Urban Song Paths: place resounding

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The project *Urban Song Paths* took a traditional musical form, the Kaluli song path from Papua, New Guinea, and translated it for a contemporary urban situation. *The Two Rivers Project* explored a classic song path subject, the route of a waterway, in terms of two London rivers. A sense of place, the journey and the importance of the human voice were transferred from the Kaluli song path tradition into *The Two Rivers Project*, but other factors were necessary to create a truly urban song path form. Notions of dislocation, true and false memory, the changing functions of place and the unconscious effects of city zones were addressed by this work.

1. INTRODUCTION

My work is based on walking, listening and reacting to environmental sounds with vocal improvisation. *Vocal Strolls* was a project that consisted of my interactions with the London soundscape. The project named *Urban Song Paths* is an extended form of these soundwalks, which attempts to address matters relating to the natural, cultural and historical origins and uses of a location. This exploration has developed ideas drawn from acoustic ecology, land art, phonography, anthropology, philosophy of place, and histories of walking and of London.

An interest in environmental sounds led me to consider methods of exploring environments and interacting with them. As voice is my mode of expression, I wanted the interaction to be between soundscape and singing. I began by making field recordings and overdubbing vocals later, but this proved unsatisfactory. I describe the challenges faced in trying to create soundscape work that could incorporate a vocal element and the conclusions reached in the Canadian sound magazine *Musicworks*: 'Looking for simplicity, I returned to improvisation and the sonic pleasures that walking can provide' (Corringham 2003: 23).

The *Vocal Strolls* project, fully described in *Musicworks*, comprised soundwalks, recorded in binaural stereo, in which the soundscape and voice operated concurrently. I performed alone, without audience. The environment was companion, resource, instrument, processing and effects. The walks meandered through supermarkets, stations, busy streets, churches, markets, and other locations. Recordings were disseminated via audio CD (Corringham 2002) and radio broadcasts (BBC Radio 3 and Resonance FM).

2. THE KALULI SONG PATH

Studies done by anthropologist Steven Feld, as described in *The Book of Music and Nature* and *Senses of Place*, were the trigger for the *Urban Song Paths* project. Feld has studied the Kaluli people of Bosavi, Papua New Guinea, and has described their practice of song paths, the poetic song texts through which a series of named places are sung, and that take listeners on a journey through a local area. Each genre of Kaluli song involves different contexts for performance and occasions of use, but all genres include, as a key textual common base, paths of place-names that feature prominently in the text.

The flow of these poetic song paths is emotionally and physically linked to the sensual flow of the singing voice, and in performance, the flow of voice merging with the flow of sung place-names creates what Feld describes as 'waterfalls of song, a sense of place resounding' (Feld 1996: 92).

Song paths may start far away and end at the singer, or start at the singer and lead far or close by. They may be dense with names of places or they may name only particular progressions of waterways, or small shrubs. Some may insert the sounds of those waterways in place of the names. Song paths may follow the course of bird flight paths, wander beside creeks, stick to more major walking paths, or follow the course of hills, ridges, and high places.

Through song, a Kaluli listener 'is suspended into places, passes along and through them, makes an interiorised macro-tour in the internalised micro-space-time of listening. Path naming creates a context for imaging prior, contiguous, and continuous, though not necessarily linear, sets of placed connections' (Feld 1996: 125).

The evocative power of the song path depends on how the place narrative emotionally resonates with personal, biographical and historical self-consciousness for listeners. Quoting anthropologist Keith Basso, Feld contends that: 'place-names may be

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used to summon forth an enormous range of mental and emotional associations – associations of time and space, of history and events, of persons and social activities, of oneself and stages in one's life' (*ibid.*).

Song paths differ from song lines, which are interwoven path-stories of the Australian aborigines, each path connected to a song and each song connected to one or more mythological stories telling of the origins of mankind.

Song paths operate as maps of place names. Places are placed in memory and related to cultural identity. Places embody cultural memory; they 'place' memory. Ultimately, the song path embodies the notion that 'Knowing where you are is knowing who you are' (Feld 2001).

