

Sound Walk Sunday 2017 - submission - find out more about Sound Walk Sunday and enjoy other walking pieces: <http://www.museumofwalking.org.uk/events/sound-walk-sunday/>

ANYWHERE - DIY Primer for Soundwalking - John Levack Drever - 60'-90' - 2017 - listening

DIY Primer for Soundwalking

In the Acoustic Ecology Tradition (after Schafer, Westerkamp, The World Soundscape Project, et al.)

John Levack Drever

Sound Practice Research
Goldsmiths, University of London

Primary Instruction: Listen! Don't feel you are being forced to unnaturally suppress your other senses – just have a go at temporarily prioritising your sense of hearing. Midst walk, you may become aware that you are distracted, preoccupied, your mind is elsewhere. No problem, initiate what Barry Truax calls, "listening-in-search": an active process of searching out and savouring specific sounds within the ochlophonic (i.e. crowded) soundscape. Stay alert! Although such collective activity is conducive to introspection, this is not a group meditation.

Requirements: Appropriate footwear, clothing, etc. for walking. Select clothing that does not generate excessive sound whilst walking; hard heeled shoes for instance are discouraged. No audiophonic media technology required or desired.

Caveat: If you have particular hearing needs, have sensitive hearing (e.g. PTSD, hyperacusis or tinnitus), or are weary or anxious, you are reminded that:

"The fact remains that most of our streets are not civilised, enjoyable places to be. They are mainly noisy, polluted, hazardous and unpleasant – with serious social and environmental problems the result." (CABE, Civilised Streets, Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, London, 2008)

Diversity: Such activity is not exclusively predicated on mobility or auraltypical hearing of the participants – suitable and imaginative alternative methods are encouraged.

Number of Participants: Minimum of 1, recommended maximum of 12. This is an unobtrusive, non-invasive activity, so intimate numbers are encouraged.

Duration: circa 60-90mins.

Location: The everyday (e.g. street, public footpath, cemetery, recreation ground, urban square, allotment, shopping mall, brownfield site, holloway, bridle-path) as appropriate to your daily experience. Be mindful of local trespassing laws.

Time of Day: Between 0:00 – 23:59, 27 August, 2017 (or any time).

Silence: Talking/interjections/whistling/humming/subvocalisation, etc. during the actual walk to be kept to a minimum. Save choice thoughts for the debriefing.

Sound Walk Sunday 2017 - submission - find out more about Sound Walk Sunday and enjoy other walking pieces: <http://www.museumofwalking.org.uk/events/sound-walk-sunday/>

Mobile devices: As this is a here-and-now activity, beyond the slowly drifting in of distant sounds due to the tardy speed of sound, mobile devices are required to be set to airplane/flight mode or simply turned off.

Meteorology: (Within reason) don't let inclement weather get in the way of appreciating the walk: a sudden gust of wind can sonically bring to life otherwise silent foliage; falling rain, taking John Hull's heed, "gives a sense of perspective and of actual relationships of one part of the world and another... I am presented with a totality, a world which speaks to me." (Hull, J.M. *On Sight and Insight: A Journey into the World of Blindness*, 1997)

Proxemics: Do not crowd the other walkers.

Pace: *Andante* (i.e. 0.5 m/s, the optimal speed for escalators and moving walks). You may of course be required to speed up on pedestrian crossings, likewise due to congestion you may be forced to go even slower. Go with the flow.

Route: Plan your route in advance, and do your research, but on the day, don't feel obliged to follow it slavishly. Add some random choices to your route. Specific to the time and place, take account of anticipated features of the soundscape, aural architecture, contrasting topography, (un)consciously designed sound, cultural activities, rhythms of the day, seek out relative tranquil locations (you could refer to the Strategic Noise Mapping DEFRA 2015 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/open-data-strategic-noise-mapping>) and contrast with sites characterised by hustle and bustle. Attempt to circumnavigate specific sounds being emitted from fixed locations: how is the spectrum and throw altered from the different perspectives? Be open to serendipity, the unplanned and the unplannable.

Caesura: Feel free to pause in opportune locations that give themselves to lingering (designed or otherwise), allowing the prevailing soundscape to move around you.

Echolocation: Explore the evolving resonances and reverberations of the environment with consistent high-frequency content sounds such as finger clicking, footsteps (remembering those hard heels) or jingling keys.

Walk Leader's Preamble: Discuss what sounds may be anticipated considering time of day, etc. At regular intervals, invite the participants to question: What is the furthest sound you can hear? What is the closest sound you can hear? What kind of sounds or acoustics shadows does your presence add? Introduce specific themes you may wish to draw attention to such as biophony or regeneration. Resist divulging the route, but reassure the participants that there is no need to worry: We will finish on time, and at the designated location. A bond of trust between leader and participant is crucial.

Walk Leader's Postamble: Allow ample time for open discussion in a safe but secluded location where voices are not masked by noise. No contribution is invalid, insignificant or incorrect. Encourage the quieter voices.

Here are some questions to prompt the discussion if need be:

Sound Walk Sunday 2017 - submission - find out more about Sound Walk Sunday and enjoy other walking pieces: <http://www.museumofwalking.org.uk/events/sound-walk-sunday/>

- Surprises, epiphanies, concerns, expectations affirmed?
- What is sound, soundscape and noise?
- Has this dedicated focus on hearing influenced your other senses: smell, balance, sight, proprioception, vibration, touch, taste, pain, time, gravity?
- How much cognitive effort was required to listening attentively to the acoustic environment?
- From your perspective, was the route pedestrian friendly or human-scaled?
- Did you encounter “sound-conscious urban design” (Mayor of London, Sounder City: The Mayor’s Ambient Noise Strategy, Greater London Authority, London, 2004) or has the walk prompted in your mind future designs and strategies?

Encourage the participants to take their time, not immediately rush back into normal life; sound walks can be a disorientating experience.

Repeat: Another time of day, season, location.

Ethics: Safety is paramount.

The above are starting points and are open to interpretation, and infinite variation.

© 2017, John Levack Drever