



## podcast one - the listening and sound pedagogies of Oliveros and Schafer

### Episode one - script

Hello friends. I hope you are all doing okay; safe and well. Thank you so much for listening and for your interest in the Sound Museum project. It is a great pleasure to be connecting with some of you again and also to be electronically meeting others. Since I started interviews with some of you and while planning this script I keep thinking how great it would be if all of us could just be in a park together trying some of these exercises and discussing the ideas. That is how I am most used to facilitating this work. So with that in mind, please add descriptions to the sounds you post, make comments on each others posts, on the inquiry questions, but also let me know if you would like something different in podcast #2.

My name is Doug Friesen and this first podcast is an introduction to the sound and listening pedagogies of composer/educators R. Murray Schafer and Pauline Oliveros. In the spirit of how I think they taught, let's start with some focussed listening. You can listen to the soundscape I am in and/or to your own. Take a breath or two and just listen. For now, don't worry about labelling what you hear.

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"Sounds cannot be known the ways sights can...seeing is analytical and reflective."

"Sights are knowable. Sights are nouns"

"Sounding is active and generative. Sounds are verbs...sound is incomparable...there can be no science of sound only sensations...intuitions...mysteries"

These words are taken from Schafer's talk at the World Forum for Acoustic Ecology in Mexico City in 2009 and are indicative of what he and I think Oliveros believed starting in the late 1960s.

I am currently a teacher in public schools in Toronto, a PHD student at the University of Toronto, and a musician. I am very interested in what Oliveros called *Deep Listening* and Schafer called *Ear Cleaning* might offer our daily lives but also what their work might offer our institutions of music education -schools, conservatories, performing ensembles, and community music programs- which can often focus more on technique and notation rather than sound and listening. I grew up on a small farm in the prairies of Canada. I have many many privileges and yet even still experienced music education's practice of exclusion when I was told not to sing in the concert of my elementary school choir. This of course is just a very small and distanced glimpse into the actual exclusion patterned into institutional music education.

I am a friend and student of Schafer. Thanks to a former student's family connections to Schafer, I was able to write him a letter after reading an earlier print version of his book *The Thinking Ear*. I tried some of his ideas in my classroom and was excited and inspired by the depth of discussions on music, sound, and listening. The creative work the students did during these lessons has changed my concept of music education drastically. What do we hear? How can we transform the sounds around us? What is music? Why do we do it? These are the starting points for Schafer's teaching, and now mine as well. Years later as a consultant for the school board I visited many elementary schools. I remember often seeing student drawings of their neighbourhoods.

They would learn art techniques but always apply them to how they see and remake their world. Why does music education not often include how we hear and interact with, or even remake, our world through sound?

“Is the soundscape of the world an indeterminate composition over which we have no control, or are we its composers and performers, responsible for giving it form and beauty” (Schafer, 1977)?

Schafer, along with an amazing community of folks at Simon Fraser University (including Hildegard Westerkamp and Barry Truax) did some significant work in the 60s and 70s on how our soundscapes are shifting, and what we might learn about ourselves, our world, and maybe each other if we listen deeper. This early research is compiled in the often cited book *The Soundscape: The Tuning of the World*. Much less referenced are his practical applications of these thoughts in education booklets published between 1965 and 1975. These have been translated into many languages and are now compiled in the *Thinking Ear*. In addition to these reflections of practice he compiled two books of exercises for listening and creating with sound: *A Sound Education* in 1992 and *Hearings* in 2005. I will list these books in the resource page of the sound museum project website. *I hear with my little ear* and *Can you recognize the sound of your own keys?* Are just two examples of the many exercises/games in these books.

Here is another that we can do now.

Try standing up without making a sound. Or sitting down if you are already standing.

I'll give some time for you to try first. Take note of sounds if you make them. Could you describe these sounds?

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Now I will try so you can listen. Again, take note of the sounds you might hear. Can you write descriptions of them?

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Both Schafer and Oliveros spent time as instructors, Schafer at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver and Oliveros at the University of California San Diego and at Mills College in San Francisco. Other than this they have mostly worked outside, or against, these institutions in retreats, community groups, invited lectures, rehearsals, performances, and workshops. Oliveros was a founding minimalist and a celebrated pioneer of electronic music. Her reasoning and recommendations for listening pedagogy can be found in the introductory material of her influential book *Deep Listening* (2005) which is a collection of prescriptive and reflective writing by her and others published over four decades. This book is closely linked with a recurring retreat (course) of the same name.

