MA PROJECT PAPER

"Well, Listen..."

Acoustic Community on Toronto Island

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Abstract

"*Well, listen...*"is a sound composition about the acoustic community of Toronto Island and Toronto Harbour. The project explores how people create and experience acoustic community, how perceptions of the soundscape are related to attitudes about nature and culture, and how power relationships are articulated through sound. The project is based in environmental cultural studies and in sound ecology, notably the work of Williams (1973), Schafer (1977), Westerkamp (2002) and Truax (1984), and concludes seven months of soundwalks, interviews, composition, editing and field research.

Participants discussed the soundscape of Toronto Island, noise pollution in Toronto Harbour and the relationship between sound, community and ecology. These interviews were edited and re-assembled in a manner inspired by the contrapuntal voice compositions of Glenn Gould. Field recordings reflect the complex mix of natural, social, and industrial sounds that make up the soundscape of the harbour, and document the acts of soundwalking and deep listening that are the core methods of soundscape research.

The composition creates an imaginary aural space that integrates the voices and reflections of the Island's acoustic community with the contested soundscape of their island home. The project paper outlines the theory and methods that informed the sound composition, and further explores the political economy of noise pollution, especially in relation to the Docks nightclub dispute and to current research in sound ecology.

I first visited Toronto Island[1] over ten years ago. My mother (who had recently moved to Toronto) and I would take the ferry to the Island on cold afternoons in the fall, after the big crowds of tourists had left for the season. We would wander the narrow laneways of Wards Island, investigating the charmingly dilapidated little cottages, or explore the windy marshes teeming with birds. The Big Smoke of downtown Toronto was home to neither of us; we were much happier in this quirky "backwoods", contemplating the mammoth cityscape from a comfortable distance. While we appreciated the break from urban culture, it was interesting to discover how the Island had been altered by humans over time; it was eroded in some places, fortified in others, planted, paved, dredged, connected and dissected according to the whims and needs of its keepers.

Many years later, just before I moved to Toronto to pursue my graduate work, my mom moved to Wards Island. I would visit her often during my first year in the city, and the Island became a refuge from the stress of student life. I got to know the island community and, for a little while, I felt like a member of that community. During these visits I became familiar with the soundscape of Toronto Island, especially Wards Island at its eastern end. I would often go dog-walking through the wet meadow at dusk, listening to thrushes, sparrows and squirrels; I would emerge onto the cement jetty at the eastern gap, listening for the 'splat!' of a beaver's tail on the choppy water; I would circle around the rock wall to the south-facing beach where I could look out, past the lighthouse

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[1] Although Toronto Island is an archipelago of dozens of small islands, it is customary to refer to the island in the singular, or simply to refer to specific islands in question, such as Wards or Algonquin Island.

at the tip of the Leslie Street Spit, into Lake Ontario. The surf made a soft, hypnotic *plish-pishh* on the sand, a smoother sound than the hollow knocking of waves on the breakwall, or the slap of a motorboat wake along the cement jetty harbourside. I was rarely aware of city noises on those walks; it was not until I started recording soundwalks on the island, and became a more attentive listener, that the broader soundscape emerged.

At this time I also became aware of the Islanders' troubles with loud clubs and party boats in the harbour. For over a decade, the island's "noise committee" has been involved in various legal, civil, and media disputes with businesses and enterprises responsible for excessive noise in Toronto Harbour. The most obvious and bothersome sources include the Toronto Island Airport, chartered party boats, raves held on Cherry Beach, and the Docks nightclub, the latter being the focus of a ten-year legal dispute.

I was immediately attracted to the Docks dispute as a case study in sound ecology, and chose it as the starting point for my project. It demonstrated an intersection of conflicting social mores regarding sound, territory, community, and human relationships to the natural world. However, during the course of the project, my focus shifted to a more general exploration of the acoustic community of Toronto Island, in an attempt to capture what is was that islanders felt was being violated by loud noises and urban din.

> Sound exists as a phenomenal presence involved in and determining the
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> shape of the world. It partially defines our perceptual, emotional, spiritual
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> and psychological spaces, and contributes to our understanding of
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> ourselves, our environment, and our relationship to each other.
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> (LaBelle and Roden, Qtd. in Waterman 9)

Acoustic ecology, or soundscape studies, is "the study of the inter-relationship between sound, nature, and society." (Westerkamp 2002: 2) It is rooted in phenomenological, sensory experience, seeks to understand how sound becomes meaningful to different people, and how the soundscape communicates information about social and environmental change.

R. Murray Schafer discussed the evolution of the world soundscape in relation to human social and technological development in The Tuning of the World (1977), and this text, along with soundscape research done by the World Soundscape Project[2], founded at Simon Fraser University in the late 1960s, inspired a body of creative and academic work that explores the symbolic potential of sound. Schafer's critique of "low-fidelity" (43) contemporary industrial soundscapes incorporated the "noise pollution" issue into a wider debate on human mediations of the natural environment, and brought attention to the physical and social consequences of careless soundmaking. Schafer also advocated a

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[2] The World Soundscape Project initiated several studies of the soundscape, including The Vancouver Soundscape in 1973 and 1996, and Five Village Soundscapes in 1975, and published many educational booklets, CDs and research papers.

prescriptive approach to soundscape design (205) that has since been challenged for its cultural and aesthetic specificity (Wagstaff, 1999).

Soundscape studies are closely related to environmental cultural studies. The soundscape is "the 'voice' which makes the world's environmental problems audible to all those who care to listen." (Westerkamp 2002: 3) Wagstaff (2002) calls soundscape studies a "tributary of environmental activism," (130) and as such it shares with environmentalism a concern for ecological health and the ways that human socio-economic relationships influence ecological balance. For example, Krause (1999) puts forward the idea of biophony: "All vocal creatures are heard in a symbiotic relationship to one another much like instruments in an orchestra,"(1) and "the natural soundscape, even in captive environments, plays a determining role in the behavior of otherwise wild creatures." (2) The sociological and psychological dimensions of soundscape research also tie it to ecopsychology (Fisher, 2002), sharing "a naturalistic and experiential politics that struggles against the nature-dominating and reifying aspects of modern mechanized society, and focuses on the need to relocate the human psyche within the wider natural world." (xvii)

It is only in the past three decades that policy-makers, the media, and environmentally concerned citizens in Western societies have come to understand noise, and noise pollution, as an environmental health issue rather than simply a question of public nuisance. This increased attention to "sound pollution" reflects the increase in

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ambient sound levels of cities and of rural areas[3], often in opposition to what might be called romantic ideals of natural and rural soundscapes. Wagstaff (1999, 2002) and Redström (1998) contest this oppositional construction of "polluted" and "pristine" soundscapes, and "bring into sharp relief acoustic ecology's overwhelming orientation towards western and developed countries." (Waterman 12)

This opposition is also criticized for its cultural essentialism (Waterman 11). Contemporary composers and theorists give attention to the ways in which diverse, modern acoustic communities negotiate between the sounds of nature and culture[4], and use sound to create autonomous spaces, and art, within the noise[5]. The "noise pollution" caused by incursions by countercultural groups (like ravers) into spaces that capitalism has left behind (like abandoned industrial areas) might also be celebrated as manifestations of independence from the dominant social order. This analysis also extends to non-Western cultures (as well as disempowered and lower-class communities within Western culture[6]), whose concepts of "peace and quiet" differ significantly from Schafer's pastoral ideal. Instead of waging a battle against a culturally specific notion of "sound pollution", sound ecologists advocate working towards a balanced acoustic soundscape, a "social biophony" where "each sonic event does not obstruct or interfere with the transmission or reception of another." (Wagstaff 1999: 27)

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[3] The majority of early soundscape research was conducted in North America and Europe, notably the WSP's Vancouver Soundscape and Five Village Soundscapes. Soundscape research has since been conducted in Japan, South America, and Africa.
[4] See Dumas and Calon (2003), Westerkamp (2002a), and McCartney (2003).
[5] See Peebles (2001), Madan (2002), Friz (2002).
[6] The relationship between sound and power in African-American culture is explored in Tricia Rose's Black Noise. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1994.

