

MOVEMENT, MEMORY & THE SENSES IN SOUNDSCAPE STUDIES

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1. INTRODUCTION

This presentation will explore how the practice of soundwalking can be a tool for memory retrieval. I ask: How are memories created and remembered in the mind and *felt* within the body? What happens to our perception of self, home, and knowing as we move through spaces and places of significance? I aim to explore the subject of memory and movement within the context of soundscape studies; these notions require an understanding of how we “hear” the past and re-evoked our acoustic memories as we move and act through our environment. Traditional methods for recalling the past involve mainly visual cues and focus on materiality—we look to photographs and hold personal objects, etc.—while remaining visual-centered and localized. I suggest that it is the physical act of moving our body through meaningful environments that unifies the senses, places and knowing and that brings together the local past into the present experience (Casey 1987). My main focus is to understand the ways in which people remember—both as individuals and as groups. This presentation explores how the production of memory and act of remembering are evoked during the process of memory walks (or soundwalks) as a way of understanding and engaging with the world.

2. CONTEXT: ACOUSTIC COMMUNICATION

Barry Truax’s text, *Acoustic Communication*, describes the concept of an acoustic community—where sound functions positively in the locale to create a unifying relationship with the environment. Acoustic cues and signals are aural reminders and temporal nods to the rhythms of daily life; they help define an area spatially, temporally, socially and culturally. An acoustic community is thus linked and defined by such sounds that signify not only daily and seasonal cycles, but also the shared activities, rituals and dominant institutions of the area. A community with good acoustic definition can easily recognize, identify and derive meaning from the soundscape. In his second chapter, Truax examines the importance of recollecting historical sounds, expanding on the World Soundscape Project’s notion of “carwitness accounts”. Such accounts reveal how different sounds provide useful information, patterns of association and, perhaps most importantly, which sounds are meaningful enough to be remembered. What Truax is interested in is “the way in which sounds are stored in memory, not separately, but in association with their original context, betray[ing] a fundamental aspect of the listening

process” (Truax 2001a). In this vein, it is important to examine cultural “soundmarks” and Schafer’s “sound romances”.

3. DISCUSSION: MOVEMENT & MEMORY

By walking, we are in a dialogue with the environment; both literally and figuratively, we re-situate ourselves into our story. Anthropologist, Jo Lee, suggests that the act of “walking can be understood as a personal biography: the body moves, in part, due to its links between past, present and future in a life” (Lee 2004). This understanding of place as constituted by movement, memory and biography is a new concept, emerging from such interdisciplinary fields as: soundscape studies (Järviluoma; Hyvarinen; Truax; Kyto; Vikman), ecological anthropology (Ingold; Lee), and ecological psychology (Gibson). In addition, the effects of the practice of walking on memory retrieval have been studied within such disciplines as: psychology, education, social sciences, health and medicine and gerontology (Stones; Dawe). These health studies show that there is strong evidence for an exercise-memory link (Eisner 2004). More importantly, however, they reveal that the body is capable of recovering memory through movement and specifically through the practice of walking.

3.1 Soundwalking

The exploration of soundwalks have been used as an important tool for aural awareness by scholars within the field of acoustic ecology and communication (Schafer; Westerkamp; Smith; Järviluoma; Southworth). Soundwalking is an exploration of sound with the intent of active listening—hearing all environmental sounds while moving in and throughout the environment. I suggest it is not just the act of walking, but the embodiment (Csordas; Feld) of the walk—or the emplacement (Howes; Pink) of the walk—that re-evokes our remembering. Memory is not merely activated through the visual surveillance of landscape, but by our interrelated perceptual understandings and bodily movements—of being in and engaging with the physical and sensory environment—this includes our aural perception and other sensory outlets.

3.2 Nostalgia & the Moment of Recollection

Through the practice of soundwalks, I am interested in how the experience of sound, companioned with the act of walking, affects our sense of time, place and

personhood. What does movement in our environment do during that moment of recollection? To understand this, we must understand that memory is contextual; moreover, the past is constantly being mediated and produced through memory work. The moment of recollection and the concept of nostalgia are thus important to examine.

4. POSSIBLE CONCLUSIONS

This presentation demonstrates that there is a need to examine the relationships between memory, the senses and movement from the viewpoint of embodied sound cognition and the practice of soundwalking. Soundscape studies include an empirical understanding of the senses as interrelated and interconnected; the discipline's theoretical framework has historically explored aural sensibility, perception, and knowledge and has utilized the practice of soundwalks to walk and engage with others. Since the discursive terrain of sensory ethnography (Pink 2009) is part of a new and growing paradigm in ethnographic and scholarly practice, soundscape researchers have an opportunity to voice what other disciplines have previously failed to account for. The question then becomes one of methodology: How do we learn about other people's sensory embodied knowing and remembering? And, in turn, how do researchers situate their own sensory emplacement and memory in relation to the people that they study? What this paper offers, then, is an exploration of walking and listening with others and how the practice of soundwalking can be a method of understanding, itself: "the record of the walk, and of the experience it affords, is just as important—and just as valid a source of field material—as the record of the 'discourse' that might have accompanied it" (Lee & Ingold 2006).

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AUTHORS NOTES

Jennifer Schine is a graduate student in the School of Communication at Simon Fraser University. Her research investigates concepts of identity, memory and movement within the field of acoustic communication and soundscape studies. She is interested in the relationships between audio heritage, listening practices, sensory experience and other worldviews.