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Listening walks: A method of multiplicity

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Abstract

A listening walk is a mode of walking in which listening to the sounds of spaces is the focus. In this chapter, we look at the potential of listening walks to act as a research method and pedagogic tool. We emphasise its flexibility and adaptability for different purposes and research topics. To make this argument, we consider a listening walk led by one of the authors in Edinburgh, Scotland. We demonstrate that, while listening walks have been posited as a means of producing research data about perceived soundscape quality, they also provide us with an endlessly repeatable and adaptable method that can address a much broader range of research questions, and can be embedded within a variety of teaching settings.

Keywords

listening, sound, soundwalk, soundscape, multi-sensory, pedagogy, Edinburgh, Brussels, multiplicity, audio

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Introduction: Listening and sensory walking

The concept of the 'soundwalk' emerged in the 1960s and 1970s through the work of the World Soundscape Project, and was first described by R. Murray Schafer, one of the key members of the project, as: 'an exploration of a soundscape of a given area' (Schafer, 1994: 213). Hildegard Westerkamp, another member of the project, only slightly embellishes on this when she states that a soundwalk is: 'any excursion whose main purpose is listening to the environment' (Westerkamp, 2007: 49). We find it helpful to distinguish between two types of soundwalks, while acknowledging that there is significant overlap. Firstly, there are technologically mediated walks, which involve the use of microphones, personal stereos, MP3 players, and so on, to either listen to the live soundscape in novel ways, or to layer pre-recorded music and sounds onto the experience of walking (Gallagher and Prior, 2014). Such mediated forms of soundwalks have been embraced to a certain extent by geographers (Butler, 2006 and 2007; Butler and Miller, 2005; Gallagher, 2015; Pinder, 2001), and by artists such as Janet Cardiff and Christina Kubisch.

The second type of soundwalk - the listening walk - is the focus of this chapter. Once again, listening walks were first described by Schafer as '...simply a walk with a concentration on listening' (Schafer, 1994: 212). Since their emergence in the 1960s in North America, these types of soundwalks have been developed as a creative practice by experimental musicians and sound artists. The impetus for these developments can clearly be traced to John Cage's ideas about sound and silence, most famously expressed in his 'silent piece', 4'33". In this work, a performer or ensemble of musicians plays no music, thereby drawing attention to the ambient sounds of the setting, usually

a concert hall (Drever, 2009). Drever writes about the listening walks of composers Philip Corner and Max Neuhaus, who both led groups of listeners through urban environments in an attempt to take attentive listening beyond the confines of the concert hall, aestheticizing ‘everyday’ sounds. While some of these walks were about chance experiences with sounds, others were undertaken with an idea of the sounds to be encountered, such as Max Neuhaus’ listening walks inside industrial locations normally inaccessible to visitors (Drever, 2009), making these types of listening walks akin to compositional pieces rather than completely unstructured improvisations.

Over the past 10 to 15 years, such sonic perambulations have flourished under the auspices of arts and experimental music festivals in cities such as New York,¹ Oxford,² Edinburgh,³ and Brussels.⁴ To take just one example, the arts duo Sans façon led a listening walk entitled *Odd sympathies* through Cardiff city centre in Wales, as part of the 2008 Artes Mundi art exhibition. The walk, which makes direct reference to the work of John Cage,⁵ was repeated 27 times along the same route, again with the expectation of encountering particular sounds at specific points along the route. This expectation is made all the more apparent as the leader (or ‘conductor’) of the walk used a graphical score to time the appearance of particular sonic features of the landscape, including traffic, fountains, and the sounds of walking over different surfaces, across each walk’s 30 minutes and 33 seconds duration.⁶

¹ <http://www.elastic-city.org/about>

² <http://consumerwaste.org.uk/audiograft/walks.html>

³ <http://www.deveron-arts.com/urbanscape-ruralsprawl-project/>

⁴ http://www.tunedcity.net/?page_id=3858

⁵ See <http://www.sansfacon.org/odd-sympathies>

⁶ For the graphical score see: <http://www.inspiringcities.org/odd-sympathies-2008-orchestrated-sounds-of-a-city/>

