

Making, Unmaking, and Remaking the Real

Excerpt from “Soundwalking,” from Hildegard Westerkamp

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The first soundwalk can be done anywhere, at any time, and as often as desired. For the sake of intensity it may be wise to limit the walk initially to a small area or even to one particular spot. Different people may spend varying lengths of time on this walk. In each case it depends on how long it takes to remove the initial hearing barriers, how deep the involvement is and how much fascination can be found in such an exploration.

Start by listening to the sounds of your body while moving. They are closest to you and establish the first dialogue between you and the environment. If you can hear even the quietest of these sounds you are moving through an environment which is scaled on human proportions. In other words, with your voice or your footsteps for instance, you are "talking" to your environment which then in turn responds by giving your sounds a specific acoustic quality.

Try to move
Without making any sound.
Is it possible?

Which is
the quietest sound of your body?

(If, however, you cannot hear the sounds you yourself produce, you experience a soundscape out of balance. Human proportions have no meaning here. Not only are your voice and footsteps inaudible but also your ear is dealing with an overload of sound).

Lead your ears away from your own sounds and
listen to the sounds nearby.

What do you hear? (Make a list)

What else do you hear?
Other people
Nature sounds
Mechanical sounds

How many
Continuous sounds continuous Continuous sounds continuous

Can you detect
Interesting rhythms
Regular beats
The highest

The lowest pitch.

Do you hear any
Intermittent or discrete sounds
Rustles
Bangs
Swishes
Thuds

What are the sources of the different sounds?

What else do you hear?

Lead your ears away from these sounds and listen
beyond-----into the distance.
What is the quietest sound?
What else do you hear?

What else?

What else?

What else?

What else?