Nevertheless, the social trend of constructing and seeking out all-consuming sensory environments supports Schafer's general argument against the low-fidelity ("lo-fi") soundscape. Both extremes (those who seek "peace and quiet" and those who love loud music) seek a *meaningful* soundscape: "An information-rich acoustic space where sound plays a significant role in defining community spatially, temporally ... as well as socially and culturally in terms of shared activities, rituals and dominant institutions." (Truax 58) Toronto Islanders create this community by attempting to remove or exclude residual and meaningless noise; urban clubbers create acoustic community by obliterating the everyday din with amplified music and immersive sensory environments. Both groups share an aversion to the average: The everyday drone of traffic, the chatter of talk radio, and the toneless hum of machinery dedicated to maintaining average temperatures and average speeds in a steady cycle of production and consumption.

Luigi Russolo, in ecstasy over the industrial soundscape in 1913, declared that: "In the pounding atmosphere of great cities as well as in the formerly silent countryside, machines create today such a large number of varied noises that pure sound, with its littleness and its monotony, now fails to arouse emotion." (qtd. in Schafer 110) The pounding atmosphere of cities, so exciting to Futurist artists at the beginning of the Twentieth Century, has become the monotonous norm from which individuals attempt to distance themselves at the turn of the Twenty-First Century. Most often this distancing involves further mediation of the soundscape, and the use of technology to create isolated, artificial sonic environments. Many acoustic ecologists consider this protective, "band-aid" approach counterproductive. Using technology to compensate for noise does not address the fundamental reasons why the air is saturated with sound, or why "peace

and quiet" has become a commodity available only to those with the time, energy or money to fight for it. While not every sound ecologist addresses these issues overtly in their creative work, questions about the evolution and mediation of acoustic community are often at the core of soundscape research and sound composition.

Environmental soundscapes represent complex, evolving organisms, and resonate with the signals and signs of cultural, social, and animal life. These soundscapes, made up of the voices of cultured and wild animals, machines, weather, geology, space, and the music of the spheres, are, in the words of Schafer, a "macrocosmic musical composition." (5) As such, the soundscape can be interpreted and understood differently according to the tastes and disposition of the listener, her ability to listen closely, and to discern the underlying rhythms and aesthetic principles of the piece. Close attention to the "tuning of the world" often inspires deeper inquiry: If the soundscape is a composition (if not always musical), who conducts it? Who decides what sounds dominate the mix? Who decides when the soundscape becomes too intense, when the force of sound, and the signs embedded within it, become too severe for the bodies and minds of the listening audience to bear? Who benefits from a soundscape that is rendered soupy and murky with the sonic effluent of industry and commerce? What makes an aesthetically and ecologically balanced soundscape, and for whose benefit is this soundscape constructed?

These questions, while related specifically to sound, are similar in nature to many questions that concern ecologists and cultural scholars, and could just as easily apply to the study of, say, water pollution, or culturally-sanctioned displays of violence. These concerns share in interest in the power relationships that govern how society works, and

also in exposing the mechanisms that determine hegemonic cultural and economic practices.

Sound has a mediating effect on the individual and the environment, and therefore creates relationships between the two (Truax 85). Sound study lends itself to an interpretative, subjective way of knowing about the world, and to exploring the cultural intersections, resonances and conflicts that exist in a geographical and social space like Toronto Island. Because sound inhabits the "invisible spaces" between subject and object, it connects bodies viscerally. While we might not feel sound in a way that our bodies recognize as tactile (with the exception of bass frequencies), our ear vibrates continuously with every passing sound. We are intimately connected to sound, and by extension to all soundmakers, whether we desire this connection or not. Sounds evolve physically in a process of reflection and refraction, but the meaning of sound also evolves through a process of intellectual reflection and feedback. "Sound is the medium through which we perform an extension of Self into the world." (Wagstaff, 2002: 117)

A curious aspect of soundscape studies, one that has so far isolated it from mainstream cultural or environmental studies, are its partial origins in tape composition and the music of the avant-garde[7], and the interpretive methodologies with which its practitioners investigate the soundscape. Many noted soundscape theorists began as artists and composers, and very often the project of soundscape studies takes the shape of sound composition, performance, and installation[8].

Perhaps the musically tuned ear is more sensitive to the subtleties of the soundscape, and seeks to understand, or perhaps to order, the aural realm within some kind of aesthetic framework. Schafer's characterization of the soundscape as a musical composition must certainly emerge from his practice as a composer, musician and performer. However, the aesthetic frameworks by which artists understand the soundscape vary tremendously. Forty years before Schafer's soundscape work, Futurist artists such as Marinetti and Russolo celebrated the Art of Noises (1913) – the very sounds of industry and war that Schafer condemns – with noisy, enthusiastic performances and manifestos.

Both Schafer's and Russolo's aesthetic traditions, although quite different from one another in terms of their political and social context, place importance on the immersive, communicational aspect of sound performance. While the Futurists advocated

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[7] See Russolo (1913), Reich (1988), Cage (1961).
[8] I am referring to a large and varied body of work, however, my primary references include: Janet Cardiff, Hildegard Westerkamp, Andra McCartney, Sarah Peebles, Pauline Oliveros, and Chantal Dumas.

"throwing nets of sensation between stage and audience," (Marinetti 196) (remarkably similar to the tactile effects of amplified bass beats!) Schafer's work, such as <u>And Wolf Shall Inherit the Moon</u> (1996) involves collaborative performances in which the composer, audience and environment (in this case the Haliburton Forest in central Ontario) interact and evolve the piece over several years (Waterman, 1998). Rather than throw the net *between* audience and stage, one becomes a part of an evolving soundscape *network* created simultaneously by people, landscape, and weather.

