

Journées sonores, canal de Lachine

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The Project

“Journées sonores, canal de Lachine” was a sound project which documented shifts in the soundscape of the Lachine canal as it changed with each phase of the revitalization project. Like all urban renewal projects, this multi-year, multi-million dollar project has profound effects on how the areas surrounding the canal sound. By recording sounds from the trail that runs the length of the canal over several years, this project created condensed sonic images that followed these urban changes. Listening to these sounds,

we hope you, especially those who live and work in the area, will consider this space through sound and reflect on your relationships to the sounds of this place. Unlike visual representations of the place, sound recordings do not frame particular buildings or scenes, but point to relationships among different sources such as auto and boating traffic, cyclists, industrial/construction machines and pedestrians.

The sound recordings were juxtaposed with media representations of Lachine and the Blue Montreal project. We intended to draw out the varying ways in which perspectives on this particular environment are framed by different sources and perspectives.

In turn, the project addressed the following questions:

- How does this area sound as the cradle of Canadian industry (partly in relation to how it might have sounded when it was first industrialized)?
- What resonances remain of the fur trade, and early relations of Europeans with aboriginal inhabitants?
- What are the sonic traces of its newer incarnation as bicycle path and pedestrian walkway?
- What flows can be heard minute-to-minute and month-to-month? What are the dominant and recessive sounds in this area?
- How do these sounds reflect and contest media rhetoric about its social roles?

In the final phase of this project (2002-2003), a multimedia installation was produced for display at the Musée de Lachine (March 2004). The show included an interactive computer installation, bringing together sounds recorded throughout several years. It also included more composed meditations on particular sites, along with photographic and drawn images and found objects. Comments from the project's website were also included. Visitors to the gallery were encouraged in turn to comment on the installation and how it affected their perception of and attitude toward the sounds of the Canal.

Soundwalking

The sound recordings are made through a method known as soundwalking. Soundwalking involves recording a sound environment of a particular place as we move through that place. It is an approach to the ethnography of place which focuses on listening as a way towards understanding how a sounding

environment communicates. As such, our presence is never intended to be minimized or disguised, but rather is intimately part of the soundscape you hear in each clip. You will often hear a snuffle or cough in the winter months or pieces of passing conversation as curious onlookers comment on our peculiar appearance or say hello. We made these recordings using a mini-disk recorder and stereo microphone, attempting to draw out particular relationships within the place and the sounds produced by it.

Soundwalks attempt to explore the “murmurs of everyday life” (“les murmures de la vie quotidienne,” de Certeau 1984). We hope that through these recordings we can draw attention to the everyday activities of people (including ourselves) as we use the public space around us. These activities and sounds are often overlooked or inaudible, but become more present through attention to them. At the same time, in an effort to respect the privacy of people using the trail, passing conversations remain murmurs in the recordings in an attempt to maintain a respectful distance.



About Us (in 2002)

[Andra McCartney](#) is an Assistant Professor in Communication Studies at Concordia University, teaching Sound in Media. She is also a multimedia sound artist with many multimedia works and research articles online. Andra lives in Lachine.

Sandra Gabriele is a doctoral student in Concordia University's Joint PhD in Communication Studies program (joint with Université de Montréal and Université du Québec à Montréal). She began sound recording as Andra's research assistant just this past year. She has recently begun researching her dissertation, entitled "Gendering Journalism (History): The Emergence of the Woman Journalist in Canada," which traces the entry of women into the journalistic field at the end of the nineteenth century. Her other areas of research include: electronic journalism, feminist theory and history, communications technology and cultural studies. Sandra lives in Montreal.

Anna Friz is a graduate student in Concordia University's Master of Arts in Media Studies program. She is also a sound artist, performer, radio programmer, producer and curator. She has created works for CBC Radio 1, Denmark's Radio 2 and ORF Kunstradio, Austria. During the three years that she worked as programming coordinator at CiTR Radio (Vancouver), she acted as curator for the 24 Hours of Radio Art project in 1999 and 2000. She recently presented a performance at the send+receive Sound Festival in Winnipeg.

[Owen Chapman](#) is also a student in Concordia's Communication Studies program and is working with Andra as his PhD advisor. His interests include turntablism, beat production and sound conversation. Owen lives in Montreal.

Le terroir sonore du phare Lachinois: Some Recipes

Terroir is a word used in French to talk about food and wines, and how the tastes of the soil, the air, the water, and the vegetation of a region are mixed and transformed in the act of cooking or fermenting, producing the subtle, yet recognizable, flavour of a St. Emilion wine [or a Kilkenny beer, or jam made from Lac St. Jean blueberries]. I like this as a metaphor for the sound work that I do.

Hidden memories

[350k] trace different moments...

