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Cityphonic Walks Unveiling the Sonic Performativity of Everyday Life in the Urban Landscape

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Cityphonic Walks Unveiling the Sonic Performativity of Everyday Life in the Urban Landscape

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Abstract

The artistic research project *Cityphonic Walks* by Irini Kalogeropoulou, conducted during her artist residency at the Temporary Art Centre in Eindhoven, explores the “phonē” (voice) of a city, focusing on the sonic performativity of everyday life. It investigates how space performs itself through sound, the strategies that can be employed to intervene in it, and how listening can turn into a performative act.

The project sought ways to extend the voice of the city by tuning into the urban environment as one would tune into a symphony or an opera, exploring the interplay of sound, silence, conflict, and domesticity. Methods such as walking, listening, soundmaking, field recordings, soundscape composition, and the creation of verbal notation were employed to uncover underlying power structures and social dynamics. Although initially site-specific, they ultimately reflected broader social concerns.

Through solo and participatory soundwalks, as well as a solo exhibition, the project revealed the affective capacities of the soundscape and its ongoing role in shaping public spaces. It proposed experiential, physical, psychical, and imaginative interactions in everyday life within the urban environment, fostering a shared acoustic community that transcends language, embodiment, and spatiality.

Keywords: Soundwalk, sonic performativity, rhythmanalysis, everyday life, urban soundscape, public space, listening, acoustic community

Cityphonic Walks

As Cage has insisted, “There is no such thing as silence. Something is always happening that makes a sound” (Cage, 1961, p. 191). Similarly, there is no such thing as an empty space. As long as the human body is actively listening and being heard, there is always the

potential to create public spaces. The artistic research project *Cityphonic Walks*, which began during the Master's program *Performing Public Space* and was further developed during an artist residency at the Temporary Art Centre (TAC) in Eindhoven, aims to explore the “phone” (voice) of the city, focusing on the sonic performativity of everyday life (Certeau, 1984). The key objective was to shed light on the ordinary aspects of lived experience, making them visible and audible (Drever, 2009) offering a context for action and transformation, where life could be perceived as art and art as life (Kaprow, 1996).

Figure 1

Participants playing the city. Credit Ursa Prek



The Term *Cityphonic*

The term *Cityphonic* merges “city” with “phone” and “symphonic.” The project draws on Derrida’s concept of “phone” (voice) and Lefebvre’s notion of the “symphonic” from his *Rhythmanalysis*. Building on these concepts, the project examines the “phone” of the city as both presence and absence, forming a soundscape—a term Schafer (1994) defines as an environment of sound, perceived and understood by individuals or society.

Main Questions

The project sought ways to situate listening within a broader relational context, where citizens could listen symphonically to urban soundscapes, engaging with the multiplicity of rhythms and voices embedded within the city. Beginning with the questions of how

soundwalking could be used as a strategy to reveal hidden sonic nuances in urban environments and how the auditory landscape shapes our embodied experience, formatting and transforming public spaces, the research unfolded through a series of solo and participatory soundwalks in Eindhoven as well as a solo exhibition titled *The whole universe wants to be touched! Listen with me!*

Figure 2

Participants performing the score Outside-Inside. Credit Ursa Prek.



Figure 3

Performer Rianne Wilbers playing the sound of her heartbeat during the soundwalk. Credit Ursa Prek



Figure 4

Snapshot from the solo exhibition the whole universe wants to be touched! Listen with me!
 Credit Ursa Prek.

**Research Positioning**

My research positioning was related to the portrait of the rhythm analyst in public space (Lefebvre, 2004), a kind of sonic thinking that disrupts normative hierarchies and makes participants aware of what and who is heard, what remains invisible, and in what circumstances, fostering the creation of an acoustic community. Lefebvre describes the rhythm analyst as someone “who listens not only to words and noises but also to a house, a street, or a town as one listens to a symphony or opera, understanding how this music is composed, who plays it, and for whom” (1992, p. 89). Following Voegelin’s (2010) notion that sound’s political dimension lies in its possibilities, the project invited participants to hear and articulate words for what appears to be impossible, engaging with the city as a dynamic, participatory performance.

Methodology

The research unfolded through a score¹-based method of walking, listening, soundmaking in the public space, as well as field recordings, soundscape composition, and the creation of verbal notation. Soundwalks formed the core of the practice, evolving from residential areas to the city center, exploring transitions from silence to noise. Inspired by McCartney’s

¹ The scores for the soundwalks can be assessed online at
https://issuu.com/eirenekal/docs/cityphonic_walks_irini_kalogeropoulou_verbal_score

(2010) view of the sound environment as an improvisational activity, the project encouraged engagement with the ephemeral and fluid nature of sound through site-specific scores, reactivating the city and expanding its “phonē” while fostering awareness.

Figure 5

Participants performing the score colourful boxes. Credit Ursa Prek.



Figure 6

Participants performing the score Tombs as Sounding Boards. Credit Ursa Prek.



Audible Citizenship

A city center soundwalk examined how audibility influences participation in public life. Through deep listening, participants reflected on spatial issues, developing “citizenship practices” and “world-making” strategies that expand the right to the public sphere (Biserna, 2022, p. 17). These practices highlighted the role of sound as a medium for reimagining public spaces and fostering an inclusive, shared urban environment. Through this approach, participants were encouraged to perceive themselves as both composers and listeners (McCartney, 2010), recognizing their agency in shaping the sonic fabric of public spaces.

Figure 7

*A written word from a participant on the ground while performing the score *Beneath the Pavement, the Beach*. Credit Ursa Prek.*



The soundwalks culminated in a solo exhibition that synthesized the counter narratives that emerged from the soundwalks. This included soundscape compositions inviting visitors to explore the diverse ways of listening: musical, historical, political, evocative, and subjective (McCartney, 2014).

Epilogue

Overall, understanding the sonic performativity of urban spaces highlighted the transformative potential of sound and its ability to evoke, connect, and challenge, opening up new possibilities for creating a shared acoustic cosmos!

Figure 8

Snapshot from the solo exhibition. The whole universe wants to be touched! Listen with me!
Credit Ursa Prek.

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