3. URBAN SONG PATHS – *THE TWO RIVERS PROJECT*

The combination of journey, the voice and a sense of place, inherent in the song path form, resonated with my own concerns, and investigations began into creating a contemporary, urban form of the traditional song path. The city has long been an essential presence in my soundwalks. *Vocal Strolls* seemed to belong in the human-made cacophony of a city with its traffic and machine drones and squeals: 'The fact of the human presence and its relation to London's soundscape is clearly embodied in this work. That presence created the tumult that sometimes drowns out the human voice and sometimes becomes a complex and perfect accompaniment to it. Issues of acoustic ecology vie with an aesthetic enjoyment of urban noise' (Corringham 2003: 25).

I became interested in ideas expressed by the Italian urban art workshop known collectively as *Stalker*, who engage in 'transurbance', journeys to discover the inside of the city. In his excellent book on walking artists, *Walkscapes*, Francesco Careri describes the aim: 'To observe the new metropolitan territories with a gaze free of that reassuring framework that is our culture' (Careri 2002: 178).

It seemed that the task of urbanising the song path form would necessitate a re-negotiation of its traditional approach to culture and ancestry. I examined the notion that to know where you are is to know who you are, in relation to the city of London, where most of my colleagues and I have no family history but choose to live, in some cases to escape our backgrounds. This place may not embody our cultural memory or identity. In fact, many inhabitants experience a sense of displacement and rootless-ness. It seemed vital for my urban song path work to embody this, avoiding a nostalgic or folksy approach.

The keynote in my walking practice is my presence in the place. In a sense I walk through my selected public spaces as someone who is there 'under false pretences', i.e. not for the usual reasons of workplace, home or recreation, and I wanted to try and reflect this outsider role.

The Two Rivers Project used the model of the urban song path to address these aims and took as its starting point a common Kaluli song path route – the waterway. I made excursions along two waterway paths: the Fleet, one of London's 'lost' rivers, and the Lea, still flowing above ground. These rivers were selected as they have been important to London and have inspired much artistic work.

An essential element in this project was the repetition of walks in order to fully engage with the route. Each route was walked between fifteen and twenty times, yet on every occasion the experience was unique. Weather conditions affected the sound of the location; personal factors of mood or health and a growing familiarity with the area affected my responses. Repetition offered opportunities of sonic exploration, the gradual unfolding of personal discovery, and also the possibility of revealing 'hidden secrets' within the location. Land artist Andy Goldsworthy asserts: 'Real change is best understood by staying in one place. When I travel I see differences rather than change' (Goldsworthy 2002).

In Tufnell and Wilson's book on walking artist Hamish Fulton, he affirms an interest in '. . . walks that go over the same route every day. My greatest inspiration for repeat walks are the present-day marathon monks of Mount Hiei in Japan' (Tufnell and Wilson 2002: 109).

3.1. The River Fleet

London has many lost rivers, which have now disappeared or exist only in underground pipes, such as the River Fleet. Its sources were the ponds on Hampstead Heath, from where it ran to the River Thames via Smithfield Meat Market, where it was used to wash away blood and entrails. Generally described as filthy and stinking, it was eventually piped in and still flows underground.

The Fleet is extremely well documented, especially my selected section from the old Clerk's Well, near Farringdon Station, to the Thames by Blackfriars Bridge, where the arch of its present tunnel can be seen by leaning over the side of the embankment. I had often walked this route and imagined the river in its pipe beneath my feet, so it was selected for this first urban song path project.

I began by walking the route repeatedly, responding both to the current environment and to my awareness of the subterranean Fleet with vocal improvisations, recorded to minidisc via binaural microphones. It soon became clear that relevant texts were necessary, in order to keep myself focused on the Fleet. These were taken from the writings of John Stove, Jonathan

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Swift, Arnold Bennett, William Hogarth, Henry Lacey, Lord Grey, Ben Johnson, Ned Ward in the London Spy, a Daily Courant of 1741, a Gentleman's Magazine of 1736, Victorian artist Anthony Crosby, and an unknown doctor in 1560. They were arranged in order of location.

