Westerkamp describes a scene where a man pursues her with a gun, then links this directly to the work of Xenakis, saying that the bullets in the dream are like "tiny seductive semen," and also like the sounds of discharging charcoal in Xenakis's Concret Ph II.

Is Westerkamp's dream making a connection between the sublimation of male aggression (bullets that tinkle rather than blasting, transformed from forces of destruction to tiny seductive semen) and the type of electroacoustic music made by Xenakis? She tells me that she does not know exactly why this piece by Xenakis fascinates her so much, but that when she listens to it, she feels similar pulls of attraction and repulsion that she felt in that dream.

Places

The places mentioned by listeners to this piece were of a narrower range than with Westerkamp's other works. Once again, because of the narration, listeners seemed more likely to choose a place that was closely related to the place that Westerkamp was describing. There is one exception to this: at the beginning of the dream sequence, one listener hears the sound environment as "like a tropical rain forest" (Ella, 22f, Waterloo composition). Several people referred to being on a beach, or by the sea, without saying where. Portia (21f, Queen's electroacoustic composition) says "sitting at a boardwalk." Amelia (45f, Queen's gender and music class) writes "I can smell the Pacific ocean."

Only one listener describes a beach that is clearly far from the West Coast:

Somerville by where Greenwood Racetrack used to be you can hear the traffic below and the water, on deck at the pool with eyes shut.

- doesn t sound like there anymore. Once you use equalizers.
- I don t enjoy voice over sounds.
- tiny sounds. -manufactured not real to me.

-piece lost meaning to me . Now I only see composer's meanings from her narration.
(Kitty, 23f, Queen's gender and music)

This listener is describing a place from memory, and her connection to that memory does not seem to be able to withstand the power of the vocal narrative.

Those who were familiar with Kitsilano compare the initial part with their memories of that place. Smitty the Ricketty Old Man is concerned with verisimilitude when he says "sounds pretty accurate for Kitsilano" (19m, Queen's electroacoustic composition). Malaclypse the Younger (21m, Waterloo composition) says:

I ve walked along Kits Beach early in the morning before - I never would ve thought of listening to nature in that place. It looked like a suburb and felt like a golf course. Maybe it was the surreality of dawn which added to this.

The beach has even more meaning for residents of Vancouver, as Barry Truax¹⁰ notes:

Kitsilano Beach is right in the heart of Vancouver, across from the West end, on English Bay, so this piece is precisely located in the local listener s mind. Its image is not that of the wild coastal areas, but the domestic familiarity of a popular local beach. He describes the beach location precisely, close to the urban centre. For Vancouver residents, each local beach has a particular flavour or ambience, which connects the place to memories and events over years of experience, giving deeper meaning to the sound environment than would be heard by someone who had only visited once or twice.

By explicitly linking this piece in the CD liner notes with her Soundwalking show, Westerkamp associates it with the aims of that radio work:

Soundwalking took Co-op Radio listeners into the soundscape of Vancouver and surroundings.... It was my first attempt to create a program that listened to the communities of Greater Vancouver without attempting to report about them. It brought community soundscapes into listeners' homes and simultaneously extended listeners' ears into the soundscape of the community. (Westerkamp 1994: 89-90) Westerkamp describes Kits Beach Soundwalk as a compositional extension of this original idea. Rather than remaining with the original place, the work extends it into the world of the studio, and the world of dreams, as well as the worlds of the concert hall in performance and that of the CD. In its most fixed form, on the CD, it still speaks to listeners about acoustic ecology, and relationships between dream and reality, studio and field recording, subjectivity and sound environment. But at the same time, in some cases listeners were blocked in their appreciation of this piece by an inability to identify with the vocal narration, or an experience of it as disruptive. Is this because of listener expectations about what constitutes a concert piece, what will appear on CD? Is it because many people value music as an abstract form where they can discover their own imagery, and reject guided imagery? Is it because they are hearing a female voice that some female listeners feel a need to identify, and because it is in such a crystallized form that they are unable to? In order to answer these questions, it would be necessary to analyze a larger set of pieces that use vocal narration of this type, and these are few and far between. By choosing to put such a piece on a CD, Westerkamp raises these important and difficult issues.

