

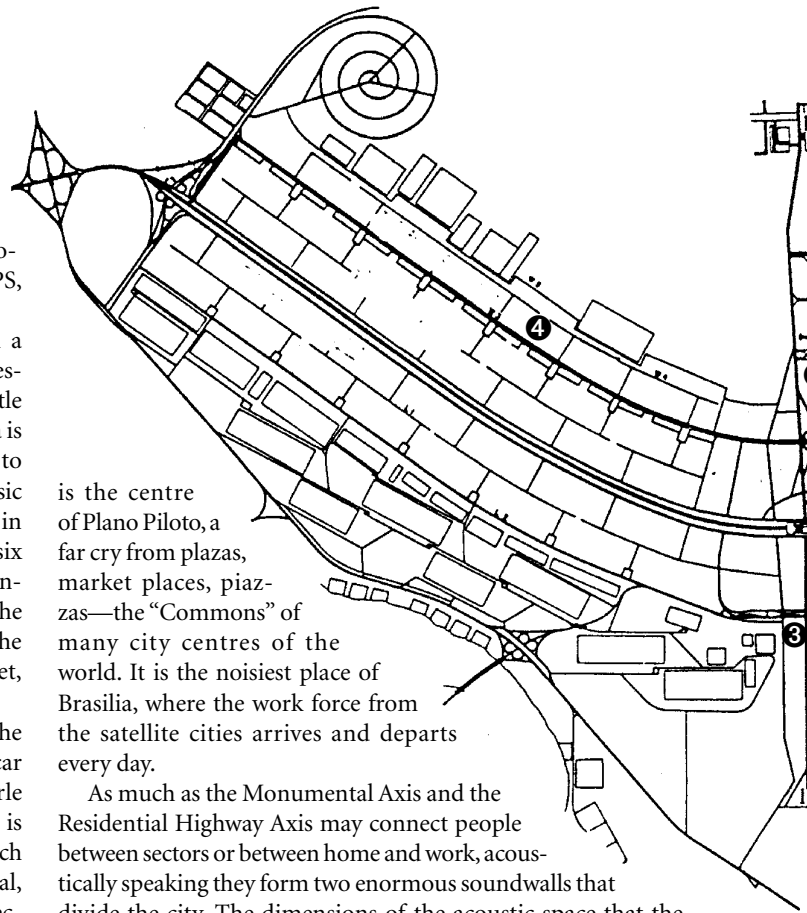
# Sound Excursion: P

by Hildegard Westerkamp

In 1994 the Goethe Institut Brasilia had invited me to conduct a soundscape workshop. This sound excursion was one of many activities during the final sound symposium that wrapped up four weeks of intense soundscape explorations of the city of Brasilia. The focus of this workshop had been the creation of soundscape compositions by a dozen or so participants in collaboration with Michael Fahres and Piet Hein van de Poel from NPS, the state radio of the Netherlands.

We decided to do a sound excursion by car rather than a soundwalk, because Brasilia was designed for the car, not for pedestrians. A one-hour long soundwalk would have given us very little acoustic variety, as it is hard to get away from traffic noise. Brasilia is a young city—not yet 40 years old—and was designed according to a master or pilot plan. The crossing of two paths along the basic north-south and east-west directions, initially just a cross drawn in the quiet earth, has grown into two huge traffic arteries with six lanes in all four directions. This contrast is I believe, the basic contrast today in the soundscape of Brasilia and surroundings: on the one hand, there is lots of traffic noise within Plano Piloto, on the other hand one does not have to drive very far to enter a very quiet, natural soundscape.

The part that looks like a bird or an airplane on the map, is the so-called Plano Piloto, pilot plan, designed by Lucio Costa. Oscar Niemeyer was the architect who designed most buildings and Burle Marx was the landscape architect.\* The body of the “airplane” is made up of the Monumental Axis—*Eixo Monumental*—along which we find most government institutions, the cathedral, the hospital, commercial, hotel and bank sectors, the TV tower, the military sector and the overland bus and train station. The wings of the airplane, called *Asa Sul* and *Asa Norte*, are made up of the Residential Highway Axis which moves from North to South. This is where most people live in three to six story apartment buildings. Where the two axes meet is the *rodoviaria*, the central bus station. This, ironically,



is the centre of Plano Piloto, a far cry from plazas, market places, piazzas—the “Commons” of many city centres of the world. It is the noisiest place of Brasilia, where the work force from the satellite cities arrives and departs every day.

As much as the Monumental Axis and the Residential Highway Axis may connect people between sectors or between home and work, acoustically speaking they form two enormous soundwalls that divide the city. The dimensions of the acoustic space that the traffic on these arteries occupy are much more extensive than their geographical dimensions. The traffic noise travels across the expansive green spaces into hotel rooms, offices, churches, even schools, and many of the living areas. The eyes can see far but the ear cannot hear beyond the acoustic immediacy of the car motor. The Monumental Axis may offer many photo opportunities, but recordings made in the same place will offer little variation from the incessant traffic noise.