The collaborative, communicative possibilities of sound composition (though not necessarily in a live performance) are also central to the work of Hildegard Westerkamp, whose work mediates contentious relationships between cultural groups[9] and fosters acoustic community through composition and the use of transmission technologies. Westerkamp's <u>Soundwalking</u> series, produced for Vancouver Co-op Radio between 1978 and 1981, explored the idea of radio as a listening medium, "listening through its microphones to the world, to human voices and to the environment." (Westerkamp, 1994: 89) Soundscape recording and composition is thus conceived as a way of opening a community's ears to the sounds of their own social and ecological lives. Westerkamp (2002) believes that soundscape composition, as method of exploring social life, "can and should create a strong oppositional place of conscious listening."(3)

Listening *outward* as a communicational activity changes the listener's relationship to the soundscape. While the ear may draw inward, listening also extends the Self outward into the environment. By consciously drawing the soundscape, and the

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[9] See Westerkamp (2002a)

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people, machines, animals and environmental elements that produce sound, into one's

sphere of reference, a sense of responsibility for the soundscape develops, as well as a

sense of ownership over the extended personal space into which one extends one's

consciousness. The conscious listener often feels compelled to *react into*[10] the

soundscape – to act upon the sounds absorbed, to communicate with the acoustic

community and to shape it according to one's personal sensibilities.

Truax's (1984) concept of acoustic community is helpful for examining how

different social groups experience soundscapes, and in turn create and shape communal

acoustic spaces. "An acoustic community is any soundscape in which acoustic

information plays a pervasive roll in the lives of the inhabitants." (58) Acoustic

information can be interpreted differently according to the underlying social and political

values of any group. Because each individual has a unique acoustic aesthetic determined

by cultural upbringing and socio-economic status, sound expression and sound tolerance

varies immensely. The capacity and desire to listen carefully determines to what extent an

individual wishes to engage with the acoustic environment – intimately, closely and

viscerally, or remotely and distractedly, through blocks and filters – and how an

individual determines her acoustic community.

By choosing to engage with the soundscape, one also chooses to engage with the

social, political and environmental conditions embodied in the soundscape. Conversely,

by ignoring the soundscape, one disassociates the Self from broader intellectual

engagement with society and the environment. However, this "call to engagement" takes

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[10] My thanks to Ed Slopek for introducing this term/idea into my concept of human communication.

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for granted the individual's ability to negotiate freely with the social and political

institutions that determine the character of many acoustic communities, and, in the case

of soundscape composition, access to the tools and methods for articulating this

engagement.

I have been fortunate in my own ability to engage with the soundscape as an

active (and activist) listener. I have enjoyed having the time, resources, and support

necessary to record and process the soundscape of Toronto Island. However, this

experience has further complicated my understanding of sound ecology, as I become

more and more aware of the subjective nature of listening, the cultural specificities of

different acoustic communities, and the social and political climate that determines which

sounds dominate the urban environment and constructed natural spaces within, and at the

fringes, of the city.

The timely coincidence of the Docks nightclub dispute, my personal connection to the Toronto island community, and my previous academic and creative engagement with sound brought this project to life. Over the past two years I also attended several sound-art events on Toronto Island, namely the Soundtravels concert series and Sign Waves installations produced by New Adventures in Sound Art[11]. The compositions and works featured in this festival explore the contested urban soundscape, and challenge the listening habits of the audience through the critical and imaginative use of sound. I was inspired to find a way of mixing my theoretical studies with my creative work as a sound collector and composer.

The project proceeded in parallel stages. To begin, I located a number of participants interested in sharing their sound memories of Toronto Island and experiences with loud sound in Toronto Harbour, and in talking about acoustic ecology in general. My selection process was guided by a desire for qualitative information; I hoped to create a sound "tableau" with a few select voices that, arranged together, would represent the acoustic community of the island from the perspective of islanders.

I located participants through the Toronto Island Community Association or through calls on academic and sound-art listserves. The legal dispute between the islanders and the Docks, unresolved at the time of my research and interviews, was likely one reason that my requests to speak with employees and sound engineers from the club

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[11] http://www.naisa.ca/

were ignored. Although my original focus was on "noise pollution" and the Docks nightclub dispute, I eventually shifted my focus to the idea of acoustic community, and to discovering what elements of the soundscape and social life on the island contribute to this sense of acoustic community.

I spoke with every participant in his or her home, usually over a cup of tea. I often conducted several pre-interviews (over email, phone, or in person) in order to put participants at ease. This was especially important in the case of islanders who were quite emotional about sound invasion, and wary about divulging their feelings to a stranger. Most interviews lasted about one hour, and the scope of discussion varied according to each participant's background. Each interview became an organic feedback process as I learned from participants, and in turn introduced my own observations based on cultural theory and sound ecology research into the conversation.

I introduced the following topics during each interview:

- Memories of island and harbour soundscapes, soundmarks and keynotes.

- Descriptions of urban sound and feelings about the urban soundscape.

- Reflections on subjective listening and different listening styles.

- Opinions and facts about specific sound pollution issues (i.e. Docks dispute)

- Reflections on club culture, amplified music, and immersive sound.

- Reflections on sound ecology.

I often began by asking participants to remember soundmarks on the island, which inspired a reflective, meditative state of mind that could last for the whole interview. These sometimes idyllic memories had the effect of highlighting how the urban soundscape was different from the island soundscape. This back-and-forth between sound memory and sound reality was a central fixture of the interview process. I have noticed in previous interview situations that some people are wary of relating their personal experiences to broader cultural or political issues, or to reified power relationships. Inspiring sound memories and asking about subjective experience created an opening through which to introduce political economy and cultural critique into the conversation.

After digitizing and transcribing the interviews, and grouping relevant sound-clips together, I identified several major themes. I assembled these voice clips together in an intuitive fashion that combined attention to the content of clips with the rhythmic and melodic elements of individuals' voices. I tried to pan/place each participant's voice in a specific space within the stereo spectrum. This was done to create an imaginary dialogue wherein participants are addressing one another (and the listener) in a virtual headspace. However, because some voices figured more frequently in some segments, or were missing from other segments, this spatial arrangement was occasionally adjusted for balance.

This method of assembly was inspired in part by Glenn Gould's Solitude Trilogy, three radio documentaries produced between 1967 and 1977 for the CBC. These pieces were experiments in "contrapuntal radio." (Hurwitz, 1983) Gould "interviewed

participants individually and then spliced together all of the conversations so that ... strangers seemed to be engaged in a dialogue" (256) about solitude and isolation, creating a "subtly rhythmic verbal quintet" (Tulk 2) with recorded, spliced voices. These contrapuntal scenes tested "the degree to which one [could] listen simultaneously to more than one conversation or vocal impression." (Hurwitz 258) I have found Gould's compositional work quite moving, and was surprised to discover similarities between the Solitude Trilogy and some of my previous sound compositions, notably The Matador (2002). While Gould's pieces and my own project require close listening and can be confounding to unseasoned ears, this method highlights thematic resonances between otherwise isolated voices, and creates a new variation on the idea of acoustic community. A remote listener can join in to the "circle" of voices, and inhabit an imaginary space where the essence of the islanders' relationship to the soundscape is distilled and rendered timeless.

I consider this part of the project to have been the most intellectually engaging and exhausting, as I was attempting to synthesize the narrative, theoretical, socio-political, and aesthetic elements of the piece together into something meaningful and aesthetically pleasing. While I had certain ideas about what I wanted the piece to sound like and what meanings I wanted to convey, I was also aware that the clips I had chosen represented only a small portion of recorded conversations, and that my attempt at balanced interpretation was nevertheless subjective. With each new listen I think of another edit or another mix that might further distill or tighten the ideas expressed.