Oliveros' work may be more closely linked to John Cage and to American counterculture than Schafer's. Her work began while teaching in southern California, where Fred Turner's places the first counterculture "be-in" (2013, p. 7)<sup>1</sup>. In 1981, Oliveros, attracted by communities of music making and meditation, moved to the Hudson Valley. There she studied practices within Zen, Tibetan Buddhism, Yoga and Taoism (2005, p. xviii). The therapeutic elements of her book *Deep Listening* -meditation, healing, dream wisdom- might be considered the primary purpose of her work (2005, p. xvii). If Schafer's main focus was heightened listening *outwards*, Oliveros' would be heightened inner listening and how this inner listening may then affect how we interact with our world and each other.

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<sup>1</sup> Turner, F. (2013). *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia and American liberalism from World War II to the psychedelic sixties*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

It is possible to illuminate this contrast in the following two listening questions; Schafer's "What is the loudest sound you have heard today?" (1992, p. 13)

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And Oliveros' "When do you notice your breath?" (2005, p. 10)

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Here is another exercise of Oliveros' which comes from the amazing *Anthology of Text Scores*. Again, please note that I will list these books on the resource page of the website.

#### *Dissolving Your Earplugs* (2006)

1. Take some time -no matter where you are-to sit down and close your eyes for a while and just listen. When you open your eyes, consider what you heard as the "music." Later try to remember what you heard and express it with your instrument or voice.  
Do this practice often until you begin to hear the world as music.

Oliveros' work was reactionary in similar ways to Schafer's. She too felt that her own experiences in music education were focused solely on performing and appreciating music of the past and that they lacked any opportunities for composing and improvising; "Most students do not realize that they have creative potential to make their own music..." (2005, p. xv). Also, like Schafer, she wanted to react against the changing soundscape; "I grew up in a time when there existed a very rich and dense soundscape of insects, birds, and animals....[n]ow in the 21st Century, that soundscape is considerably thinned out by asphalt, concrete pavements and building developments" (p. xv). This parallels Schafer's concerns but does not quite attain the level of judgment Schafer places on what he called the "deafening...noise pollution" of cities.

Oliveros and Schafer started their sound and listening work at similar times and, in large part, because of being asked to teach courses on modern music within institutions on the West Coast of North America. Because of their growing frustration with both the institutions within which they taught and the urban settings within which they lived, both decided to move east to much less populated areas: Oliveros to the Hudson Valley of upstate New York and Schafer to a farm in rural northern Ontario. I think this move from the counterculture of the West Coast to two very different smaller communities is partially what sets up this listening outward/listening inward distinction in their practices.

To varying degrees both composers do indeed place some judgement on what sounds might be good and what sounds might be bad. They also make some assumptions about what experiences and ideas participants might bring to their workshops (which I will get into more in the third podcast; "listening and difference.") Despite these judgements and assumptions I think their ideas, with some critical updates, still offer interruptions to what institutions of music education narrowly define as music.

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What is the first sound you remember hearing this morning?

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Here are some questions to consider this week.

What are the distinctions made between sound and music? Why are some sounds considered musical and others most definitely not?

Why have sound and listening pedagogies not become more commonplace within institutions of music education? Oliveros and Schafer seemed to think heightened listening was essential! Why are these two composers only mentioned briefly, if at all, at the end of an increasingly deemed eccentric lineage of 20th century composers?

Can listening pedagogies be, as Adam Tinkle suggests, “a means towards liberation from entrenched systems of knowledge/power,”<sup>2</sup> or would institutionalized ear cleaning and *Deep Listening* just set up a newly fixed system?

I’ll post these questions in our discussion forum.

#### Making sound museums

I would like to ask you to make some recordings and post them in the discussion forum. You can use your phones or whatever else you might have to record.

1. Please record a few minutes of a soundscape significant to you. It may be in your home, or at a nearby street corner, park, or river, or wherever
2. Make short recordings of a few of the “soundmarks” of your daily life. These are sounds, like landmarks, that indicate or are unique to your neighbourhood/home.

Please post these sounds along with any descriptions or information you would like to share in the discussion forum.

It might be easiest for you to load these recordings onto a google drive folder or soundcloud and post the links for us...either individually or as a playlist (happy to help with that if anyone needs).

I will post this podcast script and these instructions on the site.

Please listen to as many other posted sounds as your time will allow. It would be amazing to have each of us write descriptions of what we are hearing in other’s recordings ....if possible try to describe what you are hearing rather than label what it is making the sound.

Please also note that World Listening Day is this Saturday the 18th of July, which is Schafer’s 87th birthday. You can learn more about this day at the World Listening Project which is linked on the Resource page of our site.

Next week’s podcast will focus on what heightened sound and listening might offer our daily life. Why and how are sound and listening differ from other senses.

The third and final week of this version of the project will be about listening and difference.....exploring the reality that we do not all hear the same things in the same way.

Do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or thoughts.

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<sup>2</sup> Tinkle, A. (2015). Sound Pedagogy: Teaching listening since Cage. *Organized Sound* 20 (2). 222-230.