## Instructions to excursion participants

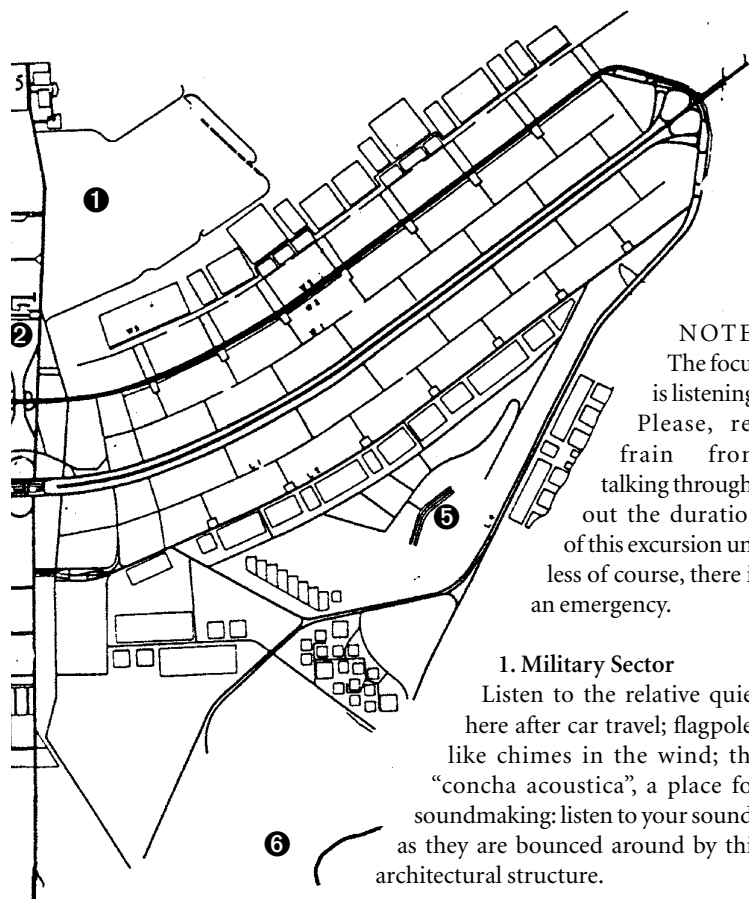
The map above shows six different listening points of interest. Some of these are places where workshop participants have made sound recordings for their compositions.

You will be given ear plugs for this excursion. Please, wear them every time you travel in the car and take them out as soon as we have arrived at a listening point of interest. You will hear a sound signal when it is time to return to the car.



Government Buildings along the Monumental Axis

# lano Pilato, Brasilia



NOTE:  
The focus  
is listening:  
Please, re-  
frain from  
talking through-  
out the duration  
of this excursion un-  
less of course, there is  
an emergency.

## 1. Military Sector

Listen to the relative quiet here after car travel; flagpoles like chimes in the wind; the “concha acoustica”, a place for soundmaking: listen to your sounds as they are bounced around by this architectural structure.

## 2. Market under television tower

This is a weekend market. Spend 20 minutes here. Let the sounds and your curious ear determine your route through the market. At the end let your ears be drawn to the fountain just east of the market to meet the group.

## 3. Cathedral

Here we will split into two groups for the exploration of the whisper gallery. In order to get the full acoustic effect to the whisper gallery, talking, whispering or some kind of soundmaking is required. The aim is to communicate with the other person on the opposite side of the cathedral. You may have to move around a bit to find the optimum spot. You can discuss secrets. No one else in the cathedral will be able to hear you. What other sounds do you hear? *[At this point in the sound excursion one of the workshop participants showed us a round ceremonial space in another part of the cathedral building. As soon as we entered it we spontaneously started to chant long tones.]*

*I am convinced that it was the acoustic and visual design of this room that had generated this reaction. We stayed for at least 30 more minutes. No one minded this unplanned delay. Quite the opposite, it heightened our awareness of the soundscape and created new energy for the remainder of the excursion.]*

## 4. Superquadra

This is one of the many designed residential areas in Plano Pilato. Take 20 minutes to explore its soundscape. If you don't want to walk, there are plenty of shady places to sit and listen. What sounds emanate from the apartment blocks? From the lawns, trees and bushes? Think back to your own home and compare soundscapes. Listen to the signal. Meeting place is at the small church.

## 5. University

Explore the sounds of architectural structures and sculptures.

## 6. Lake Shore

Spend 10 minutes listening. Bamboo in the wind. Water. Birds, People. The signal will announce the official end of the sound excursion.

*\*Brasilia now stretches beyond these boundaries into the so-called satellite cities, which have sprouted around its peripheries in the last 30 years as a direct result of the master plan. Generally speaking one can say that anyone or anything that does not fit into the masterplan concept is accommodated in these cities.*

**Hildegard Westerkamp** is a composer who lectures and writes on topics of listening, environmental sound, and acoustic ecology. She conducts soundscape workshops internationally.

Photos are used with the permission of Alfons Hug, former director of the Goethe Institut Brasilia.



**Cathedral and Government Buildings**