At the same time that I was conducting interviews on Toronto Island, I was also recording sounds of the island. During these soundwalks I used my microphone as a "guide", followed interesting sounds, experimented with microphone placement, and often moved my microphone in circles to emphasize different sound environments and the locality of specific sounds. Other times, I simply sat very still in one location, breathing deeply and contemplating the soundscape as I recorded.

I gathered approximately fifteen hours of ambient sound from different parts of Wards Island and Algonquin Island, as well as from the Island ferry terminal and on the ferry itself, on the Leslie Street Spit, at the Docks nightclub parking lot, and underneath the Gardiner expressway. It was during these soundwalks that the subjective nature of "sound communities" became very apparent: I did not make a single recording on Toronto Island that was free of industrial noise seeping in from beyond island space. Small aircraft from the Island Airport, high-altitude jets, pleasurecraft from Toronto Harbour, downtown traffic (including sirens and muscle-cars) and construction noise were always audible. The heightened listening experience facilitated by the "objective" ears of the microphone allowed me to hear a very different soundscape from the peace and quiet I thought I'd been enjoying on early trips to the island, and that I (and many islanders) had considered to be the "normal" or "natural" state of the island soundscape.

I assembled elements of these field recordings into concentrated imaginary soundscapes that feature the most relevant recorded soundmarks, and address the content of the voice dialogues I had created. I added sounds of aircraft and other mechanical and industrial sounds into the "cleaner" recordings of birds, wind, and other pastoral island

sounds to demonstrate the ubiquity of these "outside" sounds in the Island's acoustic space, and made use of stereo panning to create a sense of space and movement. These short soundscape compositions were then integrated into the existing voice recordings, with longer segments at the beginning and end of the piece.

I recorded all sounds onto a minidisc recorder using either a Sony ECM-MS907 dynamic microphone or an AKG C-1000S condenser microphone. I edited the project using Audacity at home and Sony Vegas at the Rogers Communication Centre at Ryerson University in Toronto.

Attentive listening is a rewarding and creative method of sensory inquiry. I always gain a unique sense of a place's character when my eyes are closed and I begin to sense distinctive resonances and soundmarks. With my eyes closed, I can hear complexities and symbolisms in sounds that might not necessarily grab my attention if my eyes were also engaged. In the sound studio, deep listening is a necessity. It has also proven to be an interesting and sometimes disquieting process of self-reflection.

"Conscious listening and conscious awareness of our role as soundmakers is an inseparable part of acoustic ecology, as it deepens our understanding of relationships between living beings and the soundscape." (Westerkamp 2002: 2) The idea of listening *out*, of extending myself into the acoustic environment was the foundation of my project, and informed the methods I used in interviews, soundwalks and field recording. Close aural attention to the soundscape is actually quite difficult to achieve, and I have found attentive listening to be challenging and often exhausting. There is a reason that many people choose not to listen closely to the soundscape – it takes quite a bit of mental energy to process *all* sounds, and to render all sounds meaningful!

Most acoustic ecologists and researchers approach the soundscape with open ears. Composer Pauline Oliveros (1999) supports the idea of "deep listening" empathetically in her writing and performance[12]. She describes deep listening as "a practice that is intended to heighten and expand consciousness of sound in as many dimensions of awareness and

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[12] Oliveros also conducts Deep Listening retreats where participants are trained in this meditative practice.

attenuational dynamics as humanly possible."(xxiii) As a form of meditation, deep listening allows the listener to connect to the sonic environment, to receive the soundscape as a whole and to discover relationships between all perceptible sounds.

Deep listening is integral to successful field recording. It encourages a contemplation of complex aural spaces, identification of sounds near and far, attention to the way that sounds filter and resonate through the physical environment, and how other social and environmental factors shape the soundscape. Meditative listening calms the mind and body and makes for "curious ears", allowing the listener to locate herself physically (in acoustic space and through body position) in order to facilitate good microphone placement and handling. Deep listening transforms the ears into microphones, removing the (mental) screens and filters that shape our normally simplified experience of the soundscape.

Active listening is the interpersonal variation on deep listening. Also called empathetic or sympathetic listening, this method requires a conscious effort on the part of the listener to identify with the emotional state and perspective of those with whom they wish to communicate effectively (Burley-Allen, 1995). Superficial, inattentive listening occurs all too often, both in conversation and when we interact with the soundscape. By listening closely to islanders' perceptions of the sound environment, and by listening deeply to the island and harbour soundscape, I was able to make meaningful connections between participants' experiences and my own listening experiences, and with wider social and environmental issues expressed in sound. However, this desire to empathize with participants also reduced my ability to interpret words and expressions objectively.

It was only when I began to assemble and counterpoint the voices that I was able to react critically to the perspectives expressed at the time of the interviews.

Listening and composition are the "two sides of the coin" of soundscape research. Westerkamp (2002) feels that it is the soundscape composer's responsibility to also be a sound ecologist, "to create artistic works that respect the social and political principles of acoustic ecology as well as the physical limitations of human hearing." (3) Wagstaff (2002) reconstructs the artist as an active agent, using the methods of soundscape composition in a collaborative environment to open up space for discussion about the soundscape in communities where the issue has never been validated or brought into the open. Reciprocally, the activist might also be reinvented as a creative agent, using compositional means to construct an argument, or to present a political situation in such a way that is accessible to a wider audience. "The way in which we – in our various roles of 'soundscape researchers' *relate to* and *interact with* a community is as equally (if not more) ecologically significant as the actual study and awareness of the soundscape itself." (130)

I have often wondered at my own motives for doing such interactive and engrossing social-soundscape research. Contacting and befriending individuals, arranging interviews, and creating empathic relationships with strangers takes considerable effort. Then, assembling these conversations into imaginary dialogues requires a good deal of mental and emotional engagement. I have found that soundscape recording and composition is more fun and much less draining than recording and editing personal interviews. However, the personal engagement required to document social life as well as

acoustic life is ultimately satisfying as it cultivates a more complex and humanistic

understanding of acoustic community.

Toronto Island is mixed-use parkland located in Toronto Harbour about one kilometer from the downtown lakeshore. The Island stretches along five narrow miles, protected from Lake Ontario by hook-shaped Centre Island. The islands began as shifting sandbars created by soil and sand that drifted over from the Scarborough Bluffs. In 1858 a storm surge broke through the spit at its eastern end, creating the Eastern Gap. This channel has been expanded and fortified over a century and a half and acts as the primary access point for shipping boats and launches in and out of Toronto Harbour.

Ever since indigenous people first visited the sandbars for rest and relaxation, the island has been a sanctuary for birds, naturalists, sailors, families, music-lovers and artists. Current recreational and cultural activities range from quiet family picnics to massive weekend rock concerts; the park accommodates over one million visitors a year. Many consider Toronto Island as a natural refuge from the city, but it is a hybrid space accommodating a variety of wild and cultured life that has evolved hand-in-hand with the city of Toronto. The Island is connected to the city's hydroelectric and communications networks and ferries run between the island and the city year-long.

The island's human community has existed since the late 1800s, when summer tent cities were first established. These tent cities evolved into a vibrant year-round community with a peak population of several thousand people spread over the entire island. Steady development on the island in the last century and a half earned the park a reputation as the "Coney Island of the North", boasting at one time or another: hotels, a

vaudeville theatre, dance halls, a large amusement park, and a baseball and lacrosse stadium. The island was also known as the "Toronto Riviera" because of the large Victorian summer homes built by wealthy Torontonians. The foundations and stone fences of these buildings are still visible along the Lakeshore boardwalk.

