

Permanent Sound



World Bible

Sound is ephemeral, fleeting, but some sort of a physical manifestation can help you hold on to it longer in time. I'm sure of this; I've always thought the sound that you make is just the tip of the iceberg, like the person that you see physically is just the tip of the iceberg as well.

- Yo-Yo Ma

What if Sound was not Ephemeral?

In this alternate reality, sound does not dissipate away. It does not get lost in the air around getting absorbed away, losing amplitude and energy; eventually disappearing out of existence. Sound does not have luxury to that kind of ephemerality. You might live in a world where everything said between two people gets recorded only in their memories and recording devices. The sounds of people speaking, stick around in this world. Every sound is permanent. The sounds of machines drilling, cars honking, dogs barking, trees falling, musical instruments playing, choirs singing – they are all real and permanent. Once created, they have form. They occupy space in a cloud like – bubble like mist all around us.

This world bible is made up of three parts –

- a) A set of short stories narrating the world at different scales through 3 storylines/perspectives – an individual, society and governance.**
- b) A description of the different scales of this world categorized.**
- c) A collection of Artifacts from this world that can be built to experience this world.**

Permanent Sound. (The stories)

First cry!

What an exhilarating inexplicable feeling. Welcoming another human being into this life. Breathing in her first breaths in this world, the little baby already lets out her first few sounds. These sounds that define us. Our identity, our being.

The father walks out hurriedly to announce it to his parents, the now thrilled grandparents. He affords to spend some of his sound budget on such an important announcement. "It's a girl!" he says, in a shaky voice that can't contain his excitement. A greyish translucent blob of sound floats up around him to join the rest of his sound cloud.

Everything the man says gets added onto his sound cloud around him. A literal cloud of sounds that this man has ever uttered. Every song he has sung, every quarrel with the wife, every secret whispered. He proudly looks at the sound bubbles starting to surround his little baby as she lets out her first cries. Translucent little bubbles of sound that start forming the beginnings of a cloud over her carriage. The father bends over the carriage to bring his head closer to the bubbles. He can listen and re-listen to the sounds when his ears are brought close to the individual sound bubbles. This sound cloud will be part of her identity, her privacy, her history and her legacy.

A branch falls creating a loud THUUUUUDDDDDD in the forest. I love hiking around in the forest, listening to the scattered sounds floating between the leaves. The forests are not loud and buzzing constantly like the big cities. Those massive harsh sound-making ecosystems where you can't walk half a mile without walking through clouds and clouds of construction and honking noises. The forests are not like that. They are much gentler. I do not mean the forest is devoid of sound, definitely not.

The forest is filled with many subtle and varied sounds interspersed in the leaves high up on the trees and all around the shrubs and foliage. Tiny scraping footsteps of other hikers from the past are like smoky bubbles scattered around the trails. I love walking amongst these footstep bubbles feeling like I have the company of so many adventurers just like me. Minute shrieks and calls of the squirrels running about picking up the fallen fruits float like greyish smoky tendrils amongst the tree trunks. The rhythmic swishes of falling leaves, thuds of falling fruits, thumps of running deer...

You can sometimes find clumps of seasonal sound clouds like the heavy rains of every July like a thick grey curtain of clouds. I love walking through the forest exploring the sounds of the past. Walking through the sounds of rain, a meditative drone and walking out of it into the bed of cricket calls. Sometimes I will walk into a pocket of heavy THUDS like this one. I think it could be the remnants of an age of deforestation when humans mercilessly culled the forest in the name of development a century ago. All those stories of the past are still present today. It is hard to ignore the scale and harshness of deforestation when you can see the loud cries of the falling trees still floating all around like this.

Can you imagine a world, where these sounds just wafted away? We would need pictures to prove to us the scale of such wars on nature. And with time it would just seem so distant and easy to ignore and forget. I shudder to think of a world where sound is merely ephemeral.

The universe is polluted with sound. Sounds from every source are crowding out the atmosphere. In this world sound does not dissipate away. It does not get lost in the air around getting absorbed away, losing amplitude and energy; eventually disappearing out of existence. Sound does not have luxury to that kind of ephemerality. You might live in a world where everything said between two people gets recorded only in their memories and recording devices. The sounds of people speaking, stick around in this world. Each person walks around with their sound cloud hovering above them – a history of everything they have every spoken. Leaning in to listen or grabbing at someone else's sound cloud is considered the most illegal crime in society. The clouds of sound are naturally tied in to their source and can't be carried away from the source while it is still alive. But the sounds of construction over years of development, the sounds of trainlines, historic steam engines, modern subways, century old factories etc. are littered all around the human settlements.

