

Music: A Cultural Experience

(GEN_MUS_170: Introduction to Music)

Soundwalk Reflection

Due: Friday, 5/28



A noise map by the National Bureau of Transportation Statistics

For this assignment, you will take a walk, listening intently to the world around you. You will use readings about “soundscape” and “soundwalking,” alongside other course concepts, to reflect on your experience in writing. How might we understand the sounds of the world to be musical?

"In a way the world is a composition, a huge musical composition that's going on all the time without a beginning and, presumably, without an ending. We are the composers of this huge miraculous composition going on around us and we can improve it or we can destroy it."

-R. Murray Schafer, "Listen"

Things to do

- **Read** about the “soundscape” and/or “soundwalking”
- **Walk** around your neighborhood
- **Reflect** on your experience of sound

Read

Look through one or more of the following readings to learn about the concepts of the “soundscape” and “soundwalking.” Your goal should be to familiarize yourself with these concepts before going for your own soundwalk. You don’t need to read all of the listed readings, but you must look through at least one:

- Pauline Oliveros, “Some Sound Observations”
- J. Murray Schafer, “The Soundscape”
- Hildegard Westerkamp, “Soundwalking”
- Stephen Benson and Will Montgomery, “Introduction: Writing the Field Recording”
 - Read any other parts of this book too
- Jonathan Stern, “Sounds Like the Mall of America”
- Christos Carras, “Soundwalks: An Experiential path to new Sonic Art”
- J. Murray Schafer, *Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*

- I recommend the preface, Ch. 5 (The Industrial Revolution), Ch. 6 (The Electric Revolution), and Ch. 14 (Listening) – but the book is great. Read any bits of it.
- Amanda M. Black and Andrea F. Bohlman, “Resounding the Campus: Pedagogy, Race, and the Environment”

Go for a Walk

- **Choose a location or path for your soundwalk.** Think about the spaces you spend the most time: in your home, neighborhood, city, etc. Think about the paths you take most often take: your commute, trips to the grocery store, trips to getting your covid test on campus, your daily walks or runs, etc. What seems like an appealing path for your soundwalk? Please choose a location that will allow you to maintain social distance and conform to local requirements for health and safety.
- **Hypothesize what you’ll hear.** What sounds do you anticipate hearing? What would you be interested in listening for? Many of you commute or walk while wearing headphones and listening to music. For this assignment, please leave your headphones at home and listen to the world around you.
- **Find a device to record audio** – your phone’s voice memo feature would work fine. By recording audio of your soundwalk, you can listen to it again while writing your reflection. If you don’t have a way to record audio, you can take photos or video of important instead. You’re welcome to include audio, video, or photos in your written reflection.
- **Go for your soundwalk.** Take notes along your path, doing your best to capture your initial impressions. Consider the questions in the next section before going on your soundwalk.

Reflect on your Experience

- **Write an interpretive description of your sound walk.** You should try to convey what you heard and the implications these sounds have for your understanding of where you are.
 - What do you hear? What is making the sounds?
 - What do these sounds tell you about the places you occupy during your walk?
 - What concepts from the readings for this assignment (and the course in general) are useful for your interpretation of your soundwalk?
 - Look at one (or more if you want) of the supplementary readings that seems most helpful for your experience. What ideas can you draw upon?
- **Listen back to the recording you made during your soundwalk.** Between this recording and whatever notes you take during your walk, you’ll have a lot to work with when describing and interpreting your sonic experiences.
- **Write in whatever style you choose.** I recommend writing in the first-person “I” to narrative your experiences. I encourage you to be poetic in your reflection, including images (if you want), descriptions of sounds, and how you perceived them.

Inspiration

- R. Murray Schafer, "Listen" – short video explaining Schafer's philosophy:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOlXuXHWfHw>
- Chicago's Loudest Neighborhoods, Mapped, article from 2017:
<https://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/20170328/midway/chicagos-loudest-neighborhoods-map-national-bureau-of-transportation-statistics/>
- Tour of the Mall of America video (this channel has footage from around the world):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDjYly7gAvg>
- Hildegard Westerkamp, "Kits Beach Soundwalk":
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hg96nU6ltLk>
- Hildegard Westerkamp's Soundcloud page, with many clips from all over the world:
<https://soundcloud.com/user-331234342>

Rubric

This project is worth 7.5% of your grade, organized into 20 points. In total, your soundwalk reflection should be 500-750 words in length.

Reflect (10 points): A student will receive full credit for a soundwalk reflection with thoughtful structure and correct grammar. Your reflection should answer most of the questions posed in the Reflect section above.

Analyze (10 points): A student will receive full credit for a soundwalk reflection that draws on concepts from one or more of the readings listed under the Read section. Analysis should expand upon the description of your soundwalk, using concepts and terms from the course when applicable.