In 1956, the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto (Metro) decided to "modernize" the island with the establishment of naturalized areas and wildlife reserves, as well as fully accessible washrooms, a public marina, an amusement area and a petting zoo. The "naturalization" of the island was not in fact a return to an untamed, unregulated sprawl of flora and fauna, but a conversion of the "Riviera" aesthetic to the aesthetic of cultivated parkland – a new theme park based on an idea of "naturalness". This aesthetic revision destroyed the island's private tourist industry, and was met with vehement protest from remaining islanders whose homes were being bulldozed. The fight to save the Toronto Island community lasted over 20 years until 1993, when the Toronto Islands Residential Community Trust procured 99-year land leases for residents. Presently, about 600 people live in two communities on Wards and Algonquin Islands at the eastern end of the park.

This struggle had a profound effect on the islanders' sense of community, and many feel that they are an integral part of the park's character and history. This community spirit and sense of custodianship is one backdrop for the drama between residents and those who believe the island and harbour should be fully public, functional spaces for recreation. "Islanders swing uneasily between exposed vulnerability and insular complacency ... bound by political exigencies as much by trees and water,"

(Kemp 2) and are sometimes accused of being "nimby's" for their selective use of legal recourse and media stunts to defend their own interests, often to what others consider the detriment of the greater public good. However, it is a testament to the strength of the island community that these conflicts exist in the first place, especially in a society that tends to side with commercial interests over the well being of small communities fighting for a healthier standard of living.

Toronto Island's Acoustic Community

The soundscape of Toronto Island and the harbour has evolved along with its natural and social geography. The harbour itself acts as a resonating instrument for all the sounds generated on the waterfront. While higher-frequency sounds bounce off the surface of the water like skipping stones, low-frequency sounds travel underwater, or through the ice, for long distances. In the harbour, the physics of sound transmission combine with a complex social and economic environment.

As the island "quieted down" in the last fifty years, trading the sounds of the "Coney Island of the North" for those of birch trees, squirrels and migrating birds, the surrounding harbour became louder and busier with the sounds of mechanized transport, factories, nightclubs and amplified music. Presently, events that have grown too boisterous to be held in remote rural areas (such as Wakestock, a wakeboarding competition previously held in Georgian Bay) are moving to Centre Island, and advances in sound amplification mean that concerts held on the island are clearly audible in residential areas. While there may be fewer commercial establishments on the island than

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previous to the 1950s, the commercial activity that does occur is considerably louder and more intense.

The listening habits of the harbour's residents have also evolved, and reflect technological advances well as changing social attitudes about sound and territory in the harbour. Residents of the new condominium developments between Lakeshore Avenue and the Gardiner expressway, equipped with soundproof windows and thick walls (and, one might suppose, more entertainment devices designed to enhance the "condo cocoon" lifestyle), have a different experience of the harbour soundscape than do many islanders who live in small, thin-walled antique cottages. While these communities hear different soundscapes because of topography and architecture, they also have different *listening* experiences that are related to divergent lifestyle choices.

An acoustic community is "any soundscape in which acoustic information plays a pervasive role in the lives of the inhabitants." (Truax 58) These acoustic communities are best defined where sound is a positive creative element, rather than a negative element, (for example low-fi city noise that tends to mask the unique natural and social soundmarks of a particular space). Toronto Island's location, its accommodation to wildlife and its social element help to define it as a unique acoustic community within the greater cityscape. During the course of soundwalks and interviews, several sound-signals, soundmarks and keynotes emerged as important characters in the community. Some of these sounds are presently audible; others exist only in the memories of certain islanders, but are nevertheless central to the spirit of the island soundscape:

Waves, Wind, Trees and Birds

Elemental sounds of nature are very present in islanders' sound-memories. Many had recollections of walking on the lakeside boardwalk in the wintertime, listening to crashing winter waves, or relaxing to the sound of light breezes "chittering" in the tall poplar trees. Because the island is a stop for migratory birds, there is a great variety of bird sound. Bird calls signal seasonal changes to islanders: grackles at the end of winter, robins before spring rain and Canada geese flying overhead in the fall. Other wild sounds included the yelp of foxes, the moaning of wind through pine trees, and the tinkle of melting ice.

Attention to these primal sounds indicates what might be called a naturally oriented sensibility among some islanders. This listening-outward to seasonal cycles and to non-human neighbours suggests an understanding of the island as shared space. "No sound in nature has attached itself so affectionately to the human imagination as bird vocalizations." (Schafer 29) However, nature sounds are not always interpreted as pleasant. For instance, thousands of cormorants nesting on the Leslie Street Spit make an alarming noise, and one participant noted that on quiet evenings the cry of seagulls over Toronto Harbour easily drowns out the sound of the Gardiner expressway. Clearly, this affection for bird sounds varies with circumstance, and our nostalgia is rather for the idea of what birds represent to the pastoral imagination.

Nevertheless, the immediacy of bird sounds on the island is also biologically significant. Krause (1999) has put forward the "niche hypothesis" (1) suggesting:

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"Animal and insect vocalizations tend to occupy different frequency bands, leaving 'spectral niches' into which the calls of other birds, animals and insects can fit ... the increase of urban sprawl and its associated continuous, lo-fi noise might block out or mask specific frequency niches, resulting in mating calls going unheard ... City noises seem to be interfering with the birds' learning of their own mating calls so that, rather than a melodious song, some youngsters can only manage a generic sort of chirp."(Kettles 44)

The variety of birdsong on the island is testament to its function as a sanctuary from the urban din, for aviary life certainly. In light of such research, one wonders at the effect of lo-fi noise on human social habits, and how the island might also act as a sanctuary for those whose communicative abilities are disrupted by the industrial urban soundscape.

Foghorns and boathorns

Most islanders spoke affectionately about foghorns; even though this sound has not been heard for many years, it is still a meaningful soundmark. The first foghorn was located on Wards Island at the end of the Eastern Gap, and was later moved to the end of the new Leslie Street Spit, and it is this soundmark that islanders remember most fondly. In the 1940s a YMCA camp had been set up quite close to the foghorn on Wards; two islanders reminisced that the foghorn was quite bothersome to the men camping so close by. One participant related the special experience of hearing a boat-horn while dancing at the Docks nightclub on a foggy night.

The foghorn is an iconic sound, and islanders often spoke of mystery, isolation and magic when reminiscing about it. One participant described the way sound travels differently in dense, humid weather, and the necessity of attentive listening in circumstances where visual perspective is useless. The seclusion and mystery symbolized by foghorns and boathorns make them nostalgic to islanders. While these sound-memories are related to some islanders' self-perception as a closed, isolated community, their multiple interpretations by other groups reminds us that acoustic communities are not easily defined or delineated, and that the meaning of sound is always in flux.