Listening walks have also - at least tentatively - started to appeal to academic researchers in search of a method that can be applied to help understand people's in situ experiences of different sound environments. Often this has taken the form of interrogating people's valuations of the quality of sound environments from an environmental psychology or landscape design perspective. Research in this area has instructed participants to rate the positive and negative characteristics of such sound environments, through questionnaires and surveys in which participants are asked to rank positive and negative sonic qualities of walked environments using pre-determined numerical or semantic scales (most often from 'noisy' to 'quiet'), rather than providing descriptive accounts (see Berglund and Nilsson, 2006; Jeon et al., 2010; Jeon et al., 2011; Jeon et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2014). In their version of a listening walk, Adams et al. (2008) modified this approach slightly. A series of semi-structured questions were posed at different stopping points along a walked route, including questions about what sounds dominated, what was liked or disliked about the soundscape, and how participants thought the physical qualities of the built environment impacted upon the soundscape (see also Adams, 2009; Bruce and Davies, 2014).

As listening walks have made the transition from being a musical practice or experimental artistic intervention to acquiring the status of an academic research method, their meaning and intent have been transformed. Firstly, listening walks as research method are no longer about the implicit didacticism of opening the ears of walkers to every-day sound events ('what happens when we listen to the world as a musical composition?'), but instead about a group of listeners (some "expert", others not) acting as producers of data. Secondly, the type of listening judged to be of value

has changed. Listening walks in their musical or artistic form focus most clearly on what is termed 'reduced' listening. This type of listening involves directing attention to the aesthetic qualities of sounds - such as their texture or timbre - independent of either the cause or the meaning of those sounds (Chion, 1994: 29-33). Take, for example, the sound of someone pulling a wheeled suitcase along a cobbled pavement that is out of sight but in earshot during a listening walk. Rather than listening to the scraping and rattling to discern what is producing them or what information these sounds may convey, reduced listening will instead focus on the sonic qualities of the scraping and rattling: the pitch of these sounds, their rhythm, how they reverberate along a narrow street, and so on. As an academic method, by contrast, there is a tendency to reduce listening walk data to categories of soundscape judgments. Thirdly, researchers to date have assumed that listening begins and ends with the human auditory system and associated cognitive processes, leading to a rather disembodied conception of listening. There has been little consideration of the inter-modality of the senses when walking and listening (though see Adams, 2009, and Jeon et al., 2011).

In this chapter, we argue that listening walks can perform a wider range of functions than is allowed for by a focus on aesthetics and reduced listening, a focus on value judgments of soundscapes, or a focus on auditory perception and cognition. A single listening walk can cross all of these registers and more. Consequently, listening walks are not tied to specific topics or modes of enquiry. They can simultaneously function as an aesthetic performance and a method of enquiry, a form of intensified human sensory perception and a way of connecting to the more-than-human world, a meditative experience-in-the-moment and a participatory pedagogy. They are not tied to a

particular epistemology, and are applicable to all kinds of topics in all kinds of places: investigating architecture, landscape architecture, and urban planning, including informing the redesign of spaces through new building or landscaping projects; exploring environmental change, such as the effects of conservation or gentrification, through 'before' and 'after' walks; mapping the rhythms and patterns of movement in a particular place; examining relations between humans and non-human species; and so on. This multiplicity is, for us, the central attraction of the method. It enables the method to be adapted to many different purposes, but also means that a listening walk can elicit wide ranging responses that exceed any prescribed purpose. This open-ended, emergent quality produces unexpected encounters, feelings, thoughts and analyses. Though both of us have been involved in many listening walks over the years, they retain an alluring ability to surprise.