My route began at the site of the former Clerk's Well, crossing Clerkenwell Road into Turnmill Street. From Cowcross Street, the walk crossed Farringdon Road into Greville Street and turned into an alley, Saffron Hill. Passing near to Smithfields Meat Market, Farringdon Street led through Holborn Viaduct, down New Bridge Street until reaching Blackfriars Station. Passing under a subway, the walk ended at the Thames.

Selected quotations were arranged to occur, either sung or spoken, at their appropriate locations. At first I used the texts as they were, and tried to find a suitable method of delivering them. I wanted to avoid a dramatic or operatic approach, preferring that certain words and images should jump out at the listener from time to time, emerging from and blending back into improvisation. A set of instructions was created that determined which text should be used and the method of its delivery. Initially infrequent and whispered, words became semi-audible as they described the Smithfield boar incident, building up into a fast improvisation on the theme of disgust in the section of the walk before Holborn Viaduct, and soaring into a long tone under the echoing bridge. Another block of text was whispered in a sibilant manner through the subway, leading to a poem sung quite sweetly like a nursery rhyme beside the Thames.

I considered the significance of the Fleet's story to me and I was keen to ensure that improvisations should relate not only to the heard soundscape but also to a notion of Fleet-ness. I wondered what this might be, and experimented holding different mental images as I walked the route, such as the fact that the river is hidden and its liquidity. After many excursions I began to feel a real sense of walking over the top of this river. Vocalisations became watery, and in the subway I could experience the odd sense of merging with the Fleet, which must have been quite close by, its pipe at a similar depth to where I walked. On one occasion, after heavy rain, the environment was rich with liquid sounds.

I also attempted to embody both the early texts' disgust for what was almost an open sewer, and later writers' nostalgia for the river's disappearance. While this inner focus on the River Fleet was helpful, the work was more satisfactory when sounds around me were also used as a guide to text delivery. Words might be whispered, wailed with a police siren or roared with a motorbike. I found the improvisations richer when words struggled to be heard.

So far I had walked the route of the lost Fleet sequentially, as in the Kaluli song path method. The next important stage for my project was to investigate other methods of working with song path structures to incorporate the notion of displacement and to avoid sentimental attempts at recreation of a rural folk tradition. The project needed to reflect the fact that most Londoners do not inhabit a logical, sequential city, but a series of small, often unrelated areas within it; work may be far from home and reached via the disorientation of underground trains. Methods included developing strategies for dislocations within the route and for the creation of what could be called 'false memories'.[1]

3.1.1. False memories and displacement

In addition to the use of texts and sung improvisation, street names had been incorporated into my soundings. I experimented with a false sequence of names, listing the streets alphabetically, to create a different truth through the different relation of words to each other. I named streets as I walked, as though they existed in this order.

The next method proved more productive and became a permanent feature of the Fleet song path. It consisted of placing ancient street names that no longer exist alongside current names. In this manner, I named both the place and the memory of the place, taking the listener on a journey that exists simultaneously in reality, in memory and also in association.

Two synchronised walks using identical texts but recorded on different occasions were combined. Each walk arrived at a certain key stage on the route in a specified number of minutes, texts being voiced at their proper locations but not timed. While one of the timed walks went into an underground station and through a subway, the second remained outdoors, to create an acoustic disjunction. Texts and voices overlapped and intersected in surprising and effective ways, resulting in a sense of disorientation for the listener.

Using these two recordings and a third that comprised a spoken description of the route as it was walked, a piece was created for a performance on surround-sound speakers. The three recordings were assigned to six speakers and played live. The aim was to experience how it would be to hear three walks simultaneously with enough separation to listen to elements of each. The layering of the different walks was immersive, with overlapping words and incidental harmonies and dissonances. However, for me the traffic noise was intolerable when all around, and the important sense of the movement of a journey was lost.

[1]My use of the term false memory is unrelated to the technical term used in psychology.

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Even the most vivid memory may be in some sense false; within the collected texts on the River Fleet, some writers remembered its filth and others its breadth and grandeur. On the last three walks of the Fleet series, I introduced my own 'false memories' by using only words and phrases that I could remember from my core text. The ambiguity of memory and the co-existence of truth and falseness within it became incorporated into this project through my faulty remembrance of this multi-layered text, which by then included the original contradictory writings on the Fleet, current and defunct street names, and a list of found objects collected on the route.

