*Sound Instance: A Inner Soundwalk Through Life*

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**Abstract**

The soundscape can be defined as a diverse collection of sounds available in the world that are related to different contexts and origins. These sounds serve as a means of communication, sharing information, and contributing to the well-being of society and other ecosystems. Murray Schafer, the author who originally introduced this concept, emphasizes the need to recognize the importance of the sonic reality and select the sounds that contribute to a tuning of the world, leading to a balanced and healthy life for humanity. The soundwalk is an empirical method of exploring sound in different places, focusing on an individual's daily life, with the aim of changing minds and encouraging action through a critical perception of the environment. By combining soundwalks with ethnography, it is possible to give sound its proper importance in relation to the processes of individual representation, including those related to social, professional, and emotional aspects of life. To provide more information about the importance of this inner sound environment in relation to individual reality, the concept of sound instance is useful in understanding the whole sound field existing in an individual's life. Recognizing the significance of sound in our lives is critical for maintaining balance and well-being, contributing to our understanding of the world and our place in it. By acknowledging the importance of sound instance, we can use it as a deep listening inner soundwalk throughout our life.


Keywords: Soundscape, Sound Instance, Soundwalk, Listening, Identity

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**Introduction**

Soundscape is a term used to describe the collection of sounds that exist in a particular environment. It encompasses all of the sounds that can be heard in a given space, including both natural and human-made sounds. The concept of soundscape was first introduced by Canadian composer and acoustic ecologist Murray Schafer. The author emphasized the importance of listening to the world around us and paying attention to the sounds that make up our sonic environment (Schafer, 1977/1994). In other hand, sound instance is a concept that highlights the significance of the inner sound environment in shaping individual realities. It offers insights into the broader sound field that exists in an individual's life, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and understanding the sounds that represent them and their perspective on their function in that environment (Mestre, 2023).

On the level of identity, Goffman (1959) refers to the various roles that individuals play in society and the ways in which they present themselves to others, saying that our identities are not fixed, but rather are constantly being constructed and reconstructed through our interactions with others, emphasizing the importance of symbols, language, and social interactions in shaping our understanding of the world around us and maintain the sense of self.

Mixing these terms, we present a perspective for a different kind of soundwalk, based on the sounds of our inner soundscape, the sounds that share the information about our lives, like sonic footprints, also known as sound instance.

**Soundscape**

Soundscape refer to the auditory environment or the overall collection of sounds in a particular space or location. It encompasses all the sounds that are present and can be perceived in each context, including natural sounds, human-made sounds, and any combination thereof (Schafer, 1977/1994). Developed by Canadian composer Murray Schafer, the soundscape study focus on exploration of the relationship between sound and the environment, with the main purpose to understanding and analyze the sonic characteristics of different spaces (Pijanowski, 2011). Soundscapes are multidimensional, incorporating elements such as pitch, rhythm, timbre, spatial characteristics, and the overall organization of sounds. (Gaver, 1993) They can evoke emotions, set a mood, and shape our perception of a place or event. For example, a bustling cityscape with honking cars, conversations, and footsteps may create a sense of energy and urban life, while a peaceful natural soundscape with chirping birds and flowing water may induce relaxation and tranquility (Truax, 2001).

The study of soundscapes has gained prominence in various fields, including acoustic ecology, music composition, urban planning, and environmental psychology. Researchers and artists have developed techniques to record, analyze, and manipulate soundscapes to better understand their impact on individuals and communities (Erfanian, 2019).

One notable reference in the field of soundscapes is the World Soundscape Project, initiated by Murray Schafer in the late 60's, a project aimed to document and study soundscapes from around the world, examining the relationships between sound, environment, and culture. This research produced influential works such as "The Tuning of the World" (1977), which explores the concept of acoustic ecology and the importance of preserving and enhancing positive soundscapes.

In recent years, the advancement of technology has allowed for more sophisticated approaches to soundscapes, with the development of binaural audio recording techniques and virtual reality, researchers and artists can create immersive environments that provide a highly realistic and engaging auditory experience. With these advancements it's possible to find applications in fields like virtual reality gaming, architectural design, therapeutic interventions and sound recording and sharing apps, offering a rich and dynamic perspective on our sonic environment, providing insights into how sound shapes our experiences and influences our well-being (Gaver, et al, 2007).

## Sound Instance

The concept of sound instance illuminates the profound relationship between sound and the individual, highlighting its role in representing and shaping life experiences, emerging from the recognition of sound's influence on personal and social fields, molding thoughts, attitudes, and models of representation. Divided by four subfields (sound matrix, sound cycles, sound interference and sound traces), sound instance encompasses the representation and consequence of an individual's life experiences through sound, based on four different perspectives. By understanding the significance of sound within personal and social contexts, we gain a deeper appreciation for the complexities of human existence, based on this sonic reflection, promoting a more comprehensive understanding of ourselves and the world we inhabit, ultimately enriching our connection with the sonic tapestry of life (Mestre, 2023).