To demonstrate this argument, the following section presents a first-person auto-ethnographic narrative, written by Michael, about a single listening walk. Our aim is to show some of what listening walks can do, through consideration of a specific example, before we turn to analysing some of what the walk revealed. Jonathan led the walk, in connection with research that Michael undertook in 2013 to develop methodologies for sonic geography. It took place one evening in September 2013 and lasted a little over an hour. The route was planned in advance to weave around Edinburgh's historic Old Town. Participant numbers were limited to twelve to keep the walk manageable and avoid the group fragmenting. We invited colleagues and friends by email and allocated places on a first-come first-served basis. Despite our interest in audio recording methods (Gallagher and Prior, 2014), the walk was not documented with sound

recordings since our aim was simply to listen, avoiding the distractions of too much equipment. However, a few photographs were taken during and after the walk by Michael.

We are aware that narrating a listening walk in text cannot capture or (re)present the multi-sensory qualities of the walk itself (Westerkamp, 2005: 34). Our aim is rather to evoke something of the sense of movement and multiplicity that characterises listening walks, and to offer examples of the kinds of affects, observations, and thoughts afforded by the method. In doing so, we hope to demonstrate that listening walks hold much potential beyond how they have so far been framed as a research method.

A listening walk in Edinburgh

We are being issued with instructions, gentle but insistent. Please follow me, walk in single file, keep quiet. Please turn off mobile phones, put electronic devices away, focus on listening to the city. Mildly theatric in our little procession, we string out along pavements. There are pedestrian sounds: pelican crossing beeps, a rattle that sounds like the vibration of roller luggage, soft plucking of footsteps on stone slabs. Across the cobbles of the Royal Mile, Edinburgh's main tourist thoroughfare, and a snatch of conversation is audible. A small group stands gathered outside a café, and a male English voice says, "...the gay, balding, state-educated northern scientist..." followed by an eruption of laughter. Australian accents, American accents, unidentifiable foreign languages. Then onto a busier road and dense traffic noise bears down, almost overwhelming when listened to so closely. This blanket of low to mid frequencies, fuggy and cloying, is punctuated by the jarring spike of a bus clattering over a maintenance hole cover – the collective obsession with vehicular mobility is unavoidably audible.

A tourist tat shop blares out trashy bagpipe music. The shrieking clamour recedes rapidly as we enter the Scotsman steps, a staircase spiralling down towards the railway station. Inside its tile and stone enclosure, the chug of traffic washes out to a hollow drone. For many years these steps were used by rough sleepers and as a toilet by drunks, but in 2011 they were renovated with a public art commission, couched in the familiar terms of art-as-regeneration: 'Before restoration by Edinburgh World Heritage and City of Edinburgh Council, [the steps] were extremely dilapidated, and vulnerable to misuse. The Fruitmarket Gallery suggested commissioning a public artwork for the Steps as part of the renovation, to help change the public perception of them' (The Fruitmarket Gallery, 2011).

Martin Creed, the commissioned artist, had each of the 104 stairs covered with a different kind of marble from a different part of the world. 'Whatever I did had to be functional...But I also wanted it to be beautiful. In the past it was used as a toilet, and in fact marble is used in toilets a lot...So I thought I'd try and make a beautiful toilet' (The Scotsman, 2011: unpaginated). The result is 'a staircase fit for kings' (Jones, 2011: unpaginated) but in an everyday location. New gates now enable the council to shut off the steps at night, a securitisation of space that has both restricted usage and helped to make the place appealing for a wider public. The grime and the stink of piss have disappeared. As we tramp down, the soft flip-flop of twenty-four feet on polished stone reverberates around us, creating a peaceful, almost stately ambience.

Down at the bottom we pop out onto the street and things get louder again. On entering the railway station, out of the ether comes a clipped, automated announcement instructing us not to smoke. The voice is Scottish, female, middle aged, polite but cold,

with a schoolteacher-ish tone that is intensified by the boxy acoustics of the public address system. Inside we linger to take in the cavernously reverberating bustle of the main concourse, then leave by a rear exit to the same voice incanting its regulatory message, now insistent to the point of being invasive and almost sinister. These increasingly ubiquitous cyborg ladies mobilise the affective qualities of femininity as a form of soft power, with a gentle-but-firm persuasiveness that provides 'a central asset in the continued securitisation and control of contemporary space, cutting across what little is left of the public realm and providing the appearance and the illusion of efficiency and calm in commercial environments. It is estimated that 70 per cent of recorded voices in the UK are female or female-sounding' (Power, 2013: 37).

