

CHAPTER 6

RECORDING SOUNDSCAPE MEMORIES

This section is contributed by Tan Pei Ling, a Singapore-based interdisciplinary artist. She began to record and use sound as a medium in 2008 when she realised that she was beginning to lose aural memories of her grandmother. Her work *Two Concrete Walls* looks at sounds as testimony to the demolition of Teban Gardens, while *And They Gathered Them Together in Heaps*, examines Singapore's constantly shifting landscape.

INTRODUCTION

“Soundscape” refers to the sounds heard in a particular place that are considered as a whole. Even if we are not listening out for them, we hear these sounds and they help us identify locations and environments.

The soundscape of an MRT station in Singapore, for example, includes the sounds of fare gates opening and closing, trains rolling into the stations, and the warning beeps for closing train doors. In a local coffeeshop, you hear the clangs of glass coffee mugs and drink servers shouting beverage orders in a lingo that is unique to Singapore, such as *kopi o ga dai* (black coffee with extra sugar) and *Milo peng* (iced Milo).

We relate the sounds of everyday life to our community, identity and heritage. Often, they may be taken for granted until they have disappeared or are at risk of disappearing. By collecting and documenting random soundscapes, you can help preserve the aural memories that may come flooding back when someone hears them again.

Areas for soundscape projects could include the following:

- Wet markets
- Hawker centres
- Conversations (dialects)
- Festivals (e.g. *getai*)
- Playgrounds
- Train announcements
- Bus doorbell

WHAT YOU NEED

For long-term documentation, it is advisable to record soundscapes in digital format, such as with a digital audio recorder or your smartphone's audio recording function. If you wish to make a visual record as well, you can capture the soundscape location on video while recording the sounds.

Equipment and tools checklist

- ✓ Digital audio recorder, or smartphone with audio recording function. For a slightly more advanced or higher-quality audio, try a Zoom audio recorder. (You may also download smartphone apps like Soundcloud and Chirbit for recording).
- ✓ Batteries
- ✓ Computer
- ✓ Sound-editing software such as Audacity (free for PC and Mac), Soundtrack Pro or Protools (Mac)





HOW-TO GUIDE

1 Choose a location

Begin by listing the places you are familiar with or interested in.

Take a walk around these places and note down the sounds found there.

They could be the school canteen, the wet market or a Malay wedding reception, for example.

2 Research

Go online or to the library **to read up about the location** you have decided on. Highlight the sounds you should listen out for, their significance and how they have changed over the years.

Talk to the people at the location; they may be able to share important information about the place or about interesting sounds you can collect. For example, if your chosen location is the wet market, talk to the stallholders to find out the best times to record certain sounds (such as customers bargaining).

3 Begin recording

Use a digital audio recorder to record the soundscape. Let the recording function run while you listen out for the key sounds you want to capture. Note down the timings when these sounds occur, so that it is easier to find these

Pei Ling's work *Two Concrete Walls* looks at sounds as testimony to the demolition of Teban Gardens.

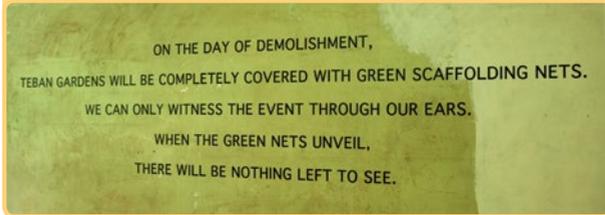


Photo courtesy of Tan Pei Ling

segments during editing. You can also document the soundscape with a video camera, which records both the audio and the visuals.

4 Edit your recordings

Upload your recordings to a computer with a sound-editing software such as Audacity (audacity.sourceforge.net) or Protools. Review your recordings, **choose the segments** that have captured significant sounds, and put together the various parts.

5 Upload your recording

Save your audio file in MP3, WAV or WMA format. **Email your audio** file of not more than 20MB to singaporememory@nlb.gov.sg. Include your personal details such as name and contact number and a synopsis of your submission.

Alternatively, save your audio file into a CD and **mail it to:**
Singapore Memory Project
100 Victoria Street #14-01
National Library Building
Singapore 188064
Attention: Azlin Aziz



TIPS

- It is advisable to keep track of the dates of recording every time you upload your recordings to your computer or an audio-sharing site as it is time-consuming to figure out afterwards.
- Use a tripod when recording. You would not want to hold on to your recorder for long recordings.
- Where you point your recorder at determines the type of sounds you capture and how clear or loud the sounds are. Also, get as close to your specific subject as possible.
- Sound is sensitive to movements. If you intend to walk and record at the same time, wear shoes that do not make loud noises and remove all accessories that may cause disturbance in your recordings.
- The soundscapes of a particular place may not be the same at different times of the day. Try recording at a location at different times in such situations.

MORE ON SOUNDSCAPE

Check out some familiar local sound clips on the National Archives of Singapore's portal (a2o.nas.sg).

Books

The Book of Audacity: Record, Edit, Mix, and Master with the Free Audio Editor by Carla Shroder

Recording on a Budget: How to Make Great Audio Recordings Without Breaking the Bank by Brent Edstrom

Practical Recording Techniques: the Step-by-Step Approach to Professional Audio Recording by Bruce Bartlett and Jenny Bartlett

Online

[How to Use Audacity](#)

[Audio Editing: The Basics](#)

[Aporee](#)

[British Library Sounds Recordings](#)



SHARING OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

DAVID CLARKE

On his trips to Singapore in April 2009 and May 2011, David Clarke from Hong Kong made recordings of the city's sounds — from traffic, construction and nature to music in a Hindu temple. He is a professor in the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Hong Kong. His soundscapes of Singapore are shared on www.youtube.com/user/solubleshark

How did you get started on soundscape collection?

I have been documenting Hong Kong, where I live, using photography. Since digital cameras nowadays allow you to quickly switch to recording digital

video, I have been able to record both soundscapes and still images on the same outing in a city.

Why did you want to collect soundscapes of Singapore?

Hong Kong has certain similarities with Singapore, and I'm interested to see where the two cities overlap and differ. We have cicadas in Hong Kong too, for instance, but I recorded one in Fort Canning Park because its sound was different from any I had heard from insects in Hong Kong. That I grew up in England gives me some perspective on Singapore too, given its British colonial past.

Did you purposefully listen out for these sounds?

I don't normally do a great deal of research before setting out to record. I find that I get the best recordings if I just wander without

too much preconception, even getting a little lost sometimes. I can then be a bit more open to discover what happens there.

Why do you combine visual and audio?

I often prefer to record sounds that are mingling together in the city, since that's how we actually hear. To do that well you need to have visual too, to explain what's going on and prevent it from being just a blur of sounds. If you use sound recording alone, then you usually need a written explanation.

How do you think these soundscapes help you relate to your memories of Singapore?

My experiences of Singapore involved all my senses, so I need to have sound recordings and photographs to try to recall my time in the city as well as I can. I'd select a few moments of sound that have meaning for me rather than

attempt to sum up the city as a whole, though. Fragments can often be enough.

What should one look out for in soundscapes?

When you feel a sense of novelty in the soundscape you are listening to, that's the cue to start recording. Another approach is to record your everyday environment in a diaristic way; you should select personal experiences that can be legible to other people, capable of triggering collective memories.

How will you be using your soundscape recordings?

For now I am mostly happy to share the recordings individually via YouTube. Later perhaps I would like to join the recordings together to make a longer film. I could compare the soundscapes of different cities, or pick out themes such as nature and music heard out of doors.



Still from David's soundscape video on Fort Canning Park.



Still from David's soundscape video on the Asian Civilisations Museum.