These objects generally consisted of street litter that had caught my attention and which seemed to incorporate characteristics of the route. On the Fleet walk I collected freshly strewn advertisements and gaudy packaging covered in text. Mute ship's rope and ancient broken objects were far more common on the Lea. These found objects became part of the documentation process, which also included texts, maps and photographs.

These texts had become layers of different realities to trigger memories and senses and thoughts. They were uttered in location, according to where the words usually occurred or where the objects had been found, insofar as I remembered. This method felt very strong and appropriate. Reciting the texts from memory allowed me to locate myself in an inner space of memory and association.

The notion of displacement remained important. I had experimented with cut-up texts in order to interrupt a narrative reading. This created some interesting and atmospheric juxtapositions. However, a literal dislocation of the route proved to be more productive. In this approach, walks were edited together to create an impossible route, with a corresponding false map in which streets were cut and pasted together.

The standard Fleet walk was recorded from Turnmill Street until just past Holborn Viaduct. To avoid ten minutes of loud traffic, there then occurred a break in recording until Watergate, at the south end of New Bridge Street, where recording was resumed, continuing through the subway to end at the River Thames.

In this natural break, the listener could be taken on a literal and metaphorical detour, the juxtaposition of locations reflected in the false map. Three different detour routes were examined. The first was to London's Carnaby Street, a pedestrianised tourist centre. Despite my distaste for the area, it has a personal resonance, as I had first visited it from my hometown when it was at the heart of 'Swinging London', and I had come to buy crushed velvet trousers, symbols of the time. Then the street and I embraced the Punk ethos, my next visit was for fluorescent socks, and so it went on. I wrote a text that named my acquisitions through the years in this Street, tracing our connected histories. The sudden diminution of traffic, my slower walking rate, and the switch from Fleet to personal history draw the listener in and create a sense of the imparting of a secret.

The second diversion was down steps to the sea in Turkey. Water, cicadas and my feet loud in the sleepy soundscape combined to create a feeling that the everyday world had simply fallen away and the listener had stepped into a dream.

The third diversion was a street market, also in Turkey and became selected as the most successful Fleet detour. The transition is quite dislocating, as the character of the sounds is very different, mainly vocal, and obviously in an unexpected language. To increase the effect of displacement, in the two Turkish diversions, I continued to name streets as though I was continuing the Fleet walk. Names such as 'New Bridge Street', and 'Watergate' acquired new resonance when spoken near ocean waves.

3.1.2. Strategies for improvisation

Two separate methods of improvisation had developed during the River Fleet work. The first was a conceptual approach that informed the use of texts, in which the nature and quality of utterance most appropriate for each section and location were researched and then implemented through simple instructions. The second was entirely intuitive and occurred in improvisations with the soundscape, where rapid response to a changing environment was crucial.

To unite these two methods of working, strategies for this second type of interactive improvisation were devised, based on object-cues. This centred on objects noticed on the route, but ones with a temporary nature, such as litter. The use of simple visual cues allowed the focus to remain in the present and vocal reaction to remain fast.

Cues were assigned to the three primary colours. Types of improvisation cued included vocal mimesis of the soundscape, textural sounds, melody, the rhythm of my footsteps and short or long utterances. I tried this method several times, varying the cues, and found it worked aesthetically and conceptually. It was incorporated into all the later Fleet walks. Once the cue system was integrated with the methods of dislocation and false memory, the series seemed complete.

3.2. The River Lea

The river Lea (or Lee) runs from Hertfordshire to the River Thames in East London. Evidence of Bronze and Iron Age settlements have been found, and during the ninth century the river formed part of the boundary between Saxon England and Viking-held land. For centuries, the Lea was an important highway for

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goods such as malt, flour, coal and gunpowder. Slaughterhouses, gas works, armament and chemical factories were located on its banks. Trains and lorries eventually took the cargoes away from the river but industries still line its banks. Despite plans to turn the Lea Valley into a leafy recreational park, there have been scandals of contaminated land, and author Iain Sinclair, in *London Orbital*, describes the area as 'ever-so-slightly-poisoned territory' (Sinclair 2002: 33).

