

# NOISE CONTROL, ACOUSTIC ECOLOGY AND THE PRACTICE OF LISTENING

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To situate the practice of listening at the centre of noise control and management tends to open a can of worms. Listening experience and response is difficult to quantify and thus adds a considerable measure of complexity to any noise research. But to exclude this approach means to miss out on vital and useful information which could potentially lead to profound environmental changes in the soundscape. It is precisely for this reason that this can of worms needs to be opened further and examined rigorously. Driven by a desire to narrow what has been called 'the major communicational divide between the concepts of acoustic ecology and the large body of knowledge and practice represented by conventional noise management' (A.L. Brown, 2003), attempts are surfacing in many contexts, including in this conference, to balance the emphasis in engineering acoustics on noise reduction with a more positive approach of identifying and preserving desirable acoustic environments. The practice of listening has been central to education and research in soundscape studies and acoustic ecology since the 1970s when the World Soundscape Project conducted a number of pioneering studies of acoustic environments. Developments will be traced through new books, research and educational activities that have emerged in various parts of the world since then and are engaged in studying the ecological aspects of the soundscape, including most importantly the listener-environment relationship and its inherent potential for changing attitudes and perspectives.

## Biography

Hildegard Westerkamp was born in Osnabrück, Germany in 1946 and emigrated to Canada in 1968. Her work's focus—as composer, educator, editor or radio artist—is on listening, environmental sound and acoustic ecology. She was a member of the original *World Soundscape Project*, working with R. Murray Schafer; has taught courses in Acoustic Communication at Simon Fraser University with Barry Truax; has worked with writers Norbert Ruebsaat and Sharon Thesen, with photographer Florence Debeugny and is conducting soundscape workshops and giving concerts and lectures internationally. Some of her compositional work appears in US filmmaker Gus van Sant's newest films *Elephant* and *Last Days*. She is a founding member and is currently active on the boards of the *World Forum for Acoustic Ecology (WFAE)*. She is a co-editor of *Soundscape—The Journal of Acoustic Ecology*, a publication of the WFAE (see: [www.wfae.net](http://www.wfae.net)). An extensive exploration into her compositional work can be found in Andra McCartney's *Sounding Places: Situated Conversations through the Soundscape Work of Hildegard Westerkamp* York University, Toronto, 1999, and in the internet at: <http://www.emf.org/artists/mccartney00/text.html>.

Her own website offers more detailed information about her various activities in the areas of soundscape composition, acoustic ecology and soundscape studies:  
<http://www.sfu.ca/~westerka>.