

Chapter 11 - Conclusions

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Dialogue has been important throughout the development of this dissertation, as a methodology that respects the agency and knowledge of consultants and research subjects. I have engaged in a fluid and ongoing dialogue with Westerkamp. She saw every chapter of this dissertation, sometimes before my committee did (for instance, the biography chapter). In addition, I contacted her about all kinds of more specific issues, on an ongoing basis. As friends, we talk to each other by email at least twice a week, when she is in Canada. While she is in India, communication is less frequent, nevertheless she sends letters, postcards, and sometimes packages in the mail, as well as the occasional email message.

All of these conversations were affected by our relationship as friends. There is a level of respect, patience and tolerance of difference that has facilitated such deep questioning of Westerkamp's compositional process and listeners' interpretations of her pieces. This level of exchange has informed both of us and our work during the period of writing. I have often wondered when reading biographical works about composers whether such a relationship exists between writer and composer. But these writings are traditionally presented as works primarily about the music, with biographical information about the composer, the writer as the sole interpreter, and the merest suggestion of the writer's relationship to the composer. Such a presentation defines some knowledge as belonging to the composer and some to the writer, without making clear how their interaction created the book. I have attempted to show some of the ways that my conversations with Westerkamp have developed my work, focusing on the interactions between us and how that has clarified our thinking.

The other levels of interactivity in this work are those between the researcher and other listeners, and the composer and other listeners, as well as the wider academic community. Here, there are a number of questions to consider. How did the form of the dissertation encourage interactivity among listeners: in other words, how useful were the web, CD-ROM and printed formats in this respect? How much interactivity was there during the listening sessions about Westerkamp's work? How much of a dialogue existed between composer and listener perceptions of structure, narrative and imagery related to a work? What would such analyses reveal about work that does not have such clear connections to the real world? How will these writings contribute to a wider academic dialogue?

Hybrid Format

I produced a dissertation in a hybrid format: part written text, part CD ROM, part website. Initially I desired to experiment with producing a document that was all hypertext. However, several practical considerations changed my mind. As I mentioned earlier, I find that long theoretical arguments are best presented as written text because then the reader is not tied to the screen for reading. Academics spend enough time in front of a computer screen! But it goes further than that. Accessibility is also a concern. I used Macromedia Director to produce the CD ROM, and this program has different versions for Macintosh and PC. In other words, if someone wants to produce a CD ROM for both platforms, they have to buy a PC and a Macintosh version of the software. I only had access to the Macintosh version, so the CD ROM is only for the Mac.

This platform accessibility became a concern even with my committee. Not all of them had a Macintosh for their own use, so in order for them to experience the CD ROM, we had to find a suitable location with a Macintosh. Not exactly accessible. So, even though the CD ROM provides possibilities to bring together images, text and sound in innovative ways, concerns like platform accessibility and the availability of fast computers with CD ROM drives is still a concern.

The CD ROM seemed to work well in institutional settings that allowed a large number of people to experience the installation on one computer. So, for instance, the gallery installation based on the soundwalk was set up on a computer with a projector in one location over a period of days, surrounded by related artwork. The highest level of interaction between audience and creator was achieved in the York show, where Don Sinclair asked students to respond to the work and I had access to their responses. In that situation, I was able to get a clear idea of what people thought of the work, and how it led them to think about sound. Once again, as with many of the listening sessions, this was a captive audience: the journal entries about the show were part of the student coursework.

In my production of the installation I wanted to focus primarily on the sound, and to encourage the audience to do so as well. The sound was the first aspect of the presentation that I completed images came later, were based on the sound, and were generally of lower resolution (leading to smaller memory requirements). The comments about the installation (see Appendix G) suggest that I was successful in this regard. Several people who came to experience the installation did leave thinking about daily sounds in a quite different way, and were sensitized to sound. Several also spoke about their reflections on the sounds of an urban park, the place of that source recording.

