

Performing the Park: Transcription, Composition, and a Soundscape

or

Sounding in the Park/ My Place in the Acoustic Community as a Runner

Prologue:

A trip to the park can mean many things for many people. I used to go running in the park to be completely anti-social. In 2019, gearing up meant headphones on with the purpose of escaping reality for a moment. I would ignore the sounds around me, lost in a familiar song or enjoying the calming effect of hearing some podcaster talk about not-music in my native tongue. This was the experience I craved after a day of class, rehearsal, practice, performance. I would be oblivious to the presence of others unless I had to step around them on a trail. For a long time, this was how I ran. Now, in 2021: well over a year into COVID-19 imposed social restrictions, my routine is changed. Gearing up means leaving the headphones on my desk, ready to shake my ears open as I stretch my legs and pound the pavement. I go running in the park ready to leave behind the sonic vacuum of online classes and meetings and to let my ears traverse freely across the soundscape. I run in the park now not to escape, but to feel a sense of belonging: to be present in a social space. And the sound of my footsteps is what connects me to this space.

The park as a soundscape

Somewhere among the debates and experiments regarding the meaning and substance of musical sound, some creative souls turned their attention to the environment with the intention of presenting the everyday as sonic artwork. Early works in soundscape recording and anecdotal sound in electronic music composition paved the way for a reimagining of the mundane as potentially extraordinary. Soundscape is now a term bound up with connections that are multi-sensory, social, political, and personal. Ingold argues that soundscape is an overused term. It is not the thing that we hear, but what we hear *in*: a metaphysical space for us to be immersed in and to experience through the act of listening (Ingold 2007: 11). Vikman summarizes that soundscape is "not a neutral field but...something ethically framed and intelligible only in relation to specific cultural and historical conditions" (Jarviuoma and

Vikman 2013: 645). Throughout my praxiography of running and listening to the park, I have become aware of the ways in which my footsteps resonate differently according to social and environmental forces at play. And it is not just my own sounds that change - the sounds that we experience, or the sonic environment that we are listening and participating *in*, and the way that we listen, are both in flux. Mindful listening to the acoustical space of the park is an active undertaking.

Movement as a method of soundscape appreciation: the sound walk

The idea of movement both within and through a sonic environment is a central component to my research. Traditional soundscape recordings focused on a single auditory vantage point - that of the composer-collector and their microphone. A listener would be lead through various sounds to create a picture of sound events which were chosen for their value by the composer. Another method of listening, the soundscape, allowed listeners to have a more subjective encounter with a soundscape. By being able to engage directly and inquisitively with sound by moving within it, a soundscape becomes subjective and highly personal. Rather than letting the sound of the world flow past, the moving listener explores the territory and reacts to it, emphasizing the relationship between listening and sound making that so often goes unconsidered. Moving through the soundscape also allows the observer to understand changes in the acoustic "**borders of a territory**"(J-K 2013 p.654).

Jarviuoma modified the approach by using sensory memory walks, which encouraged participants to consider the interaction of their senses and the power of reminiscence (J-V 2013 p.649). This broader multi-sensory method of perception uncovers networks that move across time and space to bring a richer meaning to sound in a given place. The way in which one encounters a soundscape - either through as a recording or musical composition or as an environment that one is engaged with and moving within, can change our perceptions as a listener. Jarviuoma refers to the **living soundscape** which exists only in its location and cannot be properly captured in recording, so the sounds as heard *in situ* must be compared with the sounds picked up in the recording (2013: 653). While I ran through the park I was immersed in the sounds of everything that was outside of myself. However on listening to my recordings I realized that the microphone is flooded with sonic imagery from my own

making: my breathing, my wind breaking swishing back and forth, and of course the sound of my footsteps.

The sound-run as a method of soundscape participation

My act of collecting recordings while on my sound runs continues to build into a body of data about the sounds that are happening within the park. It is also tracking the sound of my own body as it moves through this space. My footsteps are a sound mark that cannot be removed, so I must own them as integral part of the sound world. This sound is important because it announces my presence to others. While others may not notice my proximity visually, the sound of my footsteps is a cue for them to move to the side, or hold their breath, or perhaps simply to look up from their phone for a second. The interaction of our sounds in the recordings is also a recording of being. While we may shut our eyes and imagine that we are somewhere else, it is the sounds that surround us which keep us firmly placed in reality.

