

Recreating Sonder

The origins of this project begin with Memory Walk, a path of stones before Western Washington University's Old Main engraved with the years of previously graduated classes. Walking along them, I'd suddenly become aware that those inscribed before me must have followed along those exact same stones, and furthermore, that they must've become aware of the exact same thing.

In this moment, a thin, fleeting tether from then to now was weaved; a reciprocal relationship with those of the past in which I could see that person—I could've *been* that person—and I could swear they could see me, too. History was no longer an abstract series of facts and happenings to me but instead layers upon layers of time that I just happened to exist on top of.

I believe we are often disconnected from history—and understandably; it is difficult to conceptualize a world that has, does, and will exist in spite of you. For many, the past is a different world; untouchable and unrecognizable. As such, we tend to conceptualize the people of the past as distant, husked vessels in which history occurs, rather as both complex agents and products of the time they existed.

This disconnect makes it harder to contextualize ourselves (our circumstances, opinions, and identities) as a product of all that has come before us, and understand history as the intricate web of actions that brought us to where we are today. If we cannot fathom the past and the ways in which it leads to our present, nor the agency of those who acted upon it, we become ill equipped to wrestle with the origins of our present circumstances and lay the path for a better future.

So, I set out to recreate that feeling of intergenerational sonder, a cognizance that puts you in the place of another person, of another life, of another time. Sound has a unique ability to render a particular space to us; without it the world feels less tangible, but with it we can be somewhere else entirely. An image just allows us to look into a world—not be in that world. How could we use sound to change our conception of the people who've come before us? “Color” an image that had previously been black and white, without the constraints of the visual? Transport us back to the past, or even bring the past forward? How would those of the past suddenly become more real to us?

Bridging Past and Present

My project is a series of video clips from [Forward with Western](#) (1949), [Western Washington State College: A Close Look](#) (1972), [KVOS Special: The Professor Looks At His College \(silent, pre-broadcast footage\)](#) (1964), and [KVOS Special: The Key To The College Door](#) (1963) taken from WWU's Multimedia Archives Based Electronic Library (MABEL). Overlaid is matching audio both extracted online and collected in person from places like the Ridgeway dining hall, Red Square, Memory Walk, library, and Whatcom Falls.

My hope is that this project will evoke a newfound empathy for these past student (and inherently human) experiences such that the students themselves become more real to us. While the pursuit of history itself reveals connections between oneself and the past, this project strives to explore how soundscapes that make us present in a specific space can also make us present in a specific time, effectively bridging the incomprehensible dissociation between a human life now and one that has already existed.

Like the overwhelming *sonder* evoked from a black and white photo made colorized, I want to bring the past closer, prompting the audience to reflect on what and who we conceptualize as real and re-examine how we determine who is human (as opposed to a disembodied abstraction) in the tangible, fully-dimensional sense of understanding.