I sent the CD ROM to Stockholm for an international acoustic ecology conference. Here, it was available to conference registrants for a period of two days. My website was

available, with an email link and a request for commentary. Although two people wrote to me noting that they had seen the work and liked it, neither said anything specific about it or whether it influenced their thinking about Westerkamp's music.

The CD ROM also seemed to act as a good supplement to an individual presentation. I used it in a soundwalk presentation at the Chicago miXing: women in sound art festival. Here, workshop participants were most interested in how Westerkamp works with soundscape recordings. In this case, the "In the Studio" section was very helpful in indicating how Westerkamp transforms a recording, how she juxtaposes transformed and original recordings, and how these work in the context of the piece as a whole. Some participants found this detailed information to be inspiring to their own work (for instance, Andrea Polli's *Shadow Walk*, created for another concert later in the series). In this situation, I believe that the CD ROM worked well to provide information as part of a live presentation. In other cases, I sent the CD ROM to individuals who requested it. Ian Chuprun, a composer who lives in Montreal, found the analysis of *Breathing Room* to increase his understanding of the piece, which he uses in his teaching.

The soundwalk website has been available online since 1997, has been included in two online festivals, is included on a webpage developed specifically for school use, and includes several email links inviting reaction. Responses include a brief mention in an online review by an arts magazine¹ and a number of individual questions, often regarding the equipment used to do soundwalks, such as types of microphones and recorders, and where these are available for purchase. There have been no responses that relate substantively to the issues raised in this dissertation. However, when I go to do a soundwalk presentation and give people my website address first, some usually visit and come to the presentation knowing what a soundwalk is, what acoustic ecology is, what kind of work Westerkamp does, and what my other work sounds like. The website is very useful as a preparation or followup to a presentation.

While interactivity is a word that is used freely within the computer community to signify the rich potential for intersubjective connection made possible by fast communication links and the ability of computers to store messages, the practical limits of interactivity seem to demand more attention. My discussion here points out some of these limits: platform differences, equipment availability, and download times are some present concerns. Beyond that, it seems that in this project, the hypertext works best as an adjunct to live presentations. Perhaps I can work more on creating a sense of greater personal presence in the reduced environment of my soundwalk website, including a photo of my face and more audience-directed text to encourage people to respond in the way that they do during a talk or workshop.

Since I first wrote this text in 1999, mp3 and internet communications technology has improved to the point that it is possible to present a site such as this on the web for people to access and download. This is a really exciting development.

Listening Sessions

In the listening sessions I introduced a number of controls on dialogue, mainly to reduce my authority over listeners. I was concerned that if I came into a situation and gave a great deal of initial information about Westerkamp and the context of soundscape composition, listeners might be more likely to respond to my concerns and stated interests, making their written responses less open. For this reason, in most cases I gave only the titles of pieces, and did not read out program notes until after the listening session. I also allowed discussion of the pieces only after response forms had been handed in, fearing that criticisms of certain responses or a desire for consensus during discussion would lead to the deletion of certain responses. Peer pressure was most evident in the high school groups: quiet talking abounded during the listening session, as people commented on each others' responses,² and two girls sitting next to each other had almost identical writings about the work, also using identical pseudonyms.

The lack of context was perhaps unfair to the work, which is usually presented with program notes that (in Westerkamp's case) give the audience some idea of the composer's process and the background of the work. For instance, the fears about exoticism in relation to *Gently Penetrating...* were allayed somewhat when I read out the program note, which identifies Westerkamp's concerns and her reliance on local experts to find source recordings. I also wonder whether I over-estimated my potential authority: when I presented *Cricket Voice* to my undergraduate electroacoustic composition class at Queen's University, I discussed the context of soundscape composition first, and showed them Westerkamp's mixing score as they listened. And still the references to alien abductions and confrontations surfaced in this session: the responses were similar to those of other listeners in the same age group. My opinions did not seem to alter their responses very much, so perhaps my concern to reduce the amount of information I give to allow for individual freedom is greater than it needs to be.