The Orwellian mood is broken abruptly by a polar opposite gender stereotype: a bloke belching, beer can in hand, as he leans against the Ingleby Gallery, a contemporary fine art space nestled behind the station. The loutish burp sounds a cheeky echo of local history. From the 1980s until 2006, this building was home to The Venue, one of Edinburgh's best-loved live music and club spaces. With the subsequent conversion to gallery, it's boozy atmosphere has been scrubbed up and quietened down for a more refined, upmarket clientele.

We continue walking, beneath the booming arches of a rail bridge and past a redevelopment site still in progress. Another fondly-remembered nightclub once occupied an old bus depot here. As in many UK cities since the 2008 financial crash, its demolition proved premature, leaving a yawning gap site. There is a quietness here, a sense of empty space. Graffitied hoardings fence off five acres of crushed rubble with vegetation sprouting higher each year. During the Edinburgh festival, the area has been

used by Snoozebox, a pop-up hotel company offering temporary accommodation in modified shipping containers; hutches for humans. It's a herald of things to come, since the Caltongate development proposed for this site – a bland mix of leisure facilities, retail outlets and offices – includes three hotels, one of which will be part of Premier Inn's new 'hub' brand, with high-tech but ultra-tiny rooms designed to squeeze maximum revenue from premium real estate.

Caltongate stalled for over a decade in the planning process due to the bankruptcy of its first developer in 2009, vocal local opposition to the insertion of generic corporate architecture into a picturesque medieval World Heritage Site, controversy over the threatened demolition of listed buildings, the meagre provision of affordable housing and a host of other issues. However, capital usually gets its own way in the end, and at the time of writing, the scheme's new South African investors have finally been given the go-ahead, a decision reportedly greeted by a rowdy chorus of boos from the public gallery.

Back on the Royal Mile, we take a short detour through a graveyard (Figure 1), where my attention is drawn to the sight of a blood-red leather glove impaled on a black iron railing. Then the concrete façade of the Scottish Parliament comes into view, and again we are immersed in heavy traffic drone. Then a narrow cul-de-sac leads us towards the grassy sweep of Holyrood Park. I hear what Augoyard and Torgue term 'the cut out effect': 'a sudden drop in intensity associated with an abrupt change in the spectral envelope of a sound or a modification of reverberation...This effect is an important process of articulation between spaces and locations; it punctuates movement from one ambience to another' (Augoyard and Torgue, 2006: 29). The

soundscape changes gradually but radically, from rumbling main road to small enclosed cobbled street to wide open field, with crows cawing in the trees, the odd dog bark, and a male voice in the middle distance shouting instructions for what might be some kind of sports match or training session just out of view. It has been argued that urban parks are constructed through photographs, with governmental power exercised through images depicting 'park space as distant, and conceptually separate, from urban space' (Gabriel, 2011: 125). But landscape architecture can have strong aural effects too. Here the bustle of the city is palpably distant, screened out by the surrounding trees and buildings. I feel an expansive sense of space stretching away from me.



Figure 1. The listening walk takes a detour through a graveyard off of the Royal Mile.

The walk ends, and for a moment we all just stand together listening. Jonathan hands out short questionnaires to gather some written responses, and then we form a circle to discuss our experiences. For my own part, the walk led me to listen to my own listening. At times I could sense myself relaxing into listening, enjoying it. At other points I could hear myself becoming impatient, exasperated, not wanting to listen but to look or to touch the city instead. Listening functioned as a provocation, a challenge, something to push back against rather than a straightforward sensory orientation.