No one cared for it until, the noise and sound cloud pollution became too much to bear. Each city was so polluted by this smoky sound cloud pollution that you needed special sound wipers on car windshields to see the streets clearly. Specially employed cloud disposers would try collecting the clouds of sound in a neighborhood at specially designated dumping ground. People often walked about with their ears blocked with sound stoppers when out in public. Nobody wanted to hear the decades of machine noises, shouts in the streets, the propaganda sound posters that you were constantly running into at every block. Advertising campaign sounds from the age of capitalism for products long out of production still floated about near the sound billboards. The dumping grounds were overflowing, reckless sound ecosystems were out of control. No one had imagined the scales to which the sound clouds would become a problem. And if they had, they definitely did not care about the damages it was causing. It was just more grounds to reap profits from.

But now, the government has imposed strict budgets on every city. A sound quota that they must abide by. Certain fast-growing cities got higher and flexible budgets, thanks to corruption and lobbying. And so eventually, not much was gained by governing the sound budgets. It just turned into another disparate economy where the poor struggled to afford more sound budget and the rich had more than they needed.

The new father proudly takes his baby out to the beach for the first time. He is excited for his little one to experience her first non-city soundscape. He walks by the beach, on the cold wet sand, leaving behind a trail of footsteps. He walks through the misty sound clouds of the ebb and flow of the waves crashing on the shore. His little girl is enjoying herself immensely as can be seen from her wide smile. She unsuccessfully tries to swallow the sound bubbles with her mouth open as her father, runs through a particularly thick cloud mist left behind from the sounds of a high tide few weeks back. He laughs at the silliness of his little girl.

They pick up a little conch shell on the sand. He teaches his little girl to listen to the sound of the shell by placing it near your ear. The little girl is surprised by the loud thick sounds radiating from inside this tiny shell. She can hear the gigantic waves that perhaps carried this shell from deep inside the ocean and brought it to shore. She sticks her ear even deeper into the shell, and soon starts hearing a tiny tendril of a quieter slimy motion, perhaps from one of the many sea creatures that made a home in this particular shell. She gestures to her dad to put the shell in her bag so she can play with it at home.

She looks around and sees a hundred shells but doesn't realize that all of them have an immense richness of sound stored inside them. Every object that makes a sound is alive and telling its story for anyone who will listen.

I walk around my university with my ear stoppers on. I only take my ear stoppers off in class or when I'm out on my usual hikes in the forests. I wonder how the world would have been if ear stoppers had not been invented in the last century.

With ear stoppers becoming a norm to cut out the loud construction noises of the never-ending development in the city, I think they only became louder and louder each year. Would it be such a terrible thing if the machines had silencers to reduce the sounds, or even limitations on what hour of the day they would be running. Sometimes I lower the digital sound wall of my ear stopper just to peak at the sounds of the city and it is chaotically unbearable. Instead I just block out the sound and run through the clouds of traffic honking and machine grinding sounds.

The ear stoppers do a great job of blocking out the sounds but the sense of the loudness of a city does not go away, since the smoky clouds of sounds form a translucent mist all around. We constantly walk inside the sounds and keep adding to it.

Today, I am just walking over to my favorite spot near the university by the river where I can lower my ear stoppers just a bit. I love taking time to feel a little bit of the natural sounds around me. I have a sea shell on a locket that my dad gave me when I was young. He had said it was a shell that I had picked up the first time we were at the beach. I sit by the river and press my shell to my ear to be reminded of the sounds from oceans far away.

Sound propaganda had become a huge problem in most cities. Sound posters would be left around on every street for people to walk into. Clouds of slogans and screams left on every street corner for people to walk into. Spreading misinformation and hate had become tremendously easy. It had also become just as easy to gather forces for a cause that mattered to the people. Regardless of morality, it was a constant battle with the law enforcing officers trying to identify and eradicate the propaganda sounds. Some private companies manufacturing sound stoppers capitalized on the growing unwanted and polarizing sounds. This is what led to the large-scale acceptance of sound stoppers in public.

The government was already enforcing sound budgets on cities and families. But monitoring of individual sound bubbles was not a law that was being accepted easily by the masses. Fearing surveillance, the dangers of having unwanted histories in your sound bubble, became almost akin to mass hysteria. An underground market of sound lumberjacks started to grow. Basically, they hacked

around at your sound bubble trying to chop off unwanted branches. It did not make any more space in your sound budget, but it could get rid of that racist thing you might have said after having a few drinks at your buddy's party.

But this market was by no means a legal industry. It existed in the ugly and dark underbellies of illegal activities. Also, the act of sound lumber jacks was not precise by any means. It led to large chunk of sounds getting chopped off and made your sound cloud look suspiciously damaged. Also, there was the matter of the ethical implications of deleting a part of somebody. The sound clouds were the identity of every individual. This permanence of sound was what all of humanity was familiar with. Going against that instinct almost felt like playing a reckless God.

