

Listening as a Guest through Winter Walking

Rachel Epp Buller
Bethel College (KS/US)
rachel@ddtr.net

ABSTRACT

Drawing from my multimodal artistic practice, I present a brief selection of my creative investigations into listening as artistic method. I discuss how a daily walking practice during a four-month Fulbright fellowship in Alberta, Canada, offered me a pathway to listen toward human and more-than-human relations in a place that was new to me. I consider, too, how walking might be one way to answer Dylan Robinson's call to listen otherwise.

1. WINTER WALKING (EXCERPT)

Walking makes time reversible

*This complex task of repairing
what it means to be kin
only starts when you arrive*

*Every stride is language that disrupts
the ordered certainty,
creating conditions for listening*

*Spaces and silences beyond speech
draw distinctions
between wrinkles and scars,
possibilities inscribed in our bodies*

*The long haul of interdependency
challenges the memory
in our feet*

*In a different landscape
each step toward liberation
summons the walkers*

*Entanglements of care
can be an arduous task
or a hesitant search*

Clouds obscure the darkness

Winter is locked under ice

*There is nothing to do but walk,
a guidance for how to live*

2. PROJECT BACKGROUND

My presentation at the WFAE conference detailed my current research-creation project exploring listening as an artistic methodology, focusing for this talk specifically on walking as a mode of listening. I spent the winter of 2021-22 living in *amiskwaciwaskahaikan*, also known as Edmonton, Alberta, and during that time I embarked on a daily practice of walking as a way to listen in a place that was new to me, beginning to develop relationships with fellow human and more-than-human inhabitants. These daily walks gave shape to my stay and they remain with me in various material and immaterial traces. Over the first ten weeks of my residency, I reflected on my daily walks through a series of creative texts, including the one above, that testify to walking as a mode of listening. I made 100 accordion books, to represent 100 days of walking, which I then joined end-to-end in a hanging installation. And I created a variety of work that spoke to my growing familiarity with specific trees along my daily walks in the North Saskatchewan River Valley, from large-scale digital prints to smaller graphite laser-engravings (see Figure 1).

As part of my creative research into walking-as-listening, I wove words and footsteps along with traces of the acoustic landscape into an 8-channel sound piece, *Winter Walking*, that refracted my listening into a participatory experience.¹ The link included here connects to a stereo version of *Winter Walking*, through which I invite interested walkers to walk and listen along, visualizing and hearing and imagining Albertan winters from wherever they are.

<https://soundcloud.com/user-283520522/winterwalking-stereo>

In my forthcoming book, *Listening as Artistic Practice: Essays and Invitations*, I think at length alongside other walking artists and listening scholars. My WFAE presentation offered a preview of just a few of these

¹The 8-channel version of *Winter Walking* debuted at the [Sound Art Gallery](#), University of Alberta, Canada, May 1-29, 2023 and was featured at the [SpokenWeb Symposium](#) on campus that same month. The stereo version debuted as part of a solo exhibition, [Invitations to Listen](#), at the Mulvane Art Museum, Washburn University (KS/US), with a participatory walking element across campus, January 17-June 5, 2023.

engagements. As a certified practitioner in Deep Listening, I engage with the work of Pauline Oliveros. Her Sonic Meditations and Deep Listening exercises more than once position walking as a form of listening. As I explore different artistic methods as ways to listen, I am in dialogue with Oliveros' conception of listening as a whole-body experience. I engage, too, with the work of Dylan Robinson, particularly considering how walking might enable me to listen as a guest. and with the work of one of my walking teachers, Dwayne Donald, to reflect on how I might walk myself into kinship relationality.

In the provocation for WFAE that I expand upon further in my book, I posit walking as one way of answering Robinson's call to "listen otherwise" (2020, p.60), seeking out ways to inhabit a non-acquisitive mode of listening. I propose that listening otherwise, listening as a guest through walking, has three components: pace, repetition, and a lack of destination. The pace of walking, of slow movement, is a pace to pay attention, to attune to place and its inhabitants. Vehicles transport us quickly across land, separating us from place, but the pace of walking embeds us in the landscape and reminds us that we are only one component of a complex ecosystem. Repetition, walking the same paths repeatedly, daily, durationally, breeds familiarity. And walking with a lack of destination, a lack of agenda, a lack of needing to acquire knowledge, *walking just to walk*, prepares us to inhabit a listening orientation, a position of not-knowing, of learning, of openness, of curiosity.

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Figure 1. Rachel Epp Buller, *Listening with Trees 1*, 2022, graphite laser-engraving

3. REFERENCES

- [1] P. Oliveros, *Deep Listening: A Sound Composer's Practice*. iUniverse, 2005.
- [2] D. Robinson, *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*. University of Minnesota Press, 2020.
- [3] D. Donald, "We Need a New Story: Walking and the *wahkatowin* imagination." *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 53-63, 2021.