Marie Abe - and the importance of walking or moving in a space:

Just as environments change over time, our ways of sounding and listening also transform. Ethnomusicologist Marie Abe, in her discussion of the Japanese marching group of musicians employed as advertisers, states that chindon-ya only belong to a space when they are moving in it (2018: 36). Their identity is tied up with movement just as much as it is with their music making and product promotion. To draw a crude parallel, my presence as a runner in the park disappears when I stop moving and I become something else. She relates this way of being to Lefebvre's "rhythmanalysis", which she summarizes as "a way of listening to social relations and physical surroundings together, while making various patterns of temporal organization —biological, cultural, individual, collective, etc.—into presences"(2018: 54). Abe quotes the following passage directly from Lefebvre:

A rhythmanalyst “listens to a house, a street, a town, as an audience listens to a symphony . . . [and] integrates these things—this wall, this table, these trees—in a dramatic becoming, in an ensemble full of meaning, transforming them no longer into diverse things, but into presences” (2004, 22–23) (in Abe 2018: 61).

The implication is that sounds are pervasive if we are attuned to them, and they can transmit information well beyond the environmental to a wide variety of narratives and connections. For our current subject, the sounds present in the park are actually what **make up** the park. Each sound is connected to an actor, a presence, an event or a reaction. Sound and movement is a way in which social space is created, delineated, or (dis-)organized.

LaBelle and the sidewalk

"As a mediating space, the sidewalk draws out an acoustical flux of so many occurrences and events. It teems with energy, frictions, and noises to form a sonorous fabric signaling the ongoing flow of life." "In the city, the sidewalk seems to overwhelm or disregard the dichotomy of silence and noise with a general hubbub rising and falling through the day and night. Pockets of intensity, zones of volume, shifting gradations of acoustical flow that makes the sidewalk a sort of sound membrane contoured by the noise of the street on one side and the buildings on the other. "(LaBelle 2019: 65)

In Acoustic Territories, LaBelle expounds on the meaning of the sidewalk as a listened to and performed space. His sidewalk is one that divides the intimacy of our homes with shared public space, where we may still be isolated but are also fully exposed. What makes the sidewalk (or park path) interesting as a social space is the shared activity of movement. His notion that each of us has our own beat as we move about our individual courses and schedules, while a bit cliché, still resonates. The path in Macka Park differs slightly in that it is not interrupted with traffic crossings, store fronts, and entryways; however its sonic and social characteristics are quite similar and shares this idea of a simultaneously private and public mode of existence. People are occupied in their social groups and attending to their own interests, with little direct connection with outsiders. Coincidentally, 'outsiders', is, in fact what everyone is in the park - are we not all outside? What connects everyone on the path is some kind of movement, which is most often accompanied by sound. A couple walking along the path, engaged in conversation, certainly won't see me running up from behind (and they may not register my presence if I am moving towards them). It is my footsteps that signal my arrival and passing. And my experience of them is more interesting when I consider the sound of it - a brief bit of overheard conversation that rises and falls as I

move through their vicinity. Sometimes the sounds of voices intermingle with the birds or the dogs - after all, these sounds are all about communication. The way that these sounds which come from outside our expectations, is something La Belle calls over-hearing (2018: 47). The social sonic environment, which the park or sidewalk or concert venue surely is, is made up of the combination of sounds that meet your ear. These sounds break down social, political, and physical barriers and allow us to mix with endless possibilities. As a listener, this way of expanded listening has the potential to be a truly freeing experience. However, sound can also infiltrate and disrupt - and just as a physical object can block the running path, sometimes audio disturbances can disrupt rather than enhance the experience of listening. This mixing of sound and noise, movement and obstacle are in constant flux. LaBelle describes this in relation to the walking on the sidewalk as "...a beat oscillating between the more structured or regimented time of the body and the more spontaneous or improvisatory movements that seek flexibility" (2019: 65). This is observed in the way that some actors in the park have clear action-oriented presences: they are there to run or walk for health or to get from point A to B. Others may be walking aimlessly, drifting from left to right along the path: walking is not their main activity, rather it is usually focused on a conversation, or following the antics of a cat, or the highly frustrating individual with their head down glued to their phone screen. Some of these instances have sonic traces evident in the recording, in the case of conversation or vocalizing to a cat. In the latter case of the phone-obsessed, the sonic signature may be a change in my pace as I try to guess their directionality, or a gasp of surprise when they look up and realize they are on a collision course with reality. LaBelle sums it up poetically: "Alongside taking steps then is the ever-present mesh of acoustical events tickling perception to resonate with or disrupt the private self" (2019: 67).

