

Whisper Study (1975/79) for 2-channel audio

By Hildegard Westerkamp
Poetry by Norbert Ruebsaat

Whisper Study is based on the sentence "When there is no sound, hearing is most alert" (a quote from the Indian mystic Kirphal Singh in *Naam* or *Word*). Except for the distant horns, all sounds were derived from my own voice, whispering the above sentence and the word "silence".

Whisper Study started out as an exercise in exploring basic tape techniques in the analog studio of the 70s and using the whispered voice as sound material. Eventually, it became a piece about silence, aural perception and acoustic imagination. *Whisper Study* explores the place or moment where sound ends and its image begins.

The poem "When There is No Sound" by Norbert Ruebsaat was written in direct response to the original version of *Whisper Study*. The poem in this version is spoken by myself inside a soundscape of icicles and footsteps in snow, which originally was created for my radio series *Soundwalking* on Vancouver Co-operative Radio in 1978/79. Eventually this section was mixed with the last part of the original version of *Whisper Study*.

When There is no Sound

When there is no sound hearing is most alert.
There are places in the imagination
where the sound folds into itself
like freezing.

Where the soft crackle of ions
moves into the air on snow feet
made of fine wire.

Suddenly you are there
from behind a boulder
where you have been watching the moss begin

And it's as if someone were filling a strangely-shaped cup
somewhere close to your ear

and you have the memory of vast distances
with hawks on the horizon
where the world became a kind of ache
a species of limb
that is part of the larger universe

And suddenly nothing is so real as these hands
wanting always to touch things
and these eyes

which disappear immediately into the rivers
like a breed of nocturnal salamander

At night you can hear the bones of the forest
making terrible love

you can hear the wind
the godfather
beating his ice wings