Chânes murmurantes

[1 MB] One day walking on the rocky shore close to the Lachine pier, I found a large, heavy, rusty chain that must have been used to dock cargo ships when the Lachine Canal was open. I recorded the sound of this chain as I slowly lowered and raised it on a rock. I could hear waves lapping against the shore, and paced the movement of the chain to that of the waves. On the computer, I slowed down this sound by different amounts - an octave apart - and braided them through the stereo field. Over this mix, I bring in other moments - short fragments of conversation with a fisherman, cars arriving and leaving, boats driving by, birds flying overhead. All of these recordings were made in the summer or fall of 1999. 'Murmurantes' is a reference to 'les murmures de la vie quotidienne', a phrase used by Michel de Certeau to refer to the actions of everyday life that are often ignored or taken for granted, but which were the focus of his research and of mine. It also refers to the perspective of recording - because I don't want to disturb people's privacy, I record voices from a distance so that conversations are only murmurs - unless someone talks directly to me, as happens at the end of this piece.

Les Soupirs de Glace [700k] This is a recording of a thin layer of ice on the water by the pier in Lachine, recorded on a day in March 2001 when the temperature plummeted 27 degrees [from 10 above to 17 below celsius], skimming the water surface with ice that was tearing in a thousand places as we listened. There is also the sound of a chainsaw used by an ice fisher, and lots of seagulls. This piece also includes a brief recording of my voice sighing [from a recording on another day]. I filtered, equalized and lowered the pitch of the original recording of the ice, then juxtaposed excerpts of the original recording with the processed version. The processed version speaks to me of the shifting power of the current below the water surface. The original recording sounds oddly like insects in summer. I was able to get a clear recording of the ice moving by lowering the mic on its cable to within a few feet of the surface. This also protected it from the wind.

L'entrée du Phare

[1 MB] The lighthouse is open! So I'm going to go in... The resonance of this enclosed space feels like the internal presence of the lighthouse. While I climb the metal stairs inside, a churchbell begins to ring. The sound of running up metal stairs in enclosed spaces reminds me of ladders on ships, and my childhood growing up near the sea. This piece is the closest to the original recording, the one most closely linked to my subjective experience as a recordist. I have introduced only two alterations: a brief melody made by speeding up the sound of my steps on the ladder, which appears just after I say I will go in. Also there is an amplified and slowed version of the resonance of the space, which appears around the time that I say 'hello', recognizing the presence of the interior.

By [Andra McCartney](#).

Made with my sound recordings around the Lachine pier, 1999-2000, and with photography by P. S. Moore. Thanks to Nicole Gingras and [GIV](#)

Post-Industrial Audio



all photos: Jan Normand Desrosiers

My soundwalk "beat" of the Lachine Canal takes me past a number of empty or abandoned industrial sites and buildings: some guarded by rusting fences, others left open; cracked glass like teeth in the vacant windows, graffiti tags and murals spreading across the walls. The buildings are in various states of decay, but their colours are still striking: red brick, blue corrugated tin, mahogany ceramic tiling. Some of the old factories in St. Henri and Pt. St. Charles have already been converted to lofts and condos; others still stand, awaiting their turn. Some pieces of industry are left behind despite gentrification -- massive silo cylinders, the occasional free-standing brick chimney. I circle the buildings, and where the gates have fallen open, I go inside.

A hush has fallen over the industry of these spaces once built to contain massive stores of grain or sugar, or for manufacturing goods. Instead, the noise from outside leaks in through the gaping windows and holes in the roof. I walk across a large shed to the sound of cars roaring by on the street, and then step into a tiny closed room and find myself in sudden muffled silence. These sites have become a kind of liminal sonic space-- the echoes of my footsteps instead of the former din of people and machines, the

traffic and construction outside now audible inside (especially the ever-present beep beep beep of trucks backing up). I need to make sound in order to hear the dimensions of the rooms by whistling, tapping, drumming on empty hoppers and turning the wheels of strange rusted contraptions. Sound is most often found in the small things left behind: crushed glass, ceramic tile, or broken brick underfoot; odd twisted bits of metal or empty spray cans; pigeons fluttering up into the ceiling; water dripping from a burst pipe.

Anna Friz

Click on the headings to access sound files online.

[Canada Malting Silos](#)



One day I recorded a couple of boys tagging the silo... For a tour of this and other abandoned buildings in Montreal, [here](#)

[CN Rail Sheds](#)



[Redpath Sugar Refinery](#)



I found some discarded metal hoppers outside the old factory, and recorded these sounds in and around them.

[Silo #5](#)



A Montreal group called [The User] have converted this empty silo into an instrument (the Silophone). Sound is injected into the cylinders and played back using Internet, telephone and an outdoor "observatory" near the silo. I recorded this sample standing next to the silo, where a window has been cut into the cement to allow the public to hear the sound resonating inside the 12-storey high cylinders.

[Play the Silophone](#)

Vélocomp

This [sound file](#) juxtaposes two different recording methods. The first 30 seconds of sound I recorded with a handheld microphone on August 19th, 2001, near the Casse-croute Du Canal pictured at left. This area marks the easternmost point of the section of the canal I habitually record. My soundwalk on this occasion focused on discreet sound events within the larger sonic environment through which I was moving: my feet kicking around a piece of glass, creaking metal pulleys found on the Casse-croute/Caboose, etc. (Other sounds I collected on the same afternoon: bumble bees buzzing through flower beds, cicadas high up in the windy branches of the trees lining the canal, some distant industrial clanging...)