The "Wet" Coast:11 Related Work

Perhaps it is still to the original audience of the Soundwalking show, the Vancouver audience, that this work speaks most directly. David Kolber, a Simon Fraser Acoustic Communication student working with composer Barry Truax, writes the following as an introduction to a paper about Kits Beach Soundwalk:

Looking out at the arteries of bridges and roads, with the honking of car horns and the screeching of tires, and in the foreground the humming swirl of a building's ventilation intake pipe, I want to run away. Even in our world of standby airline tickets and sensory deprivation tanks, how can one possibly hope to escape this moment-by-moment barrage of buzzers and sirens, of traffic belches and whining machinery, of lights and appliances humming a single, unending, unchanging, note. I find hope and insight in Hildegard Westerkamp's "Kits Beach Soundwalk." Through the piece, Westerkamp challenges the listeners to re-evaluate and to re-establish their place within the world around them. (Kolber 1997: 1) Kolber's consciousness of the sound environment, revealed in his description of it, is a reminder of how Vancouver residents have been exposed to acoustic ecology as a discipline, to a far greater extent than in most other places. Since the 1970s, when the World Soundscape Project was established there, Truax, Westerkamp and others have worked to increase listeners' awareness of the sound environment. The Soundwalking show introduced listeners to the sound of recorded soundwalks, broadcast on radio. Westerkamp's performances have introduced many Vancouverites to performed soundwalks, and sound journals. Works released on CD like A Walk Through the City and Talking Rain also refer to Vancouver's sound environment, extending to a larger and more geographically removed audience.

In the listening session at the Western Front, I played these two pieces, as well as Kits Beach Soundwalk, as examples of works that refer to the Vancouver environment. I was particularly interested in discovering to what extent Vancouver listeners' responses might differ from others elsewhere.

A Walk Through the City was composed in 1981. Westerkamp describes it as:

an urban environmental composition based on Norbert Ruebsaat's poem of the same name. It takes the listener into a specific urban location Vancouver's Skid Row area with its sounds and languages....A continuous flux is created between the real and imaginary soundscapes, between recognizable and transformed places, between reality and composition. The poem ... is spoken by the author and appears throughout the piece, symbolizing the human presence in the urban soundscape. Its voice interacts with, comments on, dramatizes, struggles with the sounds and other voices it encounters in the piece. (Transformations liner notes: 21) Barry Truax indicates that although Ruebsaat intended the poem to refer to any city, the sound recordings locate it exactly in Vancouver:

Even though the city in Norbert's poem is non-specific, it's inevitable for me to associate it with Vancouver, right from the start with the long seaplane crescendo and its characteristic phasing effect as the sound reflects off the mountains and the water of the inner harbour- a very Vancouver sound. The voices ... from the East end near the middle and at the end are also very specific to Vancouver once that context is established.

Truax then continues by describing the drama articulated in Ruebsaat's poem, its symbolic aspects that are not as specific to Vancouver:

The very dramatic poem articulated in a wide range of styles and recording distances expresses the conflict in the city between its glittering opulence and the thinly veiled violence of its darker side. This is symbolized by the extremes of the frequency ranges used: the throbbing motors, pulsating beat rhythms, the droning ambiences and the glittering high frequencies of the bus brakes, sirens and the ethereal voices derived from them. One of the most striking moments my favourite is when Norbert whispers the text surrounded by these high and low frequency components: the city both distantly ominous and visceral as it borders our [aural] skin. Responses by other listeners often mention that the piece is located in Vancouver's Skid Row area, as Westerkamp reveals in the liner notes, but particular sounds are not mentioned in relation to this, and the authors quickly move to a discussion of its significance in relation to their own experience:

A Walk Through The City is a journey through Vancouver's Skid Row area. Unsettling in its content, it is none the less essential listening. A reminder that we have become disassociated from one another and that for those living on the outskirts, ... life is a constant struggle to survive and be. Westerkamp herself does not pass judgment but simply portrays what is happening. Norbert Ruebsaat reads his poem over this soundscape. (Review for Power Spot, a Sydney Australia radio program) This reviewer quickly moves to a discussion of commonality, using the pronoun "we," in a similar way as another reviewer, Clive Robertson:

A Walk Through the City is in part, a social interpretation of Vancouver as it exists. We hear urban sound: traffic, carhorns, brake squeals, pinball machines, people's voices. We hear street alcoholics apologizing before the microphone; we hear drunken songs. In programme notes for the piece, Westerkamp writes of perceptual shifts between acoustic reality and our own acoustic imagination. ...The voice in comparison with the voices on the street is theatrical when it screams: Somewhere a man is carving himself to death, for food. (1982: 349)

Robertson compares the voices on the street with the theatricality of the poem reading, continuing later in the article by asking: "if an urban environment already includes people's voices and conversation is there any clarity in further loading the bases with 'external human components'?" (1982: 349). His sentiments are echoed by a Vancouver resident in the Western Front listening session, but in the latter case, this listener's comparison is more strongly expressed because of his experience as a resident:

poetry and psychologized form of music/soundscape doesn't need stylized and psychological poetry this is alienating - doesn't feel like our city. recordings of citizens is much richer than narrator - let them tell their own story. beautiful music coming from airplanes - something we've all heard musically in life. she achieves mystery and sensuality in the commonplace (Jo Sharpe, 22m, Western Front)

Note that this listener refers to the "beautiful music coming from airplanes," the seaplanes that Truax identifies as indicators of Vancouver's location. When Jo finds the poetry alienating, he dissociates it from his experience of "our city." In his description of Kits Beach Soundwalk, Jo says that Westerkamp presents "sound as more than phenomena, as the listener's own," through her association of certain sounds with the intimacy of dreams. His comments about A Walk Through the City reveal that alienation and dissociation occur when sounds no longer accord with the listener's own experience.