The old man slowly crossed the street, making his way to the brick building on the other side. It was a grand building with high chimneys and columns all laden with red brown bricks designed to feel like it was from another age. It was the only building of its kind on the street surrounded by the modular high rises of today. The old man screamed at a speeding taxi driver that screeched to a stop at the crossing. After losing most of his hearing the old man did not care for sound budgets anymore. He did not have to listen to the clouds of the city anymore and had started appreciating the beauty of the cloud like shapes everywhere. He valued the stories that each of them carried.

He was a happy old man and one of the places he loved spending his hours was the brick building that he was entering right now. Swinging open the massive wooden door, he walked inside confidently. He walked straight through the curtain of cloudy sound mist that declared the name and rules of this historic building to every visitor - "The Museum of Sounds".

Each room in the museum housed glass walls within which were carefully curated clouds of sounds that one could experience. These were the tangible remnants of many of the historic sounds of the past. People could walk through rooms full of famous speeches across the world, sounds of wars and protests, samples of thick clouds from the legendary concerts of the Beatles. A group of school kids on a field trip were crowded around the glass structure that encased Martin Luther King Jr's, *I had a dream* speech, right next to Mahatma Gandhi's *Quit India* speech. Children loved the forest rooms with the sounds of many animals and birds that were now extinct. The Museum of sounds housed a slice of all these identities. The permanence of sound ensured that a piece of everything lived on.

The old man walked straight on into his favorite room. An exhibit from beaches around the world. He would sit at the solitary cushion on the floor and experience the rhythmic gusts of swirly sound bubbles that carried the sounds of the waves meeting the shore. He would sit for hours in a bliss, recalling the times with his infant daughter when they used to go exploring sea shells at the beach. Now his daughter was all grown up and lived in another larger city with undoubtedly more opportunity.

They meet once every year during the holidays and he was counting down the entire calendar year up to that day.

Today is such a happy day! I walked into this antique store to see the various trinkets lining the shelves up to the roof. I love picking up artifacts that have sounds inside them. A few years back, I was walking by this old and faded store on the outskirts of the city, when I noticed a box full of sea shells, like the one in my locket. I hadn't been to the beach in several years and seeing the sea shells made me feel nostalgic. I was so curious to listen to the sounds inside those shells. Were they similar to the ones inside my locket shell? That was the first time I had walked into this store many years ago.

On my customary trip to the antique store today, I discovered something unbelievable. They had a bunch of half-broken, rusty guitars in the back. I picked one up to listen to the sound bubbles emanating from inside it. There were a few twangs from random customers plucking at the broken guitar, but there was also some beautiful music. This guitar must have been a fine instrument at one point. I must have sat there for an hour listening to the clouds of sounds inside the guitar, when my mouth dropped open in shock. Beautiful finger style songs by Nick Drake. It was uncannily his playing. Perhaps he had walked into this store many many years ago and played this incredible instrument. My father loves Nick Drake and used to play his songs constantly during my childhood. Perhaps no one had discovered that this inconspicuous broken guitar in an antique shop had some of the rarest piece of art.

I convinced the store owner to sell the instrument to me for a good deal. The owner had no idea about the value of this guitar, and I wasn't going to tip him off. I am going to gift my father this guitar and I know he will be beyond excited. The guitar had so many stories to share.

This guitar was unique and special.

Every object was unique and special.

Every object had so many stories to share,
stories wrapped around
in the permanence of sound.

Describing “Permanent Sound”



1) An Individual:

HUMAN:

Right after being born, every sound uttered by an individual receives a bubble-like form that adds onto the sound bubble cloud that floats overhead. Every individual then lives their life with a physical manifestation of everything they have ever uttered as an overhanging cloud that follows them. It is illegal to steal other people’s sound clouds. A piece of the sound cloud can be brought near the ear (in contact with the ear drum/microphone) to listen to the exact sound as it was uttered.

This world of complete information is like the current design of the internet and social media – where everything typed and posted is stored in centralized databases and are linked to every individual.

Humans are accustomed to living life with sound cloud histories of themselves and carry their unique sound cloud identity proudly.



On an individual's death, the sound clouds get detached from the body and can be carried away by loved ones, to store in sound storages as a form of memory.



NON-HUMAN:

Objects also have a unique sound cloud history based on all the sounds that they have created. Non-human sounds are ambient and float around the space where they were created. Living organisms like animals, sea shells etc. also carry a similar sound cloud with a collection of mist like forms representing every sound they have ever created.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS:

Musical instruments have a collection of sounds that has ever been played on them get stored in tiny bubble-like forms inside them. One can listen and re-listen to all the sounds that have ever been played



by an instrument giving a unique individual story to each instrument. Though instruments are originally made from the wood from trees, the sounds associated with the tree, still float about in the forest they were cut down in.