Analysing spaces

Michael's autoethnographic account narrates one person's experience of a single listening walk, and as such can only hint at the range of functions such walks can perform. Nevertheless, it is possible to make some observations about what the listening walk revealed about Edinburgh, as compared with what might be expected from other modes of enquiry. One striking feature is that listening walks are not only about sound, though sound is their primary concern. As Drever (2009) argues, they are a means of engaging with the geographies of everyday life in a participative and non-hierarchical way. The instruction to listen and not talk might seem didactic, but in practice the informality of a group walk in unremarkable surroundings undermines any such tendencies. Instead the focus on listening is a provocation that unsettles sensory habits. The result is not only that people listen differently, but that in listening differently they also see, feel, smell, and move differently. Listening walks invite attention to wander across different senses, provoking listening to slip between different modes, as listeners tune in to various aspects of the environment, their own bodies and listening

practices. It is precisely this movement between different registers that, for us, makes the listening walk such a lively and versatile method. Requiring listeners to focus on just one of these aspects, such as judgments about noise or soundscape quality, risks restricting this liveliness.

Thus in practice, listening walks are always multi-sensory, multi-modal methods, whose relevance goes far beyond enquiries into the soundscapes of places. The walk narrated above, for instance, produced heightened awareness of incessant road traffic, the local tourist industry, urban regeneration, the securitization and control of space, and the demarcation of parks, with these issues coming in and out of focus over the duration of the walk. At certain points one or other of these issues came to the fore; at other points multiple issues were juxtaposed, playing in counterpoint to one another or jarring in dissonance.

Nancy suggests that 'to be listening is to be straining toward a possible meaning, and consequently one that is not immediately accessible' (Nancy, 2007: 6). During the walk, this straining stretched attention to its limits, raising questions, dredging up old memories, setting up new associations, sparking off unexpected trains of thought, and opening lines of enquiry to be followed up later. The city, with its many flows and sedimented accretions of materials, culture, capital and power, began to flake apart. Listening walks can thus be theorised in Lefebvrian terms as analysing the many superimposed layers of space. There is also a resonance with Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis, because so many of the rhythms of spaces are articulated sonically, in the tempo of pelican crossing beeps, the incessant hum of air conditioning, the diurnal flux of traffic noise or the seasonal variation of the dawn chorus for example. Listening

walks can draw out how spaces are composed of what Lefebvre identified as 'semi-autonomous elements with distinct rhythms that co-exist without being subsumed by one another' (Karaman, 2012: 1292-1293). Crucially, the walker, as rhythm analyst, also sets his or her body in rhythmic motion, participating in the flows of space, joining in with the improvising ensemble of the city. Analysis is produced from within the rhythms, rather than from a static or exterior position. This kind of analysis is participative, like the uniquely situated knowledge of a symphony that is produced by playing in an orchestra.

De Certeau famously argued that visuality proceeds from a voyeuristic abstracting impulse, whereas walking in the city generates more grounded, embodied understandings of everyday urban spatial practices (De Certeau, 1988). Listening adds another dimension to walking as an embodied, situated way of knowing. It can generate knowledge about spatial elements that are often overlooked, such as the sonic by-products of other processes: construction noise, reverberations from stone, concrete and glass facades, echoes in subways and staircases, the sounds of animals, plants and weather, unexpected moments of quietness. Listening to such sounds reveals the unconscious life of spaces, a jumbled-up mass of vibrations, the flipside of the smooth logics of architecture, planning and design. There are also many deliberate and designed sounds in the world – alarms, announcements, music – and listening walks tune into these more conscious aural aspects of space too.

While embodied, multi-sensory experience is central to the affective potency of the method, listening walks are not only an in-the-moment experience. In many cases, Michael's account is embellished with additional details from subsequent investigations sparked off by the walk. For example, Michael had been aware of the Caltongate gap

site for many years, recording some video footage of it on one occasion, and on another venturing inside to explore when some of the hoardings had been blown down. The listening walk, however, gave him a new sense of the silence of the site, and the local history and politics that might be hiding within that silence. The old Bongo club could almost be heard as a spectral presence. Further investigation revealed the fraught, noisy struggles surrounding the redevelopment. Likewise Michael had used the Scotsman steps on many occasions, both before and after Martin Creed's refurbishment, but the listening walk prompted more in-depth exploration of the background to this public artwork and the discourses surrounding it. Listening walks can therefore act as a catalyst for further investigation; they can be particularly useful in the early, exploratory stages of research, as a way of identifying issues to pursue, perhaps in concert with other types of methods.

