

## Handout 6: Exercises in Acoustic Ecology

# Simple Exercises in Acoustic Ecology

## Sound walks

A sound walk is as simple as it seems. An individual or group goes into the field (which could be in nature, a town, or building), and pays close attention to all sounds heard along the way. Participants may take notes, or pause to collect their memories at the end of the walk. It is interesting to compare notes, and see how different people often have quite individual experiences of the sound mix of a given place.

## Ear Opening

This one is best done in a single location. A series of questions is posed, either beforehand, or during the listening session. Examples: What is the quietest sound you can hear? What is the most distant sound you can hear? The closest? What sounds of your own body can you hear? What is the mix of natural and human sounds in this place? Pay attention to, as you might watch, a sound that travels through your listening space. Try to notice a sound just as it becomes audible, and follow it until it is barely perceptible.

## Explorations in Listening

Here's a fun one; the underlying idea is that listening is an active process—that we are, in a sense, performers and audience for our own environmental sound concert. The quest here is to find places in the given location where there are especially interesting mixes of sounds, or perhaps places where common sounds are somehow transformed (muffled, distorted, pushed to background or foreground in unique ways). It is a sort of sonic walkabout: both the changing mix as you move, and the delights of specific locations are the rewards.

(<http://www.acousticecology.org/edu/currintros.html>, <http://wfae.proscenia.net/library/articles/index.html>)

## LISTENING

Step outside and close your eyes - take a minute to clear your mind and let your ears warm up and tune-in. Open your eyes and choose a direction you want to walk in.

Walk for about 5 minutes and as you walk, listen to sounds from all directions. Sound is 3 dimensional. Listen above you, below you, to your left and right, in front of you and behind you. Hear a sound before you see it, and keep listening once it moves out of sight. When you've reached a turning back point, stop, close your eyes and turn in a slow circle. Listen to how the sound moves around you.

Step outside and close your eyes - take a minute to clear your mind and let your ears warm up and tune-in. Open your eyes and choose a direction you want to walk in.

Walk for about 5 minutes, then turn around and return where you started. Listen for very tiny sounds. What are the smallest sounds you can possibly hear? Where are they coming from? Are they close or far away? Are they getting louder, or softer? When a soft sound is interrupted by a louder sound, are you able to hear it again when the loud sound passes?

Sound waves can be absorbed and processed by your whole body, not just your ears.

You can feel the sound in your stomach, against your face, in your hands, through the soles of your feet. You have to be REALLY listening to do this. Step outside and close your eyes - take a minute to clear your mind and let your ears warm up and tune-in.

Open your eyes, turn and walk to your right - move slowly and quietly, so the waves of sound can reach you with as little disruption as possible. Listen and hear with every part of your body.

How did listening make you feel?

How do you feel now?

What do you remember hearing?

What did you expect to hear?

What didn't you hear?

(adapted from: <http://www.treetheater.org/score.pdf>)

Nada an Experience in Sound

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For just a moment...

can you drop your inhibitions

your pre-conceived notions

can you forget where you have come from

where you have to go

who you are

where you will be

can you let your love & hate

anger & pain

sorrow & joy

can you forget everything

can you just listen

listen

listen.....

([http://wfae.proscenia.net/library/articles/westerkamp\\_nada.pdf](http://wfae.proscenia.net/library/articles/westerkamp_nada.pdf))