2) Ecosystems:

CITY:

Different ecosystems have a different collection of permanent sounds and its associated problems. In a city large pollution of clouds and mists of sounds are often littering every street. Years and years of city sounds constantly over-populate the space.

Government appointed sound movers – move the large collections of sound clouds to neighborhood dumping grounds where the clouds are dumped collectively. But it is an unsustainable practice with the dumping grounds often spilling over and not being enough.



FORESTS:

The ancient history and scales of forests (much older than cities) mean that the forest is also overcrowded with sound bubbles and clouds. Forests have a natural way of re-distributing the sounds through out the trees and foliage. A particular set of bacteria can break down sound bubble forms and were prevalent in the forests maintaining the balance of the forest sound clouds. These bacteria are being re-engineered by man to introduce them back into the various ecosystems to being control the sound pollution problem.



3) Governance:

SURVEILLANCE:

Every individual's sound bubble history is monitored for nation-threatening violations. But what began as a defensive tactic is now permeating all sorts of surveillance. Currently, the practice of sound bubble scanning is only implemented at high security spaces like – airports, country borders etc. Groups of freedom activists rebel against the use of such surveillance techniques in more ubiquitous neighborhoods, like shopping malls, movie theaters etc.

Sound budgets were established to control the amounts of sound pollution created in the cities. Each neighborhood and societal group has a budget that they must adhere to and pay fines on exceeding limits. This is also a space for more bribery, corruption and unequal distribution of resources.

DARK (ILLEGAL) MARKETS:

Underground markets for manipulating sound clouds exist, with sound lumberjacks hacking at a person's individual clouds to chop off unwanted branches (of secret conversations, infidelity, racism etc.) This is not approved by the government and society also looks down on manipulating an individual's sound history. It is considered a part of one's unique identity and a sabotaged sound cloud is seen as degrading.



REBEL GROUPS:

Sound as a form and space medium has allowed for sound posters and surprise messages of rebel groups banding together. Sound graffiti is found everywhere and from harmless – art groups to militant organizations- it can be used to band people together. The citizen police have the hardest job of reporting such propaganda but often the government uses propaganda to their own advantage during the election season.

4) Organizations:

FOR PROFIT COMMERCIAL: (.COM)

Ear stopper manufacturers have capitalized on selling gadgets for controlling an individual's exposure to sound clouds on the streets. By taking advantage of the needs of the public and the incapable governments, for-profit multi-billion-dollar companies have everyone depending on gadgets for normal living.

Advertising industry has used sound graffiti to leave a constant supply of sound distractions as clouds on every major street. They create the content and then also supply the firewall ear stoppers to keep you from the distraction feeding into a vicious cycle.



NON-PROFIT GROUPS: (.ORG)

Museums of sounds curate amazing ecosystems of sounds famous beaches and forests with their real sound clouds to be experienced, speeches by famous individuals representing famous moments in history that can be relived exactly - by the actual sounds from politicians, celebrities of the past etc.

Library of humans: A non-profit that collects sounds of humans that have passed away to store a massive database of humanity. They are on a mission to save every story and though it is unclear how all these sounds shall be explored or even monitored; they allow individual families to submit small segments of their deceased for their records.

SOUND SHARING ALT-PRACTICE:

Alternate lifestyle practices for ego-death and exchanging self-experience have also become predominant where an individual, rents out their sound cloud history to be shared by another individual. Part of a hippie movement, sound sharing is considered to be an alternative to the sacred beliefs that a human's sound cloud is personal, private and sacredly tied to their own identity.

Artifacts:

1. Experience being an **Individual**

an installation (Mirror Display Screen/Camera/AR) where you can experience this world of sound clouds – walk around with sound forms over your head. As you speak it adds to your sound cloud.

2. Experience different aural **Ecosystems**

an installation, with cubicles you can put your head inside / or just different headphones for each ecosystem. sounds of different ecosystems visualized. – City, Forest, Beach, War. – visualizing the sounds across a timeline (Think about this some more)

3. Experience different **non-human Objects**

a conch shell with its sounds inside it, a guitar with all music ever played on it inside it, a plant with its sounds.

4. Experience the forms - **Tangible Sounds**

a) 3d printing sound forms – famous speeches (from museum of sounds)

b) 3d printed sound sequencer game. (Lego type blocks of 3d printed sounds you can connect)

6. Experience the **Societal Norms**.

Sound stoppers that can do all sorts of active and adaptable filtering/source separation as a hearing aid.

7. **Simulation at Scale** of the Planet.

Simulating the permanence of sound inspiration from online identities like avatars on twitter/reddit. Do one for real people and one for NLP bots from GPT-2 subreddit, showing the crowding of information both by man and AI.

8. Experience **Anarchy**

Augmented Reality Sound posters spread around in the room that you can hear as you walk through it.