The discussions afterwards often raised issues which did not necessarily appear to the same extent in the written responses, often in relation to the interpretive community of each session. For instance, in music theory and composition classes, there was often a lot of discussion about whether soundscape composition is music or not, and requests for my definition of what constitutes music. In the graduate Women's Studies class in gender and culture, there was a general discussion about the kinds of challenges faced by women composers as they work, as well as discussions about stereotyping and essentialism. These discussions often took as long as the listening part of the session.

While I wrote notes about what occurred during these sessions, an interesting research project would be to tape such discussions and compare how responses in a group situation differ from and agree with individual responses.

Different Places

There always seems to be some level of connection between listener responses and the context of the piece, if not the stated concerns of the composer. For instance, in *Breathing Room*, the sense of tension experienced by listeners can be traced both to a sonic tension between the tempo of the mechanical heartbeat and the breathing, as well as the composer's ambivalent feelings about technology and the body. The places imagined by listeners are sometimes geographically widespread (for instance, in *Gently Penetrating...* there are references to places in India, China, the Philippines, Mexico and Italy) but connected sonically (in this case, places where street vendors work or bells of different types ring). Sometimes the connections between composer representation and listener response seem particularly tenuous, as with the alien responses to *Cricket Voice*. Yet even here there are connections that emerged when I returned to Westerkamp's writings about the *Zone of Silence*, and the artists' initial impressions of it as urban dwellers encountering a harsh environment.

It could be argued that this form of analysis, utilizing listener responses about structure, imagery and memories to the extent that I did, worked partly because this is a piece which uses "real-world" sounds. As Katharine Norman (1994) discusses, realworld music seems particularly concerned with telling tales, and making connections between the recordist and sounds from a known world in context. Would such a process work with more abstract pieces? I did a pilot project analyzing several Canadian electroacoustic pieces, some of which are considered to be much more abstract than Westerkamp's work, and several listeners reported strong imagery and complex narratives in response to these pieces. Even though connections with real places in the world are facilitated by soundscape composition, it still seems that strong imagery can occur in response to pieces that are considered to be more abstract. It would be interesting in another project to explore this further, using a wide range of listeners from different interpretive communities, and analyzing their responses to musical works described as self-referential.

This study has been a very useful exercise in dialogic knowledge-seeking. Working with Westerkamp's soundwalk helped me to understand how Westerkamp listens to a sound environment, noting changes in the soundscape over time, listening to the voices of its inhabitants, responding to changes of the moment. It also gave me a chance to construct a response to that sound environment, working in a similar way to hers and articulating what I do differently. *Performing Moments of Laughter* gave us an opportunity to think about that piece as performer and composer as well as researcher and consultant, shifting our perspectives. Engaging with listeners' responses gave me access to ways of thinking about Westerkamp's work that enrich my own both through what connects us, and what separates our experience. My analysis of how Westerkamp and I influenced each other's thinking is a practical example of second-person knowledge-seeking among women friends.

These detailed analyses of some of Westerkamp's pieces contribute to research in several areas simultaneously. As a new method of analysis combining gestalt perception with listener response and critical theory, they are useful to music theorists. For instance, the listener responses about the experience of cultural flow in *Gently Penetrating...* and alien confrontations in *Cricket Voice* illustrate two different reactions to changes in sound scale produced by pitch-shifting. This connects listeners' stories about and images of the music with a perceptual change (in sound scale) and a compositional technique (juxtaposition of sounds from a similar source, changed in pitch at octave intervals). Such a connection of imagery, listener perceptions, and compositional process suggests a way of generating new possible insights into musical processes.