While Western listeners refer to urban sounds in A Walk Through the City as similar to their own experiences in urban centres, a listener from India points out the differences between Canadian and Indian soundscapes:

A Walk Through the City combinations of sounds. A feeling of large spaces and loneliness dwells in all these compositions [she also mentions Fantasie for Horns and Beneath the Forest Floor] as compared to her Indian soundscapes with so much more happening in a given time and space with natural acoustical sounds as compared with

the high frequency mechanical sounds in the West. (Minfe, 51f, contact by letter)

Listeners' responses are shaped by their previous experiences and the soundscape that they know. While Vancouver residents may hear specific sounds that locate the recording exactly in their neighbourhood (particularly if they are listening as carefully as Truax), Western listeners hear sounds as universally urban, and a listener from India hears what she hears as characterizing Western urbanity (high frequency mechanical sounds) in contrast to the soundscape of urban India (in which she hears more density of acoustic sounds and a busy human environment that is not lonely).

Talking Rain (1997) is a more recent composition based on sounds recorded in Vancouver and other parts of B.C. Once again, the comments recorded by Truax reveal its significance to local listeners:

Talking Rain invokes the West coast listener's immediate resonance to the varied sounds of rain in all of their infinite nuances. By manipulating small samples of rain sounds, she is able to draw us into the fine rhythmic and textural detail of an otherwise all too familiar sound. The accompanying forest birds ... foghorn and the frogs also conjure of the natural coastal soundscape - contrasted in the later section with the urban soundscape and its rain-washed streets whose acoustic ecology is more questionable and whose textures are more broad-band. Rainforest and urban jungle in high contrast! Unlike the ominous character of the city in the earlier piece [A Walk...] or the more distant background of Kits Beach, this city soundscape is more ordinary and less threatening [we even get churchbells!] and rather readily dissolves back into a wave wash that connects us again (note the final footsteps) as Vancouverites always feel they are to the natural environment. An interesting contrast to Gently Penetrating where the personal respite from the inescapable chaos of the city [in India] is symbolized by the simultaneous metallic percussion sounds with their spiritual connotations of inner peace.

Truax raises a number of important issues in this response. He points out the familiarity to West-coasters of not only the rain (hence my earlier pun about the "Wet" coast, a description I heard often in Vancouver), but also the presence of a foghorn as well as West coast forest birds. His comments about the progression from the urban sounds as ominous, to distant, and finally ordinary are also interesting to Westerkamp, who was not aware of this progression in her work over the period 1981 to 1997, from youthful protest and alienation to more subtle juxtapositions and a sense of acceptance. Finally, Truax contrasts this piece with Gently Penetrating, based on an Indian soundscape, in which he hears metallic percussion sounds (perhaps the slowed bicycle bell sounds) as connoting inner peace in a busy urban environment, and contrasts this with the sounds of footsteps in Talking Rain, which connotes Vancouverites' connection with the environment. Certainly there is not the same sense of loneliness in Talking Rain that Minfe, the Indian listener, heard in A Walk Through the City. The urban sounds that we hear are individual cars passing close by on rain-soaked streets, not the distant roar of traffic or the mournful cry of slowed-down screeching truck brakes.

Jo Sharpe confirms Truax' description of rain as a quintessential Vancouver sound, as well as his description of the city as normal and unthreatening:

I've had a love affair with rain all my life.
It's the voice of the west coast.
Imagery moves from drenching rain, to tiny leak, to bath time [childhood, comfort]
to forest, city, lakes, tin roofs, cement, plastic
Glad to hear the city eventually humanity within the environment and humanity as environment
Circular form connotes a zooming in and zooming out effect
(22m, Western Front)

This response also underlines earlier commentary by listeners to Kits Beach Soundwalk, as well as some of the other pieces that I analyze, in which they hear how Westerkamp invokes a sense of zooming in and out, moving from grandeur to intimacy, drenching rain to tiny leak, bath-time to forest.

Both identity with rain and a sense of zooming in and out are noted as important parts of Westerkamp's work in an online review of Talking Rain by Mark Parlett (Smartt.com):

Talking Rain, by Hildegard Westerkamp is clearly working with a force of nature that is our identity here in Lalaland, water ... water and our proximity to it, is in our bones in Vancouver ... Like looking at many photographs of the same shot with each shot having a different depth of field, Westerkamp deftly crafts together water in all its manifestations into these intimate sonic polaroids that flow in and out of each other.