Listening walks also lend themselves to repetition and so can be productive in investigating the nature of spatial experience across time. To give an example, between June 2011 and May 2012, Jonathan was invited by two arts organisations to lead what amounted to three listening walks along the same route in a northwest district of Brussels. Starting from near the Brussels–Charleroi Canal, each walk took the listening group (comprised of members of the public participating via an open invitation) to an area called Tour and Taxis. Historically, this area was dominated by a grand postal sorting building, and a network of railway lines carrying mail in and out of Brussels. At the time of the first walk, the area had been left largely unmaintained for some time; where the train tracks used to be, a diverse brownfield grassland habitat had matured. By the third walk, a development project of Tour and Taxis had started in earnest.

Diggers and bulldozers had silenced the birds and insects, as they progressively carved out prime real estate. While clearly less rigorous than the analytical tools used in the emerging field of soundscape ecology (see Pijanowski et al., 2011), the repetition of the walk nonetheless starkly revealed the changing constitution of the walked route through sound; this consequently initiated discussions amongst the participants about the broader political, social, and ecological implications of brownfield development and urban gentrification.

Conducting a listening walk

We want now to step away from these two particular walks, and offer a basic general procedure for undertaking a group listening walk. We do so because the literature that has reflected upon listening walks as a research method has not detailed in any precise manner how these are actually conducted. The procedure we offer is influenced in part by the suggestions made by Schafer (1994: 212-213), but in the main is based upon our own experiences of leading and participating in successful (and not so successful) listening walks. We wish to emphasise that the procedure is very flexible and does not need to be conducted in the manner we state. Our advice here is therefore offered as a starting point, to be adapted by other researchers for their own projects and purposes.

Before the listening walk commences, we first plan an approximate route around the chosen location, bearing in mind the desired duration, the intended participants, and any access and safety considerations (for example: will sections of the route be dark, steep, slippery, wet underfoot, cross busy roads? Will that cause any problems given the ages and abilities of the likely participants?) The route can be sketched onto a map

if need be. A print out from an online map can be useful for this purpose. We usually aim for routes that pass through a variety of different spaces and ambiances, taking particular account of acoustic variations. Typically, we include both busy and quiet spaces, and both larger open spaces and smaller enclosed ones. The Edinburgh listening walk, for example, created an interesting contrast between the acoustics of the enclosed Scotsman steps and the larger railway station concourse.

Walks can be of any duration, but between one and two hours allows for immersion in the soundscape without becoming too tiring; it takes a little time for the body and ears to sensitize to the soundscape. We tend to favour routes that do not involve doubling back, although this depends on the location and aim of the walk. A circular route looping back to the starting point can work well, but equally ending in a different place can provide a transect through space. The Edinburgh walk cut through the city's Old Town, roughly following the line of the Royal Mile, with some deviation, and in this case following an established line through the city seemed to work well. Participants can be involved as co-researchers in the planning of a route and invited to lead the walk too, particularly if they are more familiar with the area than the researcher.

It is a good idea to choose a starting point that is easy to locate, relatively open, and large enough to accommodate the whole group without blocking pavements, entranceways and other busy areas. Some shelter in case of inclement weather can also be an advantage. Examples include public squares, road junctions, or the foyer of an easily accessible building. Transport hubs such as railway stations can be convenient, but can also be crowded, so if using one of these be sure to identify a particular place within them so participants will know where to go.

Once a rough idea for the route has been generated, the next stage is to try it out. Usually we do this as a solo exercise to allow us to concentrate and observe the route without distractions, but you might prefer to take a colleague or friend for company. The most important thing at this stage is to listen intently to the environment, shaping the route around the soundscape. If you struggle with this aspect, it might be worth seeking out a local sound artist, soundscape researcher or someone else who has a keen ear for environmental sound, to help plan a route. It makes sense to do the trial at a similar time of day and season to when you expect to do the walk. During the trial walk, make a note of timings, precise route details, possible changes, and any particularly interesting sounds, spaces or atmospheres where the walk might stop for a few moments to enable greater immersion. It is advisable to walk slowly when testing timings, to calibrate the pace for slower walkers. The route can be tweaked to make it shorter or longer as required, perhaps doing a second test run to check timings again if necessary.