The Project: Knowing the Park through Running

The soundscape that is the focus of this paper is from an ongoing research project, for the moment entitled *Knowing the Park Through Running*, which began in the fall 2020 semester. It began with an exploration of the acoustemology of Macka Park as I experienced it on my runs. I try to collect at least one recording per week as I pass through the park, with the recording beginning at the entrance near the intersection of Abdi Ipekci Caddesi and Kadirglar Caddesi. From this main entrance, I follow the upper stone path until I reach the end of the park, exiting near the Swiss Hotel. As a procedure, I introduce each recording with

the date and time, and my perceptions about the weather and the level of activity that I perceive around me. On route I now mention two locations, the teleferik and the cafe On Numara, so that I may orient events in the recording more easily. At the end of each run, I record my reactions and thoughts. At a later date, I listen back to the recording, I keep a written journal where I note any discrepancies from what I expected to hear and what the microphone captured, and I add data such as my pace, my cadence (my BPM, if you will), and the weather data. The audio files are arranged chronologically in Ableton Live and lined up so that I may compare the same location at different moments in time. I continue to record weekly (excluding illness, injury, or lockdown), meaning I have accumulated recordings spanning 9 months (October 2020-June 2021).

Knowing the Recording: Adventures in Transcription and Analysis

The current phase of research is based on transcription and analysis, and to attempt to engage with sound art through musical applications. I have focused my attention on a single randomly chosen recording from March 18. Transcriptional methods include an event based multi-channel timeline as used by Qureshi (1987), a variety of applications in Sonic Visualiser including spectrograms and the polyphonic transcription plugin, midi renditions as melody, harmony, and groove in Ableton Live, and a traditional transcription using Western notation on staff paper.

Some of these methods have been more fruit-bearing than others, especially when limited to a single event. Qureshi's videograph timeline approach, where individual actors were transcribed on a separate line to show their activity, proved especially tedious as a listening-only exercise. This method was originally used for transcribing performers and audience activity in concert video recordings in order to better show the cultural context of listening in relation to musical performance in a *qawwali* ritual (1987: 73). As I was already journaling about the sounds, and had no visual recourse, I could only rely on my anecdotal recollections of trying to identify individuals.

The spectrograms in Sonic Visualiser can give visual meaning especially to loud events such as sirens, horns, certain enthusiastic birds, and some voices. Through one tuning of the spectrogram, I was even able to see a physical diagnosis: my gait had become slightly uneven due to tightness in one hip. To follow this down the rabbit hole for a moment, the

tightness in the hip manifested over the recent months of being seated at a desk for attending classes, rather than being able to move about the classroom. While my running mileage has remained consistent with pre-pandemic distances, I walk much less - preferring to spend any available time engaged in running rather than walking. This chain of events appeared to me in the Sonic Visualizer. It wasn't noticeable as an auditory event until I could see it, but now I can hear it - the way my right foot stays in contact with the pavement just fractionally longer. This is not a social or cultural outcome, but one that illustrates the power of sound, when coupled with technology, to teach us more about ourselves. Not only does the pairing of technology help with our understanding of social events, but when I include my personal experiences over time in the park (which span over a decade), I am able to present a stronger analysis. Donna Haraway advocates such "partial, locatable, critical knowledges" as being where "...the possibility of sustained, rational, objective inquiry rests" (1988: 584). Haraway's argument for embodied knowledge is also applicable to sound studies "We need to learn in our bodies...how to attach the objective to our theoretical and political scanners in order to name where we are and are not, in dimensions of mental and physical space we hardly know how to name" (ibid: 582). The idea that we still lack an agreed upon taxonomy in sound studies and electronic music, or that the glossary of terms is ever-expanding to the point that every sound warrants its own definition, should not prevent us from continuing in our pursuit of knowledge. Perhaps this is just a note to self, rather than a general statement of fact. However, the academic world can overwhelm the researcher, so any reminder that individual view points have a place in the generation of knowledge is a welcome statement.