The second route of *The Two Rivers Project* was selected to compare the soundscapes of an existing with a lost London river. To parallel the Fleet journey, the song path ended at the confluence with the Thames. Four rivers flow on the surface: the Lea, Ravensbourne, Wandle and Beverley Brook, but only the Lea has pedestrian access. The walk was to have begun near Bromley-by-Bow, but after five minutes the path ended at a junk-yard. All attempts to rejoin the river failed and this section had to be abandoned. Therefore, the route of the River Lea song path began at the bridge after Canning Town station and followed the signed river-walk, which starts by the riverside, goes through a chemical factory, returns briefly to the water then veers down a road before the final access to Trinity Buoy Wharf and the Thames.

The difference in environmental sounds between this walk and the city-based Fleet walk was striking. Traffic still dominated in places but unlike the city walk, there was almost no human sound, while the industries created hisses, drones and bangs. There were occasional quiet areas where water birds could be clearly heard but an undertow of mechanical noise was always present. Planes passed overhead frequently, giving another dimension to the sphere of sound. Mostly I was alone, which created a freedom for singing and led to unselfconscious interactions with sound-making objects I encountered on the route, such as sticks on railings.

An odd similarity with the Fleet walk is that both are river walks in which the river itself is silent. As the River Fleet exists only in an underground pipe this is not surprising, but the Lea flows above ground and might be expected to be audible, yet cannot be heard above the sounds of industry and traffic until its arrival at the Thames.

My improvisational methods again began with listening and intuitively responding to the heard soundscape. My concern is to directly interact with the environment, not to use it as an unusual backing track for vocalisation, and to draw attention to everyday sounds, rather than to my own processes. The potential for ambiguity within this role is described in *Musicworks*: 'My purpose may be to focus attention on the sounds around me, but by setting out to explore the acoustic properties of a space. I need to be sure that I don't use that space simply as a sound processor for the voice. That would disturb the delicate balance I am trying to create between voice and soundscape' (Corringham 2003). I attempt to remain in an equal sonic relationship with the place though either of us may temporarily dominate.

Using methodology from the Fleet walks, I transcribed recorded descriptions of the route as I walked it, from both visual and sonic perspectives, and I began to incorporate texts into the improvisations. These were drawn from writings on London and oral history (see website references). Texts began to evolve into lists as I used them on the walk: lists of former industries, of cargoes carried and of objects I had collected for documentation. These single words, or occasionally phrases, required a different approach to delivery from the narrative texts of the Fleet walk. Among other experiments, I sang them to the rhythm of my footsteps, distorted them to the limit of recognition and also spoke them clearly but superimposed vocal filtering effects. A breakthrough was the stereo method discussed later in section 3.3, 'The music of walking'.

3.2.1. A sense of place

There was only one street name on this route, so locations became defined for me by my intuitive response to them. This lack of external definitions engendered stronger personal identification, aversions and attractions within the walk, leading to a more psychogeographical approach than had been the case with the Fleet. Psychogeography is the study of the specific effects of geographical environments on the emotions and behaviour of individuals. This term was first used by Guy Debord in his *Théorie de la Dérive* (Debord 1956), which described the practice of drifting, getting lost in the city, or *dérive*. According to the Lettrists, who preceded the Situationist International group, 'from a *dérive* point of view cities have psychogeographical contours, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes that strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones' (Careri 2002: 98).

A similar approach is that of anthropologist Keith H. Basso who, in the book *Senses of Place*, describes how 'places possess a marked capacity for triggering acts of self-reflection, inspiring thoughts about who one presently is, or memories of who one used to be, or musings on who one might become' (Basso 1996).

3.2.2. The route

After repeated walking, my route by the Lea seemed to naturally divide into five sections, each of which instilled certain sensations to which I reacted both vocally and physically. I created a map of the walk based on this notion, and began to develop areas of

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sounding appropriate to each demarcated zone. In this sense, I performed to a musical score.