Potential participants can then be provided with information about the time, date, location, and approximate duration of the walk. It is worth bearing in mind, however, that in our experience listening walks have worked best when the exact route or destination is not revealed, as this prevents participants from pre-judging what they are likely to encounter. It is also worth considering weather and terrain, and advising participants on clothing and footwear if necessary. A contingency plan for bad weather, such as a shorter route with more shelter, can be useful. Alternatively you could inform participants that the walk will take place whatever the weather and ask them to prepare accordingly. Such considerations depend on your location – many of the walks we have led have been in the UK, where rain is always a possibility.

We have found that a group size of around 10-12 including the walk leader(s) is optimal, being large enough to make for a good discussion afterwards, but not so large as to be unwieldy. With larger group sizes, there is a danger of the group fragmenting or people getting lost. If many people are interested or you have a large pool of potential participants, multiple walks can be organised on different occasions, or places can be allocated on a first come first served basis, keeping a reserve list of names in case anyone drops out.

Once everyone has arrived at the start point, we introduce ourselves and make some introductory remarks. One of the most important elements of the method, in our experience, is to politely ask participants to refrain from talking during the walk, to not externally document it in any way (no written notes, no photographs), and to turn off all mobile devices – not to a vibrate or silent setting, but fully off. We usually explain to participants that observing these rules will help them concentrate on listening.

The walks also seem to work best when participants are asked to walk spaced apart in single file; a little distance between each walker means that the sounds of those in front or behind will not be the only focus of the sonic environment, and prevents interactions between walkers causing a distraction from the wider environment. When leading the walk, it is best to walk at a relatively slow but steady pace, so that walkers can focus on listening, rather than trying to keep up with the person in front of them. If you cross roads or other obstacles, wait quietly at the other side to let everyone cross safely; you can inform participants about these temporary pauses before you set out.

These rules may seem prescriptive, but in our experience they help to produce distinctive sensory experiences. Participants often comment afterwards on how walking

in this way, spaced apart and listening without talking, produces interesting affective states such as meditative calm, a sense of being unsettled or provoked, or a heightened awareness of their surroundings or their own bodily presence. Both of us have experienced listening walks in which these rules were not observed, where people walked alongside each other chatting casually, like an ordinary ramble, or where the walk was periodically interrupted by the leader to discuss notable features or invite responses from the group. There is nothing wrong with such activities per se, but we find them unsatisfying as listening walks because they do not create enough sustained, intensified auditory attention to disrupt usual sensory habits, which for us is central to how the method functions.

Debriefing and discussion can take place afterwards, and is often fascinating. As is evident in the Edinburgh walk narrative, Jonathan hands out short paper questionnaires immediately after a walk to gather individual responses, before breaking into group discussion. The theme of the research being undertaken will dictate the precise nature of the questions posed, but we have generally found it best to use a short number of open-ended questions using non-technical language ('Write down any unexpected or unusual sounds'; 'What changes to the sound environment did you experience as you walked?'). Ending the walk in a relatively quiet space helps to facilitate a group discussion on participants' responses to the questions; it may be of use to document these discussions on an audio recorder.

Such a qualitative form of debriefing allows participants to raise all manner of ideas and chains of association that cannot be presupposed. The following extract from a participant on the first of the Brussels listening walks, illustrates the types of

intersections between sound, space, and body that can be revealed when both listening *and* walking – rather than disembodied, cochlear listening – are the focus:

The noise from the busy street was very loud and oppressive. As we approached the open grassland [at Tour and Taxis] the noise dropped, and it became clear to me how big the influence of sound is on your state of mind. I'm constantly (subconsciously) trying to keep out the noise. This means you can't open up and relax. Entering the grassland changed this and I could feel myself again. Hearing the rustle of plants and the sounds made by the surface I walked on felt like coming home. An intimacy returned, I could reconnect with the environment.