One aspect of the recorded sound, and subsequent attempts at transcription, suffered greatly in comparison with *in situ* experience. These were the background sounds. Schafer presents the concept of soundscapes as being either hi- or low-fidelity, depending on the clarity of sound events present in the environment. Macka Park, being located centrally in Istanbul, falls in the category of lo-fi. While Schafer posits that urban soundscapes lack a clear perspective (1977: 78), LaBelle would argue otherwise: that a multiplicity of perspectives are available and this type of noise-sound raises our awareness of our surroundings, and indeed connects us to things unintended (2018: 47). Augoyard refers to the urban environment as "a reservoir of sound possibilities, an *instrumentarium*" (2014: 8). In

fact both sides to this non-argument are correct. The microphone used in my recordings, just an iPhone held in hand, suffers from lack of clear stereo information but also captures a wealth of input. While many sounds come across clearly and distinctly: horns, voices, dogs, birds, revving motors and so on, there is also a consistent background hum of a mixture of city noises. Schafer refers to this as a “flat line in sound” (1977: 78), where it is present in analysis by a consistent nearly flat sound wave, or by Augoyard as the “drone effect” (2014: 40) where industrial sound mimics the musical. These feature throughout the recording, and are mostly made up of traffic and construction sounds. While the term flat line or drone seems two-dimensional, in reality they were experienced to be quite dynamic *in situ*. I often described the ebb and flow of traffic sounds present in a midday run as wave-like. It appeared as waves to my ears, but was not so evident in the recording. While crossing the park, passing through a break in the tree line seemed to open up the space of these flowing traffic waves. When perceived through the ear of the microphone, these sounds present themselves as a stable background, with subtle shifts in pitch generally caused by the Doppler Effect or some other type of movement. Comparing different recordings also shows that this drone fluctuates with time and weather, an area of further research I intend to pursue.

While all of the styles of transcription were interesting or frustrating in turn, none of them captured the spirit of the park as well as journaling and listening to the recording, in my opinion. My search for accurate representation would go on.

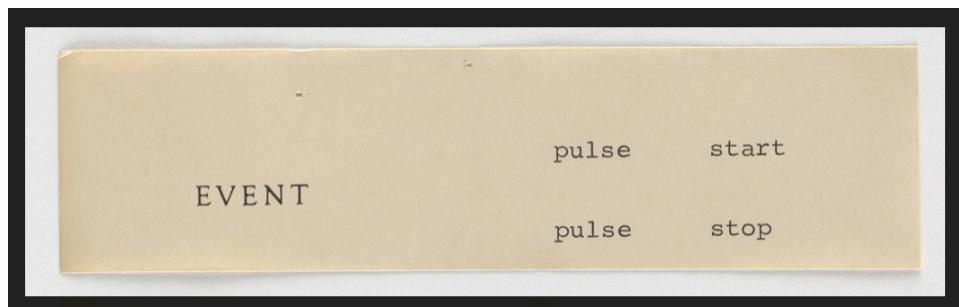
Trying to Tame Something That You Shouldn’t: Where Composition Fails

Sometimes I struggle to generate ideas, and I fall back on traditional, conservative tools. I find this habit both annoying and surprising, given the amount of new music I am normally participating in. An important part of effective creative output is being able to self-critique, and so I include this here. Oftentimes, I attack a problem from a very conservative point of view. Moving forward, I will try to emulate Cage and knock my head against that wall.

While transcribing onto staff paper, I was also trying to simultaneously make compositional decisions. Examples of this inner dialogue include: which instruments best

represent certain sounds, trying to identify octaves, pitch disagreements between my ear and the analytical programs, could I achieve the desired effect using a simplistic approach to rhythmic notation. It was perhaps too much to try and accomplish these tasks concurrently, but the commodity of time was in low supply so it seemed like a good idea at the time. In composing/analyzing this soundscape with the aim of recreating it for instrumental performance, I began by identifying three key standard compositional components: time, foreground, and background. By limiting myself to three simple categories, I felt confident that the process of composition would not get too complicated. Over-thinking or over-categorizing in this part of the process was something I wanted to avoid so that creativity would have a chance to offer solutions as needed. I also considered what instruments I would compose for, settling on flute, trumpet, cello, piano, and percussion. Later I considered incorporating a clarinet and perhaps one of either viola, second cello, or double bass.