The walk began at the first area where it was possible to stand by the river after leaving Canning Town station. The sight and sound of rushes, birds and open space always induced an intense feeling of well being that led to a physical stillness in me and also affected vocal improvisations. These became related to natural and peaceful sounds.

The second stage of the route veered close by a roundabout with thunderous heavy traffic. My discomfort and urge to hurry past produced recordings in which fast breathing and tension are clearly heard. These qualities became the basis for this section of the 'score', which also included naming previous and current industries that belong to Iain Sinclair's previously mentioned 'ever-so-slightly-poisoned' list.

The third stage circumnavigated a large factory in which Futurist Luigi Russolo's 1913 manifesto *The Art of Noises* comes to life: 'the gurglings of water, air and gas inside metallic pipes, the rumblings and rattlings of engines breathing with obvious animal spirits' (Russolo 1913). I was attracted to this strange environment and produced sounds incorporating breath techniques that might reflect such spirits.

Unable to remain by the river, which continued through the factory, stage four led down a road in which abandoned buildings embodied the beauty of dereliction. These empty public spaces of a city 'represent the last place where it is possible to get lost within the city, the last place where we can feel we are beyond surveillance and control, in dilated, extraneous spaces . . .' (Careri 2002: 184).

Anti-yuppie statements were scrawled on a wall, and the dubious benefits of regeneration will surely come, but at present this area exists in a transient state of functionless-ness, irrelevant to the city and outside of its time. Objects collected here were intriguing: an advert in which the only legible words were 'lost music', some oddly twisted lengths of plastic strip, and several different types of ships' ropes, recalling the river. These became the basis of texts sung here, the improvisation attempting to recollect the river's presence through echoes of earlier singing.

The last section of the walk was on Trinity Buoy Wharf, at the confluence of Lea and Thames. The sudden open space after the road walk was startling and made my presence feel insignificant. This was reflected in physical stillness and minimal use of voice.

After many walks, I became frustrated that the area by the river from Canning Town station to the first stage on my map was closed for construction work, and I began to include a journey by Docklands Light Railway, which hugs the riverbank, as a possible prologue to the piece. The train's speed caused me to consider earlier forms of river transport. Names of these and their cargoes were incorporated into improvisations that reflected both the sound of the train and a restless sense of not yet being in place. Eventually, however, this prologue was deemed superfluous to the piece and was discarded.

3.2.3. Dislocation

The notion of dislocation had been addressed in the Fleet work, but did not become an important element of the Lea section of the project. One reason for this decision was that the Lea area seemed to have little relation to the city of London and the concerns of its citizens, therefore there appeared to be no reason to reflect views on the experience of displacement in city living. A sequential, non-dislocated route was therefore preferred.

The Lea Valley itself seems to exist in a state of dislocation. Unusual for London in that it still contains areas of wasteland and 'useless' space, it is a strange area from where the fantasy future London of the Canary Wharf complex can be clearly seen. Francesco Careri comments: 'Urban space time has different speeds, from the stasis of the centres to the continuous transformation of the margins' (Careri 2002: 183).

In contrast to my concerns with history, displacement and memory on the River Fleet walk, my approach here took the psychogeographical form previously described: attractions and aversions became intimately connected with specific locations. My presence and reactions on the route became the basis for the work. On the sense of nostalgia and attachment to a place in which we do not belong, Lucy Lippard, in her book *The Lure of the Local*, observes: 'A "sense of place" has become not just a cliché but a kind of intellectual property, a way for non-belongers to belong momentarily' (Lippard 1997: 33).

Lippard also claims that we live today on a threshold between 'alienated displacement from and longing for home' (*ibid.*: 20). In this limbo, it seems that city walkers might have learned a kind of scanning ability as survival technique, the ability to know an unfamiliar place quickly and adapt to it. This adaptation may well produce the subliminal emotions and behaviours described by psychogeography.