My research indicates that integrating a wide range of listener responses can raise issues that might not otherwise occur to the researcher. Juxtaposing responses from people of different disciplinary backgrounds can suggest why expertise in a genre of music does not guarantee intent listening. Attitudes and values associated with disciplinary knowledge focus the listener on certain aspects of the music, and can even stop him or her from listening at all. The inclusion of a wider range of listeners offers a number of possible perspectives on the pieces, and other potential ways of understanding them.

Some of the issues which arose in my analysis reach into other academic areas. As Westerkamp notes, the similarities and differences between the tales she is telling and what listeners hear is useful for composers to know, to think about the role of the composer in relation to the listener. Similarities and differences between soundscape composition and film soundtracks in the responses will provide topics of discussion for theorists in the area of acoustic ecology as well as in film sound. What are the subconscious effects on listeners of film sound design? How do they activate fears and desires in the listener that they are not consciously aware of?

My discussion of categories and canonicity in electroacoustic music is helpful in a re-thinking of contemporary music history as it relates to the development of disciplinary canons, and to interactions between composers in their compositional formation. A further area of study might be to look at how biographers of composers, often composers themselves, influence both the reception of that composer's work and the composer's thinking about their work. While it is commonly understood that people choose to study

composers that they believe are influential, who have often influenced the researcher, less is known about how influence flows in the other direction. Westerkamp has noted several times how my work has affected her. It has helped her to increase her own understanding of her compositional approach, and her confidence in its value. My interpretation of listener responses has given her access to the ideas and imagery of a large audience talking about her work, offering insight into the stories that people tell and situations that they imagine while listening.

Another theoretical area, my multi-disciplinary approach to the study of the idea of northern wilderness in Canadian concert music, contributes to thinking about how such a mythology is related to canonicity, and leads to further questions about Canadian identity in music. How is this idea of north played out in popular music and film soundtracks? How is this mythology being complicated as Canada becomes increasingly multicultural, as global warming changes the climate, as music on the web changes what goes international? Westerkamp's approach to place in her music highlights the sonic, social, and ecological specificities of places. While she values the sonic sparseness that allows her to hear the song of a single cricket, her sound works are not the unpeopled landscapes of a Group of Seven northernness. Her works retain the motions, gestures and voices of herself and other inhabitants. She explores unknown places as much through stillness and intimacy as through rugged adventure. She also represents urban sounds, from the voices of people living under the flightpath of Vancouver's airport to the razzle-dazzle of Banff's tourist centre or the framed Nature of urban parks. This creates constructs of specific places in Canada that are more complex and differentiated than a mythology of northern purity.

Fundamentally, this dissertation and my work with Westerkamp have confirmed my own commitment to soundwalk recording as a creative discipline, an approach to research with sound, and a way of organizing my life that makes sense. I have developed an approach to soundwalks that emphasizes a listening connection to a place and its inhabitants and a heightened awareness of how I move through that place. On January 13, 1999, spurred on by the incredible snowfall of early January (another sign of global warming?) and a need to balance my incessant writing with some creative work with sound, I came up with a millenium project that seemed at the time to be very simple: I would record, at intervals determined by chance procedures, the walk from the end of the street to my house, for the period of a year. That way I could mark changes in weather, meditate on my connection to my immediate neighbourhood, and make a website that uses sound to think about home, place, memory, and the passage of time over a year. Chance, as John Cage would say, comes in to give us the unknown. In April, I was offered a teaching position in Montr al, and we moved there in the summer. I continue to record from the end of the street to my house, but it is a different street, and a different house. And a different story.

1 "Andra McCartney's Soundwalks may be a pleasant way to end the visit. The project allows the visitor to wander through the audio-environment of Vancouver's Queen Elizabeth Park and the Open Ears Festival in Kitchener, Ontario." Magalie Tremblay. "Maid in Cyberspace Encore." Centre international d'art contemporain de Montr al, Electronic Art Magazine. <http://www.ciac.ca/magazine/magelectroniqueangl.html>

2 As my daughter Sian, who accompanied me on this session, reported afterwards.

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