The Ongaria

The Ongaria ferry is integral to island life, and acts as the primary physical connection to the mainland. It is also very loud, and the low physical rumble of the ferry motor is at once disconcerting and comforting in its rusty growl. Visitors are often introduced to the island via the sound, smell and sight of the ferry, and the evolution of sound on the ferry-ride signals the physical journey from shore to shore. Unlike the natural island sounds that vary with the seasons, the Ongaria is an unchanging, hourly, daily soundmark and keynote regulating the schedules and social interactions of islanders. One participant related the way that the ferry horn acted as an alarm clock in the morning, and the ferry-dock is a place where locals meet and exchange news. Although the ferry is very loud, the iconic sound of its horn, and its integration into the island's daily rhythms, means that islanders hear this keynote fondly.

Bicycles and Carts

The small but significant sounds of bicycles and carts are present everywhere on the island. Many have unique rhythms that identify the cart or bike's owner, and the prevalence of bicycles speaks both to the small scale of island life and to the priorities of islanders who would choose to live in a place best navigated by cycle-power. These micro-sounds would not be noticed in an urban space filled with motors and generators, and it is the relative quiet of the island that allows these small sounds to be perceived.

Party boats

Dance music emanating from party boats and cruise ships, while initially identified as noise by most listeners, is one of the most notorious and contested soundmarks in the harbour. Most participants reflected that when they enjoyed the music emanating from the boats, they tended to disregard the invasive nature of the sound itself as it bounced over the water. However, because the boats tend to circle around the island at night, the sound is much louder in relation to the calm evening atmosphere on Wards and Algonquin islands.

Airplanes

Some islanders complained about airplanes from the Toronto Island Airport, and low-flying aircraft has been another major focus of the noise committee over the years. The sound of airplanes – a nuisance for some, barely noticeable to others – is nevertheless a keynote that symbolizes the power of industrial and business interests in Toronto Harbour[13] and is a source of ire to many people in Toronto. The lower, more distant roar of large jet engines high in the atmosphere is also noticeable on the island (as

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[13] The Toronto Island Airport, in spite of being a money-losing enterprise, is subsidized by the City of Toronto and caters mainly to downtown businesspeople and politicians.

it is almost everywhere in developed industrial countries), yet this pervasive keynote seems to have receded into islanders' (and society's) collective aural unconscious.

The Gardiner Expressway

The "constant hum" of freeways is a keynote of the island; it is the quintessential lo-fi sound. The faint roar of Toronto's downtown is a constant, and it is especially noticeable on quiet nights and when facing the cityscape. However, it is easily ignored because of its ubiquity. When the hum of the city is obvious, it is clearly differentiated from the calm space of the island, but this hum "goes away" quickly when the listener's attention is diverted elsewhere. This sound is nevertheless alarming in its mass and consistency, especially when one contemplates entering into it upon one's return to the city!

Noise exists everywhere in big cities (and bothers people there, too), however the Island's physical separation from downtown creates a critical distance from the din. When inside it, this ambient lo-fi sound tends to mask the louder and more intrusive noises, but it also makes it difficult to focus one's ears on a particular soundmark, or to identify and isolate a community that is affected by a particular kind of sound. This physical and critical distance also allows for a clearer examination of the institutions that sanction sound pollution and disregard the protests of those who resist the insinuation of industrial and cultural noise into every aspect of their lives.

Islanders and Environmental Culture

The unique social life and natural history of the island make it an attractive

subject for studies in environmental culture. A seemingly more intimate relationship with

island flora and fauna has influenced personal identity and the development of

community, aesthetics and social life on the island. However, islanders are also tethered

to the city core, and must rely on the civic and economic networks of metropolitan

Toronto for food, electricity, and water. This bond with the urban mainland permits

islanders and visitors alike to romanticize the island as a natural sanctuary. A conquered

natural space ceases to be threatening; humans, emancipated (or estranged) from the daily

ruthlessness of an uncivilized biological system – from the real threat of icy winter

winds, shifting and barren sandy soil, and guano-strewn water – are free to appreciate the

island as an aesthetic space designed for human consumption. "Toronto Islanders live

here so intensely that natural geography has become our history." (Kemp 1) However,

this selective appropriation of the Island's wild origins entails a commodification and

fetishization of natural geography to suit the social ideals and political ambitions of

island residents.

In the same manner, the parkland soundscape has come to symbolize the leisure

activities that occur therein, rather than existing as signs relating to survival or

sustenance. As the landscape and soundscape become enframed, aesthetized, and

rendered safe, "natural elements appear as sound romances rather than sound phobias."

(Schafer 179) Soundmarks in nature, rather than alert signals, become pieces in a well-

arranged sonic tableau to be enjoyed on evening walks. "The quiet ambiance of the hi-fi

soundscape allows the listener to hear forth into the distance just as the countryside

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exercises long-range viewing." (43) This aesthetic rendering of the pre-industrial, pre-electronic soundscape, while attractive, also plays into very Western ideas about pastoral nature.

Just as the pastoral countryside of pre-industrial England was a literary and artistic construction designed to legitimize the enclosure of common land and the exclusion of labour from the bourgeois frame of reference (Williams, 1973), the fetishization of soundscapes free from the sounds of industry, labour and commerce also reflects the values and aesthetic preferences of the modern bourgeoisie. The complex soundscape of the island – industrial, pastoral, colonized by humans, re-appropriated by beavers and extreme sports fans alike, representing the pleasure and danger of a space at once wild and tame – threatens to be reduced to a string of pleasances that cease to have any reference to the island's true character or its place within a complex urban society. Sounds that invade the pastoral ideal are thus interpreted as "negative", although they are often (but not always) products of the economic and industrial functions of the city, as necessary to islanders as to every other urban dweller.

Pastoral interpretations of the soundscape, in my personal experience, are augmented when one has a home on the island – when the island *is* one's home. There is a luxury to experiencing "the wild" from the security of one's doorstep. Casual observation reveals a wide variety of attitudes towards the wildlife of the island, and to an islander's place within this parkland. Some islanders live very simply, with aesthetic sensibilities necessitated by modest means and the obsessive need to recycle broken tools. Others cultivate lavish and precise weed-free flower gardens recalling the aesthetic

principles of the Victorian era. Other residents have no compunction about exterminating raccoons and other rodents that get in the way of "proper" home and garden maintenance. The cultural differences between the island community and the rest of the city are in a sense superficial; the feeling of being "in nature" is achieved psychologically, sometimes overriding the sensual reality of the island environment. Most often, one can choose where to look – out into Lake Ontario or up at the skyscrapers – and what to hear – the birds or the planes. Sometimes, however, one cannot exclude the city from the frame, or filter noise from the mix, especially when these noises are not deemed "necessary".

The perception of the island soundscape as somehow more natural and "traditional" than the modern, amplified sounds of industry and mass entertainment also plays well into contemporary islanders' sense of connection to the "original" island community that existed before the Metro "naturalization". One participant clearly stated, "We were here first!"[14] in opposition to the Docks' relatively recent move into the same acoustic territory. However, this sense of tradition only steps back three generations, or one hundred and fifty years, to the first commercial enterprises and property purchases that occurred when nameless shifting sand spits were being converted into the "Coney Island of the North".