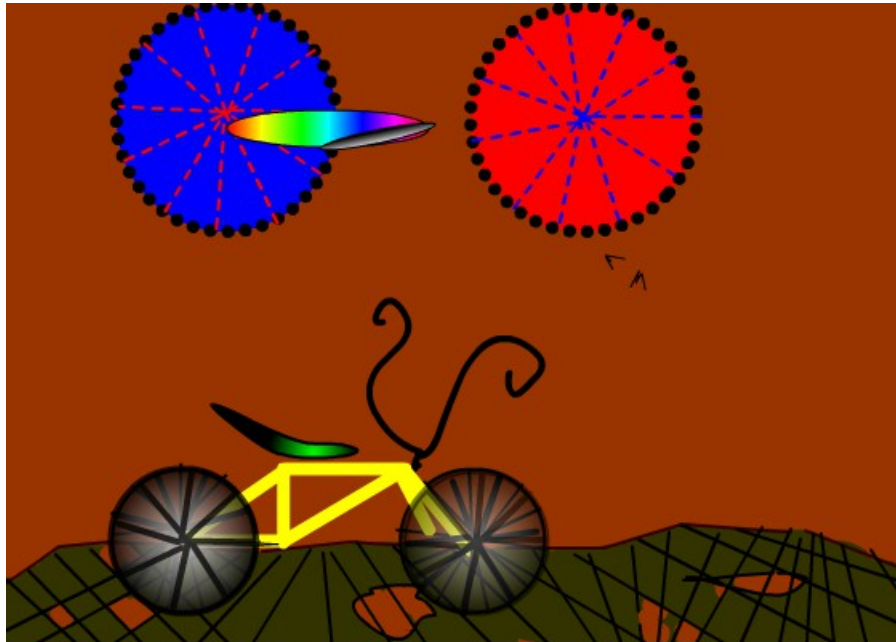
The last 30 seconds were taken from a sound recording I made while riding my bike on November 3rd, 2001. In order to accomplish this and other similar recordings I have outfitted my bicycle helmet with two small microphones at the back. The section of the canal pictured at left is readily recognizable upon listening to these recordings due to the heavy traffic sounds which dominate the area. Decibel levels here are nearly always between 70-80 dB. With these *soundrides*, easily isolatable sonic events are replaced with a compressed (and often jumbled) sequence of sounds.

Owen Chapman



[Flash et vélo](#)

The samples used to compose this piece all came from recordings made along the Lachine Canal during the month of November, 2001. The booming bass drum sound I produced by kicking a large shipping container resting alongside the bike path. All the other sounds were collected randomly via small microphones on the back of my helmet during bicycle rides up and down the canal. The unedited sound files (air brakes sighing, crows cawing, a factory whistle) were digitized before subsequently being sent through a series of effects and processes, including equalization, pitch shifting, and reverse playback. The resulting "new" sounds were then sequenced and layered through the use of digital multi-track sound editing software (Cubase). The moving Flash images of wheels, bike frames, birds, the canal, etc., do not depict any particular narrative.



Soundwalking at Night

Recorded on October 25, 2000, this piece was part of a series of night recordings made by Sandra and Andra. Interested in hearing what differences the night produced for the sounding environment, Sandra recorded this excerpt while walking westward from the Atwater Street access point. Circumscribed by all the attendant cultural and historical meanings of women walking in the dark, soundwalking at night through trails that exist on the edge of the city, bordering an old industrial zone, can be risky business for women, as Sandra discovered on this night. The sound excerpt is an encounter Sandra had with a young man who rode past her on his bike initially, noticed her walking in the shadows, then turned his bike around and approached her. Fearing potential danger, Sandra stood under a lamp post, under full visibility, while feigning looking for something in her satchel. The few lines below are some reflections Sandra had on the experience.

This encounter, as I have come to call it, reminded me of what many feminist theorists have asserted: that moving through space is a complicated process for women because of the cultural meanings attached to gender. Her gendered body marks a woman's visibility, making the idea that a woman can observe quietly, detachedly – as one might expect in a soundwalk – almost impossible. For me, soundwalking at night, posed an interesting challenge to my conventional practices of recording during the day. Without the benefit of clear visibility, I must already rely on sound much more. But, while recording, these sounds are much more amplified, creating a frustrating and discomfoting experience. Whatever ways I have of engaging with the sounds that surround me during the day shift as I listen in a different way at night, leading me to take on an assertive stance that, nonetheless and paradoxically, begins with vulnerability. For me, this vulnerability, this willingness to hear in an unfamiliar way, is at the heart of my soundwalking practice. While the circumstances of this encounter may have been enough to have startled most women, the immediacy and intensity of this situation was a product of my active engagement with the sounds around me. Choosing to hear the sounds the way we do, by insisting on our active and bodily engagement with sound in our practice of soundwalking, the position of a detached observer remains out of reach for both Andra and I. While there are always risks associated with the ways in which we choose to move through the soundscape by remaining intimately connected to the places we are in, those risks are further intensified, further complicated by our gendered bodies.