3.2.4. My role in the location

At the start of work on *The Two Rivers Project*, I was concerned to address issues on my role within the chosen environment, my own dislocation and sense of being there 'under false pretences'. On the Fleet walk, almost all other people were engaged in work or work breaks. The location functioned largely as *interplace* (Casey 1996: 39), intermediate space between work and home or work and lunch place, its significance mainly found in the provision of work, sustenance

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and transport. I too was working but the speed and manner of my transit was unusual, as was my relation with the space and focus on the lost river. The Lea walk was very different. It presented an almost depopulated landscape, in which human function or sense of dislocation seemed irrelevant. Having lost its original purpose as navigational route, the Lea still had not been assigned a new role, despite much promotional literature on new leisure parks. Certainly, the route I mapped lacked fishermen, walkers or anyone indulging in any kind of recreational activity. Workers were generally inside trucks, behind windows at factory gates or on boats at the Thames wharf. In this environment, the only thing 'wrong' with my presence was the repetition of an apparently motiveless ramble, and eventually I found myself acknowledged by construction workers and viewed with slight suspicion by factory guards. However, as there was no generally agreed code of human behaviour in this space, I had no sense of transgression. I was no more there under false pretences than anyone else.

3.3. The music of walking

I have referred to the notion of musical improvisation as a form that celebrates the moment. Perhaps the act of walking could also be considered in this light, as Iain Sinclair suggests: 'The joy of these days out lay in the heightened experience of present tense actuality' (Sinclair 2002: 120).

Motion allows a certain mental freedom that translates a place to a person kinaesthetically, and intimately connected to the body's movement is the voice, as Douglas Kahn asserts in *Noise, Water, Meat*: 'Speak of the voice per se and one necessarily speaks of the body' (Kahn 1999).

Sinclair uses a musical term to describe his own walk, the fugue, although his context is the book *Mad Travellers (Reflections on the Reality of Transient Mental Illnesses)* by Ian Hacking, which gives an account of seemingly random walks undertaken by French labourers in the late nineteenth century and offers the notion of an hysterical fugue as explanation.

Both the spontaneous composition of music on a walk and the walk itself share certain characteristics. Each requires negotiation of its territory, adaptation to current circumstances, compromises with unexpected change, and sudden divergence from original intention if necessary. If there is a score, then it and the map initially need to be studied and followed, becoming familiar and finally unnecessary with repetition, remembered and misremembered instructions being integrated into the whole.

The improvisational methods used in this project were entirely context based and it was necessary to develop a new language of improvisation in order to achieve a close accord of musical content with location. Previous work valued spontaneous response to other musicians or to soundscape, but the repeated walks of *The Two Rivers Project*, while still retaining spontaneity, could create a deeper relationship with and understanding of the terrain they crossed. This resulted in a greater complexity of sound making, in terms of both aims and achievements.

Physical factors also impacted on improvisational methods. As the act of walking the River Lea route changed speed according to personal reaction to locations, hurrying by certain areas and lingering in others, so breathing audibly quickened and relaxed, affecting the degree of control over the voice. The tempo and tone of this audible breath were exaggerated to reinforce the sense of discomfort in certain regions. Technical factors related to the use of binaural microphones also affect vocalisations: as the microphones sit close to the mouth, the voice may drown out the soundscape unless vocal volume is controlled, and certain types of utterance, such as overtone production, are avoided as they frequently cause distortion.

My approach to playback altered over the course of this project. Initially I favoured listening with headphones, to reproduce the three-dimensionality of sounds as I had originally heard them, which through stereo speakers flattened, their direction of travel less clear.

In the River Fleet walk, headphones offered a kind of protection to the listener, an invitation to walk inside my head across the road, at a safe distance from the monstrous traffic. For the listener, headphones create the ultimate private acoustic space in which sounds not only circulate around the listener, they seem to emanate from points in the cranium itself. Music writer Evan Eisenberg discusses his experience of listening through headphones: 'While it is hard to say whether my self has expanded or the world has imploded, the violent privacy of the experience makes the sense of implosion stronger . . . Another result is that I do not seem to be listening to the music so much as playing it' (Eisenberg 2001: 52–3).