Parlett also notes the importance of Westerkamp's limited manipulation of sounds to his appreciation of the work:

Westerkamp stays out of the way in terms of the manipulation of the sounds. If there was any processing or treatments to the tape they were imperceptible and all but invisible. I had one of those sublime moments where upon deeper examination I realized that the composer may have done a little processing on some very tiny fast dripping droplets of water, and then I realized that I have encountered a sound like that in my life, a processed computer like sound, sitting beside a small creek in the spring when it's beginning to thaw and small drops of water are dripping under the ice downwards and it's almost metallic, and then I realized it doesn't matter either way.... Hildegard Westerkamp's

work at its best brings us closer to the notion that we are the sounds that we hear...the "just listening" state...the dissolution of the "me listening to that " construct, this is the essence of Talking Rain.

Parlett mentions a sense of identity with sound. This is somewhat like Jo Sharpe's earlier comment that Westerkamp works with sound as not just phenomena, but as the listener's own, focusing on the relationship between sounds heard and the subjectivities who hear them. Unlike Jo, Parlett experiences this not as a sense of ownership of sound, but as a dissolution of boundaries between self and soundscape.

Westerkamp herself thinks of her work as being at once inside and outside of the soundscape, both recognizing that boundaries between self and subjectivity exist, and attempting to create the kind of immersive listening that temporarily dissolves those boundaries. She amplifies and focuses listening using a microphone.

The microphone is a seductive tool: it can offer a fresh ear to both recordist and listener; it can be an access to a foreign place as well as an ear-opener to the all-too-familiar, or a way to capture and speak back to the unbearable. (Westerkamp 1998: 6)

The sense of immersion offered by the microphone is contradictory, bringing the recordist further inside the soundscape while it also keeps her outside.

... the whole experience feels to the recordist as if he or she is more intensely inside the soundscape, because the sound is closer to the ear and usually amplified. But in fact, the recordist is separated from the original direct aural contact with the soundscape, especially from the spatial realities of closeness and distance, from the ability to localize sound correctly. In that contradiction, however, lies the seduction of the microphone: it feels like access, like closer contact, but it is in fact a separation, a schizophrenic situation. Soundscape recordists exist in their own sound bubble and hear the place in which they are, completely differently from everyone else in the same place. They are like foreigners or outsiders, no matter whether the place is their home or foreign territory. (Westerkamp 1998: 7)

Kits Beach Soundwalk embodies this sense of being inside and outside the soundscape at once. Sounds enter Westerkamp's most intimate dreams from the everyday experience of walking the beach. She listens to the recording, immediately beginning to play with levels, to create an imaginary space far from the city, leading the listener through a world of high frequencies. She is at once inside the beach soundscape and reporting on it, inside the composition and relating how it is made.

Re-learning to hear and decipher the soundscape like a new language; treading carefully with curiosity and openness, aware that as recordists we remain outsiders; always attempting to create a type of naked, open ear; these may be ways to continue for the composer who wants to speak from inside the soundscape and at the same time transmit a genuine ecological consciousness. (Westerkamp 1998: 10)

1 This soundwalk formed the basis of my soundwalk website and the soundwalking webpage on this site. I also made a gallery installation based around an interactive screen animating a wall projection, surrounded by ceramic, drawn and painted works by P. S. Moore that were based on listening to the soundwalk.

2 This section is built around Westerkamp's performance score. My comments and additions are added in square brackets [].

3 Although the recording was made in February, Westerkamp found that word difficult to say in performance, so changed it to January.

4 Composer Wende Bartley contributed a sound for Westerkamp to use in this piece, a high-frequency synthesized whirring.

5 Westerkamp describes the source of these arpeggios: "I had played around with tape speed and sped up some of the higher pitched piano string sounds (from an old broken, out-of-tune piano in an abandoned house on Slocan Lake in the Kootenays). A lot of the tape mix and the way the words fit with the mix was total coincidence (the most obvious example being the clicking sounds near the bullets section in the text)."

6 Westerkamp says "I took [this sound] randomly from a cassette tape that a boy (a friend of Sonja's) was listening to. This boy had been in the Tomatis program in the Listening Centre in Toronto and when he moved to Vancouver, he continued to listen to these tapes."

7 Westerkamp: "It is a neon sign above a shop with arrows and the light pulses from left to right (to the entrance of the shop) through the arrows."

8 Throughout the discussions of Westerkamp's pieces, I use the following to identify listener responses: Pseudonym as given by respondent (age followed by m for male or f for female, location of response)

9 Or words, in creative writing; or images in visual art.

10 Truax attended one of my listening sessions, and agreed to be identified. I decided that because of his expertise in this area, it would be best to use his real name.

11 Many people who live in British Columbia refer to it as the "Wet" coast rather than the West coast, especially after a rainy spring.

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