



## podcast two (July 20th) - Why Sound? What might heightened listening offer?

### script

-insert audio of an exercise-

That is the sound of a few of my former students and now fellow educators and musicians, generously offering me some of their time to do some listening and sound games at a safe distance in a park. This one is called 'empty repeating canvas' (can be found here <https://creativemusiced.wordpress.com/exercises-and-games/>) It begins with an empty decided upon count number of beats and a repeat sign. Each of us decides where we want to place one sound event and then we repeat this pattern until a leader cues a shift, transition, or return. I'll intersperse a few of these recordings into this podcast and post them as a playlist on the resource page. There are many more exercises and suggested practices in the sources listed on that page.

So hello, I'm Doug Friesen and this the second "podcast" of The Sound Museum Project. You cannot see it but I am holding up some air quotes when I say podcast. I did not want to call it a lecture or a lesson....perhaps audio reflection would have been better?

Last week, in episode 2 of this podcast (air quotes) I introduced Pauline Oliveros and *Deep Listening* practices and R. Murray Schafer and *ear cleaning* practices. This week we will further explore what focussing on sound and listening might offer that our other senses might not. I'll start by making some connections between two main rationales for Oliveros' and Schafer's attention to sound.

1. Sound was the medium of their musical practice as composers (still is).
2. They felt that our soundscapes were changing; both disappearing and getting too loud (still are?)

I then want to explore the suggestion that we, along with our institutions, have become ocularcentric: The idea that sight is atop a Western imposed hierarchy of senses.

Pauline Oliveros and R. Murray Schafer, after gaining some attention as pioneering 20th century composers, were both asked to teach courses on modern music at separate institutions along the West Coast of North America. They both had felt that creativity was lacking in their own music education (unfortunately still is for us too) so they planned composing and making new music as a central to these courses. Trying to convince university level students that they should create and compose after they too had already experienced a very fixed, Western, notation based music education may have been a very difficult task. I know I have experienced this difficulty. My thinking is that this difficulty led Oliveros and Schafer to focus on heightened listening. Perhaps their students found creativity in listening easier/safer to take part in then being creative as musicians. If someone's listening and their observation can become creative and critical, making music may seem less daunting. This has been true in my classrooms of instruction and I'm only just fully realizing the sequence of this now as we start this project. So, from their attempts to heighten listening and their attention to the sounds around us come a broader consideration of sound as separate from, and perhaps disconnected to, music. This disconnect seemed to frustrate them both. Why should "music" be something so separate from the sounding

world around us? This is a question posed earlier in the century by John Cage. What are we missing if we only *really* listen at concerts, or to recordings? This would mean that our ears and bodies are somehow ignoring much of the sound we constantly hear. We just ignore much of what Schafer called “noise pollution” and “sound sewage.” But we do not have physical earplugs and so cannot choose to physiologically stop hearing. Despite our ignoring of much sound, our bodies and ears still absorb/receive the physical particles within these sound waves. What effect does this have on us? And also, if music and sound are not considered so separately, we might, or must begin to ask why our cities are being allowed to get noisier and noisier. Schafer and Oliveros both felt that we *must* learn/re-learn to listen.

Their initial interest in sound, however, comes more from the very simple fact that it is *the main medium* of musical practice. Why has this alluded so much of music education practices? Do we often not “teach” music by sight, with method books and black dots on the page? We most often equate the term *musical literacy* with a knowledge of Western European *notation*; the notation itself, not even the sounds of or the listening to the Western Canon of music. Not only does this definition exclude millennia of many music practices, and corresponding bodies, it even tends to exclude sound itself! This definition of music literacy also illuminates why institutions of music education assume, like much of education, a scarcity of experience and knowledge within the students (Illich, 1970).

I want to again invite you to listen to your soundscape, perhaps by taking one headphone off, or to listen to mine.

What are our ears leaving out that we can take note of when we listen more deeply?

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Are there sounds you can hear now that are at ear damaging levels? Consider both our own ears and the ears of others who are further away.

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Further reasoning for inquiries into attention to sound, not unrelated to those just described, lead to the suggestion that our world has become ocularcentric. That seeing is on the top of sensorial hierarchy which is neatly, and perhaps artificially, divided into the most accepted definitions of the five senses; sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell. And, because of this separation and grading of importance, we disregard more embodied and less normalized ways of being in the world. Music education scholar Joseph Abramo (2014), in a brief epistemology of the pedagogy of sound, cites Martin Jay’s use of this term *ocularcentrism* to describe a Western prioritizing of vision over hearing (p. 79). Citing the work of Bruce Smith, Abramo suggests that, in comparison, seeing an object may be considered fixed and separate whereas hearing involves continually shifting sounds that are both simultaneously separate and a part of us (p. 81).