First is the steady pulse of the footsteps, which signal the start and end of the soundscape/piece. The use of a steady pulse was a method that I enjoyed and that connected directly with pieces from the Minimalist canon that I am fond of: Steve Reich's *Four Organs* relies on the eighth note pulse of the maracas, his *Music for 18 Musicians* has marimbas 1 and 2 maintaining an eighth note pulse for the entire hour of performance, and Terry Riley's *In C* has pulsating eighth notes throughout. I also thought of George Brecht's work *Event Scores*, which was an early and important contribution to the Fluxus movement.



The second category, background drone (Augoyard) or flat-line (Schafer), was initially contradictory for transcription. Listening back to the recording, through a variety of speakers and headphones, my mind would play tricks. Because I cannot separate the sounds, and as

they seem to have no clear beginning or end, it often created a sense of auditory hallucination as I strained to identify individual actors in the collective din. At the periphery, human and animal sounds would blend into this background space - or at least my brain imagined them to be so. My solution for transcribing, whether for the event timeline or for the traditional notation, was to focus on the clear sound objects, and anything I questioned, I would relegate to the lo-fi rumble. Compositionally, I decided this rumble could best be notated within a pitch range, which fluctuates gently over time, and is intended for an instrument like piano to noodle-around freely with no sense of hierarchy in pitch or rhythm. As the drone covers a range of the low spectrum, this multi-dimensional semi-improvisatory approach to interpretation seemed appropriate.

** Discussion of atmos(phere) would be applicable here. In fact the sound of the atmosphere may be included here as it melds together into a texture / timbre which has variations from day to day (refer to the Lucier reading or Kahn)*

The third element are foreground random events - although most are connected to time scales much larger than my 5 minute traversing of the park. The social, environmental, political, historical, and occasionally unquantifiable connections between people, dogs, birds, activities, airplanes and ferries -simply cannot be done justice through a single soundscape recording. For more information on the social structures present in the park's dynamics please refer to Salsgiver (2021). By being captured and reduced to a single recording, these actors are removed from their periodicity and their sounds appear as chaotic or random. This disconnect between sound and meaning is central to soundscape debate, and LaBelle puts it as "The recording of place often leads to contrary results, for to bring place to life one has to contend with the interferences of its very representation, mediation, and ultimate dislocation" (LaBelle 2015: 197).

It was precisely with this third component of the soundscape that this exercise in instrumental composition based in transcription became a great frustration. The park's meaning was being lost, the unfolding nature of environmental sounds felt entirely forced, and time was running out. I longed for more time, or a better way. Fortunately, I had a musical ace up my sleeve.

When in Doubt, Improvise!

The very act of trying to accurately depict the sounds of the park seemed to utterly destroy the meaning of those sounds. I recognize that, yes, I could very much indicate exactly a car horn or a bird or imitate the shape of a snippet of conversation - but should I? It felt like a Quantum Paradox: by writing these moments down it seemed like they ceased to exist. What to do? I took a step back.

I considered a compositional experiment undertaken in a previous aspect of this project. In this approach, I had used the main elements listed above and interpreted them as Luc Ferrari's remembered sounds. Unlike anecdotal sounds, "where the landscape tells itself, here a traveler discovers a landscape and tries to evoke it like musical landscape" (Ferrari: 2002). This conceptual approach also rings true with LaBelle's idea that acoustic ecology and soundscape are not just about the sounds, but how we work within technology and imagination to expose and uncover them (2015: 203). Composing here became more tied up with performance, which suited my relationship to music and to the park well. For this version, following an intensive listening session, and re-reading of my running journal, I retuned my electric guitar so that the open string would resonate in the Eb of the moving teleferik. I recorded in Ableton Live several independent and individual improvised tracks using an E-bow to produce waves of sound with harmonic shifts. To this I added some improvised gestures using crotales and pipes with delay and panning. And finally, I added a maraca pulse timed to match my running cadence. I did not listen until everything was recorded, and worked with these limited sounds to create something which felt like the experience of running in the park for me.

