

Morrison: Morrison Soundscape

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I am staying in an apartment in the Museum District of Philadelphia, so I went to the courtyard in the middle of the property. I took some snacks with me, took the elevator to the ground floor, then walked outside and chose a white Adirondack chair in the middle of the grass.

Being in a big city, I heard much more man-made, urban sounds than I did clean, natural sounds.

The first thing I noticed was the low, almost throaty, rumble of motorcycles on the freeway not even 200 yards away. It came in non-metrical bursts for the first minute or so, and then even more sporadically for the remainder of the time. Throughout my time outside, the distant wailing of sirens pierced the air around me. I was unable to distinguish whether they were ambulance, firetruck, or police car sirens. There was an even rhythm to the song, that can only be described as

cold. Shattering my bubble of focus, a horn honked on the freeway. Maybe it is just because car horns are typically synonymous with anger, but the sound of the low beep was rough. A moving truck pulled into the loading dock behind me, the door slamming shortly after. The dark thud juxtaposed against the brightness of new beginnings, which were revealed by the smooth sound of furniture being slid out of the back of the truck. Paired with that was the deep creaking of the ramp joints beneath the weight of the movers. One thing I did notice throughout my time outside was a soft, almost imperceptible, hum of traffic. The sound seemed to surround me, acting like a blanket laying atop every other sound.

Near where I was sitting, there is an in-ground fountain. The splashing of the water onto the concrete created a thick, non-metered rhythm. I listened for a while to see if I could pick up on any pattern in the sound, but to no avail. As a woman walked by, her keys hit her wallet with every step, in a bouncy rhythm. The jingling keys were kind of high-pitched. As she continued to walk, she had to walk around a little boy playing with chalk on the sidewalk. While I could not hear the scratch of the chalk on the ground, I could hear his high-pitched, shrill voice exemplified in whines and screams. My attention was diverted to a dog walking up with his owner, his dog tags creating a similar rhythm to the passer-by's keys, but with even higher of a pitch. Soon, strong and low-pitched barks came from him, as he argued with an automated lawn mower rolling by. "It's alright, Ziggy," his owner said, in a high, honeyed voice. His barking triggered a smaller dog's barks as well, though those were high-pitched and came in an even beat of rhythm. Much like the soft hum of traffic, I could hear the low, slow buzz of the pool filter that was just down the hill.

When the dogs, children, and honking cars calmed down, I heard the calming, fluid whishing of wind through my ears, punctuated only by the high-pitched, yet full-bodied, orchestra

of cicadas in the trees around me. As I bit into a carrot and began to chew, a muffled rhythm filled my head. I then accidentally knocked over my Hydroflask, which is an everyday occurrence, so the metallic clang of ice shaking around is not foreign to me. The Ziplock holding my peach slices crinkles and rustles softly as I reach my hand in. To round out my time outside, a helicopter beats on overhead. Its low, choppy sound drowns out anything else since it is so low to the ground.

Sitting outside for fifteen minutes, with nothing to do but listen, gave me the opportunity to focus on sounds that I hear every day, but do not notice. I spend a lot of time outside, but I am usually listening to music or talking to someone, so I do not pick up on things like the rounded hum of traffic that is always present or the sirens in the distance. The one sound that sticks out to me as not being in my regular acoustic niche is the child. I do not like children, so I typically try to stay away from and ignore them. Fortunately, this soundscape activity also made me work on the ability to compartmentalize the sounds around me, so I could choose to hear them all together, or focus on just one (I obviously would not choose the child to focus on).