-insert audio of an exercise-

Ethnomusicologist Beverly Diamond (2016) suggests that “...sound, like movement, is experienced as vibration” and that it “enters our body, enlivening and energizing” (p. 243).

What sounds can we hear now that our body, more than our ears, is registering as vibration?

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What can you now see that is also making a sound? How does your sight experience it differently than your hearing?

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We can hear what we cannot see. Bruce Smith (1999), suggests that this would have helped humans know of approaching dangers...and perhaps still does for less privileged folks. We need to remember that peace and quiet is a privilege of the few...and perhaps fewer and fewer. You need only to do a sound/listening walk through varying neighbourhoods of your community to note this. What are the quietest neighbourhoods? Why do you think that is? I will reflect more on sound and privilege next week.

Although I do think there is use and illumination to be found in doing so, I want to evaluate some of the assumptions underlying attempting to prioritize hearing over sight. This presupposes that these two senses can actually be reflected upon separately and also without other senses -taste, touch, and smell-. Perhaps further learning can teach us that there are different senses than these, or even more than five senses. However, even these five must interlock, combine, ebb and flow, and layer upon each other. Attempting to separate them is maybe a useful theatric but also presupposes a universality and normativity to experiencing these senses: further patterning that there is only one normal way to hear and see. This is not true as those living and working within disability programs, practices and research have continually and patiently keep trying to tell us.

Another important reminder comes from rhetoric and composition scholar Jody Shipka (2016); “We stand to gain little by inverting existing hierarchies, substituting one set of sign systems, meaning-making strategies, and communicative technologies for another while working to denigrate what has come before” (p. 265). I want to interject a quick note that Schafer’s later practices, both as a composer and educator, involved inquiries into creating with all five senses. He included smell, taste, and touch into his own composing, with students preparing courses of food to match performed music, and taught two versions of a course called *The Theatre of the Senses*. This work does not seem to have been documented or researched.

Close your eyes. What can you hear? What do you smell? Can you taste something? What do you feel?

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Yet another Rhetoric and Composition scholar Steph Ceraso offers an argument for listening itself being multi-sensory and multi-modal (2018). Interestingly, she is the first North American academic I have read who refers to Schafer’s and Oliveros’ teaching practices rather than just theories. She hopes to further this work in her own teaching. Ceraso’s research with Evelyn Glennie, who is considered legally deaf, presents a strong critique of framing our senses as separate. For Glennie, touch and hearing are the same. She *hears* with her body, touching the sound, and through this practice performs extensively with many other musicians. Sound might indeed be a bridge, perhaps even if just a temporary or superficial one, from distanced senses to those more embodied...or might even re-illuminate that sight itself is not at all separate from embodied experience. Heightened attention to sound might bring us back to our bodies, to touch and perhaps even to feelings and emotions as integral to the experiences of our daily lives .

-insert audio of an exercise-

Literary theorist Roland Barthes (1985) suggested that the ear is “a funnel leading to the interior” and “to listen is to adopt an attitude of decoding what is obscure, blurred...in order to make available to the consciousness the ‘underside’ of meaning” (p. 248-249).

With these ideas in mind let’s continue to build and share our sound museums.

1. Recall an early significant sound memory. Describe it, try to see if your description can cover telling us what it is but also what sound it made and how it felt to hear it. Please share this with us by posting both the sound and description in the discussion forum. I think our earliest memories are most often connected to pictures we have been shown. Early sound memories might illuminate something different, something more.
2. Record 3-4 sounds that you think might be disappearing. Archive these sounds and describe them. Please post a playlist and your descriptions for us to hear and read!

If your time allows, please also listen and reply to some of the amazing sounds posted last week as well as those coming this week! I also want to invite you to use google translate to engage in posts that may not be in your first language.

I will post new inquiry questions for us in the discussion forum. I will also post this script along with the audio of the podcast.

Next week I will talk more about how we do not hear/feel the same sounds similarly. Our daily soundscapes are not only different—sometimes drastically depending on location and also cultural background, and class—but we even each hear the same sounds differently. We will also discuss remixing, re-reading our world through sound.

Thank you again for listening. As before, let me know if I can shift anything to make this project more connected to your experiences and practices.

I want to end with sharing a recording from my own sound museum. This is a recording from a fairly recent, pre covid, visit to Schafer's farm. Murray has advanced Alzheimers however we still very much enjoy speaking and even improvising with our voices. His voice still sounds the same as it did when I first met him and the ideas he has shared are still within these words. Bye for now!

Doug

-insert "thank you" (audio of Murray)

**Cited** (other resources listed [here](#))

- Abramo, J.M. (2014). Music education that resonates: An epistemology and pedagogy of sound. *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, 22, 78-95.
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