Based on Schafer's contributions further shed light on the concept of sound instance by emphasizing the detrimental effects of overstimulation and decontextualization of sound, he proposes the field of acoustic ecology and design as countermeasures to combat noise pollution and restore harmony between individuals and their sonic environments (Schafer, 1977/1994).

## Listening

Listening is an art form in itself, a profound and transformative experience that transcends mere auditory perception. Just as a symphony conductor guides an orchestra or a composer weaves intricate melodies, the act of listening requires a heightened level of attentiveness and openness. It is through this act that we connect with the essence of music, unlocking its power to transport us to realms beyond the physical world (Buffington, 2016).

One figure who emphasized the significance of listening as a creative and spiritual practice was Pauline Oliveros, an avant-garde composer and pioneer of deep listening. Oliveros believed that listening went beyond the mere act of hearing sounds; it encompassed a deep engagement with the sonic environment and an awareness of our own perceptual responses. In her groundbreaking work, she encouraged listeners to expand their consciousness and embrace the richness of sonic experiences in all their forms (Oliveros, 2005).

To truly listen is to embark on a journey of discovery, to venture into the intricate universe of sound that surrounds us, it is to immerse ourselves in the harmonies and rhythms, to discern the interplay of instruments, and to feel the emotional currents that music can evoke. Just as a musician attunes their ear to nuances and subtleties, a skilled listener hones their ability to discern and appreciate the intricacies of a musical composition (Uddin et al, 2018).

Moreover, listening is not limited to passive reception but can also be an active and participatory experience. It invites us to engage with the music on a personal level, allowing it to shape our moods, thoughts, and even our physical movements. It opens doors to introspection, self-expression, and communal connections as we share our experiences and insights with others who have been touched by the same melodies and rhythms (Hesser, 2001).

Through deep listening, we cultivate a heightened sense of presence and mindfulness. We become attuned to the present moment, fully absorbed in the sounds that envelop us. It is a practice that extends beyond the realm of music, permeating our daily lives, and enabling us to embrace the world with greater empathy and understanding (Supper and Bijsterveld, 2015). Through the art of listening, we embark on a transformative journey that connects us to the vast history of human experience, reminding us of the beauty and power of sound (Nieminen, 2012).

**Identity**

Identity, a complex and multifaceted concept, lies at the heart of human existence, evolving the shapes our perceptions, interactions, and understanding of ourselves and others (Alcoff, 2006).

Erving Goffman (1959) introduced the concept of "presentation of self" and the idea that individuals engage in impression management to construct their identities. According to Goffman, we constantly perform different roles and adapt our behavior to fit social situations, whether conscious or subconsciously, that shapes how others perceive us and, in turn, how we perceive ourselves. In Goffman's view, identity is not a fixed entity but a fluid and dynamic phenomenon, that navigate through various social contexts, assuming different roles and adjusting accordingly. This process of impression management is akin to a theatrical production, where we carefully craft our performances to create specific impressions on others. Just as actors rely on costumes, gestures, and scripts, we utilize social cues, body language, and verbal communication to present ourselves in a manner that aligns with the desired identity. However, Goffman's work also highlights the tension between our public performances and our private selves, he introduced the concept of "backstage" and "frontstage" behavior, emphasizing that while our public presentation may be carefully curated, our private moments often reveal a more authentic and unguarded version of ourselves. These private moments are where we can momentarily shed the social roles and expectations imposed upon us, allowing for a deeper exploration of our true identities.

In other sociologist's perspectives, Charles Cooley (1902) introduced the concept of the "looking-glass self," suggesting that our identities are shaped by how we imagine others perceive us. According to the author, we develop a sense of self based on the feedback we receive from our social interactions. In this way, our identities are not solely constructed through our own self-perception but are influenced by the reflected judgments and opinions of those around us.

Similarly, philosopher Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity challenges traditional notions of identity, by arguing that gender is not an inherent characteristic, but a social construct enacted through performative acts. According to the author, we continuously perform and repeat gender norms and expectations, which in turn solidify our identities within societal frameworks (Butler, 1990).

There for, identity is a dynamic and multifaceted concept shaped by social interactions, performances, and societal expectations. Goffman's insights into impression management and the presentation of self-shed light on the intricate ways in which we construct and navigate our identities. However, identity is not only a result of our own actions and self-perceptions, but also influenced by the feedback and judgments of others, the cultural and social contexts we inhabit, and the performative acts we engage in. Understanding the complexities of identity allows us to appreciate the diversity and fluidity of human experiences and fosters empathy and acceptance in our interactions with others (Goffman, 1959).

**Soundwalk**

Idealized by Murray Schafer in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the concept of soundwalk is defined as an empirical method for exploring the auditory environment in various locations, also used to understand and perceive human daily practices from personal and professional perspectives (Nakahodo & Quaranta, 2013). The concept advocates for an active passive participation of individuals in the sonic environment, with the aim of focusing attention and developing a process of critical listening, thereby contributing to the balance of the sound landscape (Adams et al, 2008).

According to Westerkamp (2001), neglecting the individual and social auditory process promotes a poor-quality sonic environment, leading to exhaustive, painful, and somewhat depressive and frustrating soundwalks. In this context, the author suggests that individuals often resort to illusory defense mechanisms that do not contribute to resolving the problem. In other words, these mechanisms do not address the excess of sound stimuli available in the environment, thereby weakening auditory and sensory acuity.