Ironically, the idealized past of a quiet, peaceful island full of happy cottagers that is central to the myth of "island lineage" is part of the same tradition that introduced theme parks, hotels and nightclubs into the Island's social and physical space. These establishments were likely quieter than the Docks, but nevertheless were part of a slow

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[14] Vivian Pitcher. Interview June 18 2006.

invasion of a previously wild space, and its slow conversion from an unabashedly synthetic theme park to a more covert kind of theme park built around pastoral notions of parkland and cottage living. Perhaps the squirrels, beavers, thrushes and gulls of the island, and those fish remaining in Toronto Harbour, have a more valid claim to having been there "first". However, opposition to noise in the harbour is rarely made in the name of restoring any kind of original wilderness in the island space; Toronto Island is – and must remain – a functional space for human use. However, the conditions of the 99-year leases mitigate this sense of ownership, at least for residents, if not for the City of Toronto and those who govern the land as public space. In the words of one islander: "The irony that the land is not legally ours but is claimed by Metro Council reminds us that no land can really be owned." (Kemp 2)

While the aesthetics of individual islanders vary, island homes exist within the relatively "high-fidelity" soundscape of the urban park. Most islanders do not seem to feel the need to dominate the soundscape overtly, even if their relationship to the land is mediated by varyingly romantic or ruthless attitudes about their wild and weedy neighbors. A soundwalk through Wards Island on a warm evening does indeed sound like a pastoral ideal – the sounds of cooking, soft music, children playing, birds and bikes punctuating the ever-present wash of waves and wind (and the ever-present drone of airplanes) – but it is this *ideal* that defines Island life in sharp contrast to the reality of glass skyscrapers, roaring freeways, pulsating nightclubs, and buzzing powerboats that surround this fragile acoustic space. Listening for an idealized island soundscape is a process of exclusion, of choosing which sounds fit into an ideal acoustic community, and assigning negative value to those sounds that don't fit into the pastoral ideal.

The dispute with the Docks nightclub has consumed the majority of the noise committee's time and energy, and it was the launching point for my research into acoustic community on the island. The committee has always maintained that "the Docks has operated its business with consistent and chronic disregard for noise since it began holding raves in 1995." (Partridge, 2005) A recent hearing in front of Toronto's Alcohol and Gaming Commission (AGCO), concluded on November 24, 2005 after 26 sessions, making it one of the longest AGCO hearings and the first centered on the issue of noise. On July 26, 2006, the AGCO decided to revoke the nightclub's license, noting that the "volume and hours of music has not abated for nearly a decade."[15]

This precedent-setting decision on the part of the City of Toronto and the AGCO represents a significant change in attitude and policy-making in regards to unwanted sound and its effect on public health. While the decision supports the idea that noise is a legitimate social concern and deserves greater attention as an environmental health issue, the question remains as to why the conflict took ten years to be resolved, and why loud sounds have become such an overwhelming presence in urban life.

The Docks Nightclub is one of the world's largest entertainment complexes, with a capacity for over 12,000 people a night. It features one of the world's most powerful sound systems, boasting high-output 15-inch woofers and 3600-Watt amplifiers. The system is integrated into the building's superstructure in order to "deliver club music on a

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[15] Although the AGCO report had not been made available to the public at the time of writing, parts of the report were quoted in news coverage of the issue. See CBC (2006).

massive scale."(Pro Audio Group 1) In a 2004 news release announcing the new sound system, a photo with the caption "The Art of Noise?" featured racks of amps "on display in a glass case so club-goers can see what's driving the decibels." (2) The amps are displayed directly above another glass case – the one displaying beer and liquor. This not-accidental juxtaposition leads one to question what really drives the club's reputation and profits. The "huge punch" of obliterating sound sought by the club patron seems to be linked to more general desire for intoxication and assaults on the senses that figure prominently in the rituals of western pop culture[16].

While the Docks can also be considered an acoustic community, there is a significant difference in the way this community interacts with the physical and sonic environment. Clubbers rarely live in the harbour area, and this space, so ideal for entertainment and recreation, is not *home*. Although the club's community is a valid social entity, the soundscape that Docks patrons might value in their own home setting is not the same soundscape that defines the acoustic community at nightclubs, boat parties, raves, etc. A study of club noise in the United Kingdom noted that "noise from pubs and clubs is likely to be made by one social group and impinge on other groups ... we are more tolerant of noise produced from people of our own social group." (Davies, Hepworth et al. 13-14) Because city centre users are segregated in time (14), individuals who might actually have similar acoustic and environmental values find themselves on opposite sides of the "noise debate" because of multiple community affiliations[17].

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[16] The Docks has also faced charges of public drunkenness and fighting in the past.
[17] A number of islanders related their own experiences at raves or on party boats, noting the irony of these shifting allegiances.

The Docks' location, the size of its sound system, the regularity of events, and the fact that it is owned by a single company make it a good target for islanders fed up with excessive noise. However, the Docks did not begin as a powerful entertainment mega-complex. Underground raves and parties held in the same location (and other empty warehouses in the area) were produced by small, countercultural organizations whose philosophy and aesthetic were grounded in what one project participant and former raver referred to as the "archaic revival"[18] and what Bey (1985) calls Temporary Autonomous Zones – spaces where subcultures can elude formal structures of control. Often, wresting control from the powers that be requires the re-appropriation of the tools of control – sound production and dissemination being one of the most powerful of these social tools. In the decade since these early events, the rave scene has evolved into a mainstream international industry fueled by technological advances in sound amplification, the establishment of a "star system" of DJs and producers, and a tourist network of mega clubs, like the Docks, that attract hundreds of thousands of people a year to downtown Toronto.

While some ravers may subscribe to a countercultural philosophy that many islanders might support in principle, not every clubber considers dancing to loud music to be a political act. The political character of early rave culture, while reflecting a desire to reconnect with a powerful primal rhythm, does not necessarily share the same environmental and social priorities as the island community. The amplified, rhythmic pulses produced at early harbourfront raves also bothered islanders, as do the current

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[18] In reference to Terence McKenna's The Archaic Revival. New York: Harper Collins, 1991.

parties at Cherry Beach organized by small groups of dance enthusiasts who like their

"T.A.Z." and their "pastoral" wrapped up in the same package[19].

Most project participants were sympathetic to other people's desires for rest and

relaxation through dance and socialization, and did not target individuals for wanting to

have a good time. Nor did most participants pass judgment on the quality of the music

coming from these sound sources, though some were perplexed by the social trend

towards "sensory extremes". The core issue was about the volume of sound, the way that

sound can invade personal space and transgress boundaries, and how the prevailing social

and political attitudes towards "noise pollution" make it very difficult for islanders to

maintain control of their own sonic territory. The question that frustrated all participants

(and the researcher) was "*Why does it have to be so loud?*" Who benefits from a sonic

environment that is physically and psychologically debilitating to everyone involved?

The interpretation of sound is inherently subjective, and quantitative

measurements of sound can only go so far in expressing the qualitative nature of noise.

