

Vancouver 2020

Field recordings by Jacek Smolicki

The following field recordings were made between the end of February and December 2020 in Vancouver, BC. They are part of my international postdoctoral research that allowed me to spend several months as a guest researcher at the Sonic Research Studio at the Simon Fraser University's School of Communication. The project was funded by the Swedish Research Agency, while anchored at the Department of Culture and Society at Linköping University in Sweden. Through this artistic research project, I have been exploring the history, present, and future of soundwalking and field recording practices in the context of arts, environmental humanities, and philosophy of technology. During my stay in Vancouver, I have been interested in exploring the World Soundscape Project's legacy, especially how it has been carried on through various soundwalking and field recording initiatives. Besides qualitative research and interviews with local practitioners, my study included practical work and experiments with listening, soundwalking, and field recording techniques. My incentive has been to rethink these historically established practices in the light of current issues of critical importance such as climate change, social and environmental justice, and decolonization.

While the majority of the following recordings come from my daily sound journaling practice, others were made specifically for a project entitled Intertidal Room. It is a soundwalk composition developed for Vancouver coastline near Stanley Park, the unceded territory of Coast Salish peoples - Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Stó:lō and Səl̓ílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) and xʷməθkʷəyəm (Musqueam) Nations. By attending to the fugitive nature of intertidal zones, this soundwalk intended to provide room for increased aural attention to the ways people have been cultivating, affecting but also disrupting various, also imperceptible layers of these complex environments (more information about the project can be found on my website: www.smolicki.com). Among the recordings below, those made especially for the Intertidal Room soundwalk include hydrophone recordings of intertidal species, vessels, and harbor industry noises.

My visit to Vancouver coincided with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. A couple of weeks after my arrival, the city and district authorities began introducing lockdown restrictions. The outbreak had a significant impact on the way the city sounded. Some of the selected recordings reflect these changes (for example, more distinct sounds of birds, such as the chirping of heron chicks in normal circumstances taken over by the sounds of nearby tennis players and restaurant clients). Other recordings directly represent this uncertain period (for example, the anti-lockdown protest or collective cheering for healthcare workers that residents of downtown have since March 20 been performing daily at 7pm).

The killing of George Floyd by the police in Minneapolis in May triggered a wave of protests against racial injustice. Those took place all over the world, including Vancouver. The soundscapes of the city have become regularly augmented by thousands of people who, despite the pandemic, took to the streets to demand justice for Floyd and numerous others who have fallen victims to systemic racial discrimination.

On Juneteenth, six thousand people join the Black Lives Matter demonstration in Vancouver. Ever since then, several other protests that took place, including a demonstration on Emancipation Day (Recordings from both of these events can be found in the collection).

At the turn of the year, the only certain thing to be said about the current moment is that uncertainty - already accompanying us due to the ongoing climate change crisis and raising polarization of societies - might only increase. While the soundscapes to come become increasingly unforeseeable, let us hope that by reflecting on the past as recorded in sounds, might make us better listeners in and to that uncertain future.

With this intention, I share with you this collection of field recordings from Vancouver in 2020.

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