One participant on the Edinburgh walk described it as Wagnerian in its range of dynamics and timbres, while someone else remarked on the gendered qualities of certain sounds. Another found that traffic noise predominated, with few distinctively local sounds; a kind of aural non-place. Some say they heard the sounds of the group, of their own footsteps, their own bodies. Several remarked on how gentle and peaceful they had found the city as a whole, to their surprise. As a group, we talked about the interaction of listening and other senses, and how the focus on sound made for a particular kind of multi-sensory awareness, invoking a different sort of seeing, a new sense of one's body in the city, even a heightened sense of smell.

The potential of listening walks: Some concluding thoughts

We have seen that within the extant literature listening walks have been presented as a means to collect data about the sonic quality of different types of spaces. The primary intention here is for research participants to provide soundscape judgements at particular moments on a walked route, and at least some information about what it is that constitutes a positive or negative sonic experience. By contrast, we have offered a

descriptive account of a listening walk, pointing towards the broader potential of the method, and drawing particular attention to its multiplicity.

Listening walks can act as an analytical tool in the investigation of different spaces. Such investigations need not be confined to examining the sonic pleasure or displeasure that moments along a route may bring (important and worthwhile though this may be), but also provide a means to explore, amongst other things: a) how a listening body, or group of bodies, affectively and emotionally respond to sounds along a particular route; b) the production of spaces, as different modes of listening generate particular analytical insights, which are often different and complementary to those produced through visual and textual method; c) the multiple layers of spaces – listening, for example, to the political economy of a given space, or its material constitution, or its cultural, social, or ecological attributes. Listening walks can also be used as a starting point for other strategies of knowledge production, such as ‘counter mapping’ (Wood, 2010: 182), in which individual or inter-group sonic representations of spaces are produced, either textually or graphically.

Listening walks are endlessly adaptable and repeatable across all types of terrain, and require no special equipment, technical facilities, budget, or venue. For this reason, listening walks hold great potential as a pedagogic tool for a wide range of age groups and disciplinary specialisms (and, indeed, none, given that we have used them as a such a tool outside of educational institutions). We have both used listening walks in a teaching capacity with groups of students on social science, arts, and humanities courses, and with practitioners. Michael, for example, recently organised a listening walk as part of a continuing professional development course for a group of early years

educators, to help them to reflect on the nature of listening in their own practice. Afterwards, some said that they had done sound walks with young children, but always with the adult professionals directing the children to listen to certain sounds; the more open-ended, uninterrupted listening walk led by Michael, with its absence of talk, enabled them to hear in a deeper and more expansive way.

Similarly, in 2009 soundscape composer John Drever ran a listening walk for acousticians and noise control experts attending the Eurnoise conference, as a way to gently unsettle their more usual technocratic, normative focus on noise reduction. We see no reason why listening walks could not be similarly used with other groups, such as natural scientists interested in particular ecological systems and environments. The method would be well suited to teaching on courses concerned with the sensory and phenomenological experience of spaces, transport and mobility issues. It also has obvious relevance for professional practices that shape the sounds of environments, such as engineering, planning, design, architecture and acoustics. As a form of participatory pedagogy, listening walks can be used together with other types of sonic methods (see Gallagher and Prior, 2014) to act as a catalyst for a range of discussions about sound, listening, and space.

Finally, given that the listening walk we have outlined is a group endeavour, it is useful in offsetting the individualism that often arises with other types of phenomenological accounts of spaces, or indeed the notion that 'listening' is a solitary act. Listening walks can instead contribute to the development of listening practices that are engaged, collective, participatory, and inclusive. We also think that listening walks are well suited to research and teaching where sound per se is *not* the focus; in such

scenarios they can act as a provocation to experience spaces differently (quietly, in a group), or invite different kinds of attention to spaces that other teaching methods would struggle to accommodate.

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