Berglund, Lindvall and Schwela, in the WHO Guidelines for Community Noise (1999)

outline healthy sound levels in dBA[20], noting however that "a noise measure based only

on energy summation ... is not enough to characterize most noise events,"(xii) also noting

that "annoyance in populations varies not only with the characteristics of the noise,

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[19] I discussed this curious and problematic blend of the "primal" and "pastoral", especially in relationship to raves held in outdoor natural spaces, with two participants in a pre-interview, however, I did not pursue this avenue of inquiry during subsequent interviews and did not include these ideas in the composition.
[20] dBA is a weighting system applied to sound-level measurement. Because the human hearing system is not equally sensitive to all sound frequencies, various types of frequency weighting have been used to determine the relative strengths of frequency components making up a particular environmental noise. The A-weighting is most commonly used and weights lower frequencies as less important than mid- and higher-frequencies.

including the noise source, but also depends to a large degree on many non-acoustical factors of a social, psychological, or economic nature."(x)

The City of Toronto's noise by-law states that "no person shall make, cause or permit noise or vibration, at any time, which is likely to disturb the quiet, peace, rest, enjoyment, comfort or convenience of the inhabitants of the City." (4) This seemingly clear-cut standard (including citizens' duty *not to permit* the production of noise!) only makes sense in a world where sound is divorced from the socio-economic environment is which it occurs; not everyone has the time or resources to gather hard evidence that their peace and quiet has been significantly disturbed. The psychological stress caused by noise invasion is related as much to the frustrating social and political climate that has a "blind spot" for acoustic ecology.

Karlsson (2000) states: "dealing with noise problems for real would be like opening a Pandora's box, which may be the real reason why politicians dare not or cannot address these issues."(10) It is therefore a pleasant surprise that Toronto city councilors McConnell and Fletcher were willing to support the islanders. As each community has a different relationship to sound in the city, politicians make enemies by offering leadership on a public health issue that has a negative impact on the economy. According to the Docks' management, the actions of the City and the AGCO serve a very small interest group – the islanders – and they feel that the decision will negatively impact waterfront development and threaten the livelihood of the Docks' 350 employees. Rather than conceding to the judgment of a court of law, the business is attacking figures of authority are attacked for taking sides in a public forum, and especially for opposing a

moneymaking enterprise. The islanders, for their part, are characterized in the media as "privileged souls paying a buck a day to lease public parkland, [engaged in] self-righteous, high-pitched whinging." (Keenan, 2005)

Ultimately, "noise problems are always a matter of who controls a certain area, who can assume the right to probe or exceed geographic limits, and who can afford to pay." (Karlsson, 2000) Noise abatement always means collisions with economic interests like the tourist, aviation and transport industries (10). The "public good" according to 600 citizens (a minimum of whom are actually involved in the dispute) concerned with what many call a "luxury" problem is significantly different from the "public good" promoted by the Docks and other cash-generating harbourfront ventures. On the other hand, employees at the Docks have likely suffered permanent hearing loss from working at the club: loud sounds affect everybody physically and physiologically, not only those who have psychological aversions to noise and the ability to put up a decade-long fight against it. Furthermore, the business has refused to recognize the adverse side effects of its economic activities, or to shoulder the responsibility that comes with the economic and physical power to infiltrate the acoustic space of unwilling neighbors. For now, the law favours the ideal put forward by islanders; however, it remains to be discovered if this decision will spark a trend towards a more balanced social-ecological soundscape.

The ephemeral nature of sound makes it difficult to restrain or to seal neatly behind borders and lines drawn on maps. Like air, it transgresses class boundaries, seeps across fences and through walls. It cannot be shut out. One might succeed in ignoring the negative aspects of a loud or offensive soundscape, but the physical effects of sound will continue uninterrupted even as one's mind learns to dull its own outrage. When sound is produced and controlled by those in power, or when sounds are a by-product of industries that support hegemonic economies and cultures, its insinuation into our waking and sleeping minds and bodies is nearly continuous. Many, given no choice, learn to revel in the din rather than worry about its influence on health and social relationships. Others, for physical or ethical reasons, simply cannot ignore the modern soundscape as the "voice" of the world's environmental problems.

While different acoustic communities shape and negotiate the soundscape according to their cultural needs and aesthetic sensibilities, not all communities have the same control over noise. This lack of control extends to non-human species, whose communicative and social capacities are compromised by the rising level of sound around the world. The human capacity to respond to the soundscape using myriad social, economic, aesthetic, architectural and legal avenues complicates the easy correlation between loud noise and social-environmental harm. While the negative physiological effects of sound invasion are well documented, "tuning the world" to suit one acoustic community over another will not necessarily result in a balanced, ecological soundscape. When I asked one participant how to solve the "noise issue", she answered: "Wait 'till the

economy collapses, and we can't afford the nice toys anymore."[21] If this is the "final solution" to the noise issue, the peace and quiet will be profound indeed, and not necessarily welcome.

This project is an attempt to distill the major themes of acoustic ecology, and a way of connecting and communicating with a unique acoustic community. The project does not address every nuance of Toronto Island's acoustic community, nor does it examine every aspect of the political economy of urban noise (something I have tried to elaborate briefly in the project paper). "Well, listen..." presents an affectionate interpretation of the community based on participants' subjective experience of sound; however during the course of creating this project I developed a more critical interpretation of acoustic community, and its relationship to culturally-specific constructions of nature, specifically those based on Western ideals of the pastoral. I hope to pursue these avenues of inquiry at the doctoral level in the near future. I hope that the project inspires others to listen, to attend to the soundscape, and to foster a deeper relationship with their own acoustic community.

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[21] Lynn Robinson. Interview 18 June 2006.

Project Participants

Albert Fulton volunteers as the Island archivist. He has been living on Algonquin Island for about 25 years and is not involved with the sound committee or the Docks dispute.

Marinko Jareb is a DJ and sound artist. He lived with Daya Lye on Algonquin Island for two years in the late 1990s and was also involved in Toronto's rave scene.

Freda Lord is an octogenarian who has lived on Wards Island since the 1950s. She lives directly across the Eastern Gap from the Docks and was a witness at the AGCO hearing.

Daya Lye grew up on Algonquin Island and has been living in downtown Toronto for about ten years. She was involved in Toronto's rave scene in the mid 1990s.

Vivian Pitcher is a homemaker who has lived on Algonquin Island for three decades. She volunteers on the noise committee and was involved in the AGCO hearing.

Lynn Robinson lives on Wards Island and volunteers on the noise committee. Lynn gave closing arguments at the AGCO hearing. Her husband suffers from noise phobia.

Katy Singleton is a graduate student living in downtown Toronto. She was involved in a noise-related dispute in Kensington Market. Her voice was not used in the composition.

Glossary[22]

Acoustic Ecology: The study of the effects of the acoustic environment on the physical responses or behavioral characteristics of creatures living within it. Its particular aim is to draw attention to imbalances that may have unhealthy or inimical effects on living creatures.

Keynote sound: Sound hears by a society continuously or frequently enough to form a background against which other sounds are perceived.

Hi-Fi / Lo-Fi: A high-fidelity soundscape is one in which sound may be heard clearly without crowding or masking. A lo-fi soundscape is one in which signals are overcrowded, resulting in masking or lack of clarity.

Soundmark: A community sound that is unique or possesses qualities that make it especially regarded or noticed by people in an acoustic community.

Soundscape: The sonic environment. Technically, any portion of the sonic environment regarded as a field of study. The term may refer to actual environments, or to abstract constructions (designed environments, music, sound montage, etc.)

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[22] Adapted from Schafer (1977).

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