

Barry Truax, interviewed by Raquel Castro  
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**I would start by asking what is your personal history with sound.**

Well... I mean, first of all as Hildegard Westerkamp said, we are always in the soundscape, right? So of course, as soon as you're born you are surrounded by sound. And that means that most of the time we take it for granted unless something is particularly toxic or annoying. I sometimes wonder at what point does one really start listening? I was raised in a musical family and eventually, after having studied science and technology, I started composing and not just being a piano player. So there's a certain point where you start focusing on sound directly, such as you do with listening to music, that's a good place to start. Although of course today people have music on all the time on their headphones, whereas we didn't have that when I was growing up. Music was still something that was quite special or came on in the radio or something like that. Certainly, where it started to really change was with technology. Working in a studio where I had control over the sound and could design it. In the early days it was electronic, analog electronic, and it quickly moved on to the early stages of digital audio technology. Murray Schafer invited me in 1973 to come to Simon Fraser University in Vancouver and join this new group called The World Soundscape Project. Frankly, I had no idea of what it was about but he said it was the most important work being done in the world and I had to agree, it sounded

to media and attitude and training. Now there are some people and some professions that have of course been expert listeners. For instance in medicine,

that kind of balance and design, and if you have control over certain things, for instance in your own home, do you need to have machinery, music, whatever, on all the time? Just make common sense decisions. Common sense is notoriously not very common. People are aware of environmental sustainability, environmental crisis, climate change, water pollution and things like that. But isn't sound pollution just as serious and something that affects us very directly and affects the quality of life? That should be on the environmentalist agenda.

**So what are the options? What can sound studies and practices add in terms of politics and urban planning?**

Well, the listening aspect of it, the qualitative aspect. In Europe in particular I'm very encouraged because the acoustic communities, such as the acoustic designers and consultants, are quickly moving beyond the purely quantitative approach that has characterised the last 100 years of sound and noise measurement. I think they realised how far it can go, that the quality of the soundscape is just as important. What makes a good soundscape? That involves listening and evaluation. This can be done on a quasi local level as well, through positive community action. So for instance, you could do something like nominating what we call soundmarks. What do people think are the important sounds of their environment? These are sounds that people notice and value.

Fortunately, today on the academic side of things, sound studies are becoming broadly accepted and practiced across humanities, even in architecture which has traditionally been very visual, now there's more focus on it. So it's a very good time right now, maybe out of necessity, for people to understand the role of sound historically and in our current situation. Then, of course, artists can take a step further as they always do. Many steps further, right? Pushing some boundaries by creating interesting listening experiences out of the concert hall.

**Do you think there is an economical aspect over silence and noise?**