However, speakers were to become the playback method of choice for the River Lea recordings because of the characteristics of the territory. In the open, amorphous environment of the Lea, I had less awareness of myself as an enclosed entity, sometimes having a sense of merging into the landscape. This personal dislocation led to development of a technique that had begun as a kind of enjoyable stereo trick, in which use of the hand to cover one side of the mouth can direct the voice to left or right microphone. Rapid hand movement results in dizzying vocal leaps between a listener's ears. When the recording is played back over stereo speakers, the singer seems to divide into two people separated by some distance, and the precise

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location of the human within the territory cannot be determined. This sense of dissolving boundaries seemed appropriate to the River Lea walk, so after more experimentation, the technique was incorporated. In the second zone, my place of aversion, I directed text into first one microphone and then the other, creating a disturbing illusion of two voices, and at the third stage breath-based improvisations were swirled between left and right microphones to echo the disembodied mythic spirit of the factory chimneys.

For a listener, each of the two river song paths has a different sonic character. The Fleet walk is dominated by traffic and human noise. My sound making is fairly constant throughout, sometimes becoming submerged and then re-emerging. The use of text blends into other human communication in the multi-layered street soundscape. In the Lea walk, there is more variety of sound within the environment. The voice retains its clarity over the quieter sounds, becoming the focus of attention when singing, but remaining silent between the discrete sections.

Improvisation remained key; it would have been possible to select portions from several walks to create the 'perfect' product, but that would not have suited my intentions. Each time I walk, the walk is subtly different, affected by factors such as the direction of the wind, my own well-being, the dampness of the air and other small sonic shifts. My aim is to sing the walk as it actually is at the time I walk it. (Exceptions are the 'dislocations' introduced into the Fleet River walk, but even then the detour leaves and returns to the same walk.) Each recording made is as valid as that made on any other day, though ultimately aesthetic choice will lead to one being more favoured than another.

4. PLACE RESOUNDING

The Two Rivers Project took as its basis a traditional musical form, the Kaluli song path, and translated it for a contemporary urban situation. Using a classic song path subject, the route of a waterway, two very different London rivers were explored, one of which no longer exists on the surface. The project questioned how an ethnographic study on 'waterfalls of song' (Feld 1996: 92) might be relevant for 'those of us enclosed in a world where everybody seems to be on the move, displaced or disemplaced' (Geertz 1996: 260).

A key element of the traditional song path was considered to be highly relevant: that sense of place which, according to social scientist Clifford Geertz, seems barely diminished in the contemporary world: 'For it is still the case that no one lives in the world in general. Everybody, even the exiled, the drifting, the diaspora, or the perpetually moving, lives in some confined and limited stretch of it – the world around here' (*ibid.*: 262).

This sense of place, the journey and the importance of the human voice were effectively transferred from the Kaluli song path tradition into *The Two Rivers Project*, but other factors were necessary to create a truly urban song path form. Notions of dislocation, true and false memory, the changing cultural functions of place and the unconscious effects of city zones were addressed by this work. Land art, walking art and acoustic ecology were perceived as relevant, with particular attention given to theories of the Dadaists, Surrealists and Situationists.

The act of walking, 'an ordinary one from which the extraordinary can be derived' (Solnitt 2001) was important to *The Two Rivers Project* and related to previous work such as *Vocal Strolls*. This most natural and everyday human act was adopted in order to explore environments and be emplaced within them in a very direct way.

Yet ultimately the strongest element in *The Two Rivers Project* was sound; the live improvised interaction of human with sonic landscape. Through many repetitions of the same walk a deep personal engagement with the particular characteristics of each of the two selected locations was formed. Certain vocal utterances, text and moods became associated with specific regions. By the end of *The Two Rivers Project*, a new approach to vocal improvisation had developed, incorporating techniques to move the voice around the aural landscape and responding to psychic as well as sonic factors.

The project I am currently working on, *Shadow-walks*, seeks to extend work previously done on psychogeography and memory, and to further develop the context-based, vocal improvised music. I invite members of the public to share their 'special' walks with me, leading me on a walk that has some significance in their lives. Then I re-tread the route, trying to walk and sing as if through the filter of the other person's experience, while remaining aware of the present reality of my own walk and its unique sonic landscape.

The final sound-work is made available as an audio-walk that combines elements of the original shared walk and my later solo walks. Participants slide between the triple realities of three journeys – their own, my walk leader's and mine, as they listen to intimate human vocalisations conveying layers of human experience, association and memory.

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