That project had a very personal orientation around my experience in the park; however this time I wanted to uncover the multiplicity of sounding and perceiving that is present in the park. Taking a cue from the success of the improvisatory approach, I asked (assigned) the MIAM Improvisation Ensemble (MIE) to interpret my recording. In our pandemic-isolated method of musical creation, we were already exploring ways of creating works that let us feel

as if we were performing together. For this piece, entitled *Run With Me*, performers were given the audio recording and the following performance instruction:

Join me on a run through Macka park, from March 18. Please play along with the original audio recording, interpreting the event in any way you want. You can highlight events that you hear, reply to a bit of conversation, focus on the mood, or blend in with the background noise for example. After everyone has recorded, I will combine the tracks and remove the original to create a performance of my recording. Use any instrument you are comfortable with.

In addition, performers were requested to write a short reflection on the experience. Everyone recorded without knowing what the other performers were doing, and I collected the tracks into an Ableton Live session. I waited until all files were received to listen, and in the initial pass I made some volume and gain adjustments. The result, as has been the case with nearly every long-distance project with the MIE, far exceeded my expectations. It captured the feeling of Truax's acoustic community, "a bounded space where the shared experience of sound creates identity and interaction" (Truax: 2010). Improvisers shared in the role of collaborative composition through their performances, which were united through the soundscape recording.

LaBelle suggests that soundscape composers are working within Michel Chion's reduced listening, where we look at a sound's qualities rather than its source or meaning; however he also immediately points out that this is contradictory as the essence of soundscape is in its location (2015: 204). Is it possible to separate the meaning of sounds from a location that one has been deeply submerged in? These two aspects need not be exclusive, and in fact are a way to meld the musical interpretation with the nostalgic. Locations and actions that take place in them are suggestions, and those suggestions can trigger both the creative imagination and the memory. Musical interpretation is a many-faceted thing, and I do not suggest I can define how it functions, except that all sounds, pitches, gestures are all fodder for the musical mind. In *Run With Me*, with its location being the MIAM adjacent Macka Park, this acoustic environment is one that the performers have encountered often, although from their own

perspective. These sounds may have previously been heard as ubiquitous, however as we are not meeting at the university for over a year now, the response from the ensemble seemed to find comfort in this familiar sound world: it induced a sense of nostalgia. It can also be suggested that as many of the sounds are familiar, the performers were more adept at interpreting them musically, and the more likely the performer was to inflect their own remembered sound narrative from their own experiences in this park. By reinterpreting the soundscape, the performers acted as listeners-turned-participants, and perhaps due to their comfort with improvisational language and listening, they were able to strike a balance between sound making and listening, expression and impression, that Westerkamp prizes in the linking of listener and composer to a soundscape (2002: 56).

In Five Village Soundscapes, it is stated that those who are from within a community will hear a soundscape differently to someone from outside; and that those differences will increase as "cultural separation" increases (Schafer 1977: 307). I'm not sure how I can gauge this in regards to my project. So far, my audience as well as my interpreters have been familiar with the location. Those who were unfamiliar with Istanbul - friends from overseas that supposedly listened online - were enthusiastic about the experience of listening. However, would they have voluntarily listened to a similar soundscape experience if it had not been connected through the bonds of friendship? I ask this because deep down, I still find myself questioning the meaning of what I am doing. I enjoy this project, I am learning a great deal about listening, the environment, and its acoustic properties, but I am not convinced that pursuing this would be perceived as academically viable.

Conclusion

The nature of composing within the soundscape should emphasize a similar state of mind to that which is had when listening to the environment. The role of flow, multiple fleeting points of input, atmosphere, all induce a certain way of listening. Bill Fontana writes:

I began my artistic career as a composer. What began to interest me was not so much the music I could write, but the states of mind I would experience when I felt musical enough to compose. In these moments when I became musical, all the sounds around

me also became musical. The act of listening became a way of making music.

(undated)

As I listen back to my footsteps echoing through months of recordings, I am aware of how the simple act of running has allowed me to improve as a listener. The social mingling of sounds resonates differently today than it would have two years ago, as these social interactions became something nearly forgotten.

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