Associated with research in the field of acoustic ecology, the term "sound walking," defined by Hildegard Westerkamp in the 1970s, also highlights the potential for improvisation and composition using the available sonic resources, combining the visual and auditory components to create a blend of meanings and opportunities in the realm of sound art creation (Fernström and Taylor, 2014).

Within the artistic realm, soundwalks promote the creation of sound narratives based on the artist's and spectator's perspectives, transforming the environment into a museum accessible to all listeners, offering to participants the opportunity to have a dual role as a visiting curator in a work of art, engaging in musical orchestration and execution without a conductor, allowing for freedom and constant evolution (Kato, s.d.).

On a personal level, according to Westerkamp (2020), individuals respond in accordance with their perception of the surrounding environment, economic and social status, health condition, age, and cultural and political influences.

According to Kolber (2002), sound is considered an influential and differentiating medium through which we hear and perceive throughout life, sharing information that can evoke emotions, convey meaning, and shape our understanding of the world.

**Methodoly**

Ethnography is a research methodology that involves immersing oneself within a specific cultural group to understand their practices, beliefs, and behaviors (Kutsche, 1989). It

emphasizes participant observation and engagement to gain deep insights into the social dynamics and cultural context (Schwiedland, 1922). Ethnographers collect data through methods such as interviews, field notes, and audiovisual recordings (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). The data is analyzed to identify patterns, meanings, and the underlying cultural significance (Geertz, 1973). Ethnography promotes an understanding of cultural diversity and challenges preconceived notions (Marcus & Fischer, 1986). It provides a holistic perspective, capturing the complexities and nuances of human experiences (Maanen, 1980). Ethnographic research findings can inform decision-making, policy development, and foster intercultural understanding (Emerson et al., 1995).

Phenomenology is a philosophical and methodological approach that aims to understand and explore subjective experiences and the ways in which individuals make sense of the world (Husserl, 1931). It focuses on uncovering the lived experiences and perspectives of individuals, highlighting the subjective meanings they assign to phenomena (Merleau-Ponty, 2010). Phenomenologists employ methods such as in-depth interviews and reflective analysis to access and interpret these subjective experiences (Giorgi, 2009). Through phenomenology, researchers seek to illuminate the structures of consciousness and the essence of lived experiences (Heidegger, 1927). This approach encourages a deep exploration of individual and collective perception, embodiment, and interpretation (Van Manen, 2014). Phenomenology offers insights into the richness and complexity of human consciousness and the significance of subjective meaning-making processes (Smith, 2003).

In this matter, both ethnography and phenomenology offer valuable perspectives when examining information based on sound resources, allowing researchers to delve into the cultural practices, beliefs, and behaviors of a specific group, providing a deep understanding of the role of sound within their daily lives, capturing the nuanced sound shapes and influences their experiences.

On the other hand, the focus is on the subjective experiences and meanings individuals attribute to sound, exploring how sound is perceived, embodied, and interpreted by individuals, shedding light on the unique ways they make sense of the world, uncovering the essence of lived experiences and the significance of sound in shaping subjective reality.

By combining both approaches, it's possible to gain a comprehensive understanding of the intricate relationship between individuals, communities, and sound, allowing for the exploration of sound as a cultural and etnographic phenomenon, while phenomenology delves into the personal and subjective dimensions of sound experiences. This interdisciplinary approach enriches our knowledge of how sound shapes identities, social interactions, and cultural practices.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the concept of the soundscape and the practice of soundwalks shed light on the profound influence of sound in our lives. The soundscape encompasses a diverse array of sounds, each carrying its own meaning and significance within different contexts. Murray Schafer's focus on recognizing the importance of the sonic reality emphasizes the need for selecting sounds that contribute to a balanced and healthy life for humanity.

Soundwalks, as a practical and empirical method for exploring and understanding the sonic environment of our daily lives, promote critical perception of our surroundings, changing our

perspective, inspire action, and foster a deeper connection with the environment. Integrating soundwalks with ethnography further enhances our understanding of how sound influences individual representation in various aspects of life, including social, professional, and emotional realms.

The concept of sound instance provides valuable insights into the inner sound environment of individuals, highlighting the intricate sound field that exists within each person's life. Recognizing the significance of this inner sound environment is crucial for maintaining balance, well-being, and a comprehensive understanding of ourselves and the world around us. By employing a deep listening inner soundwalk throughout our lives, we can cultivate a heightened awareness of sound, promoting harmony, and enriching our experiences.

In essence, by embracing the concepts of soundscape, soundwalks, and sound instance, we recognize the profound impact of sound on our well-being and our perception of the world. Through critical engagement with sound, we can foster a more balanced and harmonious existence, not only benefiting ourselves but also contributing to the greater health and vitality of society and ecosystems. Let us appreciate the richness of the sonic realm, taking proactive steps to preserve and cultivate a soundscape that nourishes and sustains us throughout our life's journey.

**Acknowledgements**

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