

Mary Jiang
Professor Gandy and Professor Robertson
CS 4590
10 February 2020

Class Ex. 5: Active Listening

The sound environment I chose is a recording of a downtown city centre that is filled with the sound of human activity and motor vehicles passing by. The most prominently featured ambient sound and the one that I noticed first is talking amongst people in the background that is indiscernible for most of the recording but nonetheless present the whole way through. Occasionally, there are people talking louder in the background chatter, and one person who says “yoohoo,” most likely to get someone’s attention. Someone whistles and then fades out, suggesting they were simply walking past the person recording. There is also periodic clinking in the background, which sounds similar to plates and cutlery clinking together, that may imply these people are seated at the outside patio of a restaurant. Someone coughs at one point, which can be identified because of its abruptness and loudness over the background chatter. Some kind of motor vehicle drives past quickly at the three-quarter point. I am inclined to believe it is a motorcycle rather than a car because it accelerates in a short period of time and has a thin motor sound compared to the deep rumbling of a car. There are periodically cars that drive past. A loud screeching sound plays and then there is a deep engine sound over the sound of other engines, which suggests this may be a large truck. Someone wearing high heels walks past, making a clicking sound with each step, which makes me think that the ground is not cobblestone because of how consistent each click is since cobblestone is an uneven surface. Towards the end of the recording, a man’s voice speaking in a different language gradually grows louder and clearer, which suggests that he is walking past the person who is recording.

I noticed the sound of constant human chatter first, but as I listened further in the recording, it slowly transformed into ambient noise, which made identifying sudden or louder sounds, such as the high heels or coughing, much easier. With these sounds, I had more difficulty pinpointing what exactly was making them. I could pick out the sound of an engine, but I had to listen to the snippet several times to figure out whether it was a car or a motorcycle making it and compare that sound to the other motor vehicle sounds. I could tell that the shoes walking past were high heels because of the succinct clicks, which then revealed information about the environment to me, namely what kind of pavement ran through the downtown centre. Something I noticed was the lack of doors closing or opening, which I found interesting because I assumed since it was a city centre, there would be the hustle and bustle of people going in and out of stores.

Altogether, these sounds have a positive meaning in the context of a downtown centre since they suggest there are many people gathered together in this central location, speaking to others around them and connecting, which fits the purpose of a town centre. The sounds in this environment are overall positive, just chattering with a mixture of other sound sprinkled in, such as whistling, vehicles, or the clinking of plates and silverware.