

Eva Kekou (gr)

Panteion University
Department of Communication, Media and Culture
ekkou@syros.aegean.gr

Ioannis Zannos (gr)

Ionian University
Department of Audiovisual Arts
zannos@gmail.com

Nicolas Remy (fr/gr)

University of Thessaly
Department of Architecture
nicola.remy@gmail.com

**What is All this
Noise About****Soundscape**

A telling example of an involuntary soundscape are the sound recordings made by the postman character Mario Ruoppolo for his friend and mentor Pablo Neruda in Michael Radford's film *Il Postino* (1994). In the film, simple recordings made on an island with a primitive recording device are compared to poetry, which Mario wanted to learn from Neruda. The sounds act as metaphors in a double sense: they stand for the experiences of the elements that Mario wants to transmit to Neruda, and they are meant to transport (μεταφέρω in Greek means "to transport") his message to his friend over distance of place and time. Spectacular examples of environmental sounds are the songs of Weddell seals used by Werner Herzog in his documentary about the Antarctic Encounters at the End of the World (2007). These songs sound alien, and express the strangeness of the environment in one of the most remote regions of the world. Because of their similarity to electronic synthetic sounds, they also create associations with the otherworldliness of purely artificial cultural artifacts.

Dérive

The above examples illustrate that sound can be easily dissociated from concrete objects or meanings, and is therefore open to associative interpretations. At the same time, sounds are perhaps more evocative of the environment from which they stem than images, as suggested by the contrast between the postcard in the beginning and the recordings at the end of *Il Postino*. The fact that sound is both more abstract and more location-specific than image predestines it to play a central role in location-specific pieces. Thus, the dislocation of sound from its original surroundings acts as a device for prompting the participants to recreate their own meanings. This explains why sound can play a prominent role in the process of dérive. It is exempli-

fied in Alvin Lucier's piece *Quasimodo the Great Lover* whose instrumentation reads "for any person who wishes to send sounds over long distances [...] to capture and carry to listeners far away the acoustic characteristics of the environments through which they travel," and which is based on the song of humpback whales.

The idea of dérive as immersion in an environment through free drifting is present in many media art works that employ sound. The innately immersive nature of aural experience is used to simultaneously "embed" and "remove" the participant from the environment. We selected four recent interactive pieces set in urban environments to illustrate different ways in which artists use sound to support dérive. Her Long Black Hair uses sound to transport the participant in a journey through time during a real-life walk through Central Park of New York (Cardiff 2005). In *As if it were the last time*, Speakman uses sound to create an alternate narrative played by the participants themselves in an urban setting. Clay's *China Gates* engages the participants as performers in a musical piece that is scored by their movements in open spaces. Finally, *Divided we Stand* creates an audiovisual performance through a metaphorical simulation of a democratic voting process.

Conclusion

The evocative power of sound, its immersive qualities, and the immediacy of auditory experiences make it a prominent feature in art installations in urban environments. By virtue of the above features, sound demands the attention of the participant, and is thus able to overcome the distracting effects of sensory overload.

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