

Strolling through Soundscapes

Remystifying the City with Personal Audio

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ABSTRACT

The 19th century concept of the flâneur describes a personal city walk as an exploration of urban mysteries. Contemporary cities have lost their affordance of mystery and exploration to the paradigm of rationalization of society and public space. There is no room for Flâneurism in contemporary cityscapes. However, media and sound scholars and artists hypothesize that the addition of musical sounds can highly influence a subject's perception of the surroundings. On the basis of a case study with five subjects and in-depth interviews, comparing experiences of non-musical and musical city walks, I can conclude that the application of musical audio walks can make for a remystification of a rationalized environment by putting the walker in a flâneur perspective, and therefore evoking richer observations, associations and memories with their surroundings. Traversing the city engulfed in a personal acoustic bubble therefore allows a digitally augmented flâneur experience that should drive considerations towards the application of soundwalks in the future.

KEYWORDS

Flâneur, Soundwalk, Rationalization, Remystification, Future City

INTRODUCTION

I really hate commuting during rush hours. Extrapolating from the facial expressions of most people I see at Utrecht Central Station during such commutes: probably everyone does – the stress for being on time, the lack of personal (seating) space, the odour of other travellers, and way too many elbows. But how does the scene change when one puts on some light piano music on their noise-cancelling headphones: The busy train station becomes a stage on which skilfully trained actors perform a highly complex choreography of moving, and pushing, and struggling through space.

Walter Benjamin considered the 20th century as making the *flâneur*, that “sovereign spectator going about the city in order to find the things which will occupy his gaze and thus complete his otherwise incomplete identity” (Tester 1994, 7) through “flânerie, the activity of strolling and looking” (1) an essentially “bygone figure” (13). The described commuter experience is the pinnacle of this development. According to Benjamin, the contemporary cities - unlike Baudelaire's Paris - are structured after the “rationality of Capitalism” with “no spaces of mystery for the flâneur [left] to

observe”, since “with rationalization, all mystery is removed from the city” (13). Thinking of busy public places (e.g. Utrecht Central Station), it seems intuitive to agree with Benjamin’s examination of how traversing an urban environment leaves nothing to the imagination, as one is too preoccupied with all the signs to read, and rational procedures to anticipate and perform correctly. The city turned into an obstacle to overcome, which makes the city walk a mere “passing from here to there, as fast as one can manage, preferably without stopping, better still looking around” (Baumann 1994, 148).

However, when Kevin Lynch in the 1950s undertook a 5-year investigation into how city dwellers read their environment, and create an image of the city, he found that these city images can be “soaked in memories and meanings” (Lynch 1977, 1). They are “generalized mental picture[s] of the exterior physical world” (4) that serve as “a broad frame of reference, an organizer of activity or belief or knowledge” (4) and that are of “emotional importance” (4) to the individual. Since the image is mainly acquired through traversing the city on foot, “walking is currently high on both policy and academic agendas” (Middleton 2011, 90), as it serves the citizen “as a method of understanding the city” (Macauley 2000, 211).

But do the smart cities of the 21st century afford this emotional connection with space? And, if not: What could be done to make the future city more a space for people like the flâneur?

In April 2015 I was lucky to participate in a workshop by sound artist Duncan Speakman¹. We test-walked a piece of music meant to be incorporated in a so-called ‘soundwalk’, as a work-in-progress. For 10 minutes we aimlessly wandered through the streets, letting the music steer and guide us. For me the experience was remarkable: Instead of dangerous traffic and ugly construction sites I saw energetic movement and cinematic scenes. The noise of the city was cancelled out by the partly bombastic orchestration of the audio piece. Tourists and passers-by were no longer obstacles I wanted to avoid, but living storylines, instantiations of the vivid city’s urban narrative. I was amazed by how exciting and adventurous a mere city walk could be.

The medium of the soundwalk as “a creative and research practice that involves listening [...] while moving through a place at walking pace” (McCartney 2010, 212) and as such the soundwalk “creates a sonic bubble around the listener” (233). This affords an “extension of perceptive potential” (Chambers 2004, 100) towards sensing the “invisible digital sound layer [added] to the existing architecture” (Behrendt 2014, 189) and therefore seems like a promising tool for remystification of the city. I hypothesize that the additional stimulation from the music might be able to overcome the omnipresent rational understanding of the surroundings and enable urban strollers to discover new aspects of their well-known environments. To explore this idea I will

¹ <http://duncanspeakman.net/> and <http://wearecircumstance.com/>

undertake a case study on Duncan Speakman's audio piece *SittingStillMoving*, guided by the research question: "How is the experience of a city walk influenced by adding personal music?"

This paper has two parts: In the first part I attempt to reach an understanding of the cultural persona of the flâneur and the different aspects and developments of flânerie in classic theory and investigate how this concept is resumed in contemporary academic discourse on city walking. I will then introduce the concept of soundwalks and how mobile music can influence people's perception of the city, their attitude towards the urban environment and their relationship to other people. I end this literature review with a hypothesis on how these concepts can be connected, by directing attention towards the way audiowalks can enrich a city walk and improve the city's value as a living space for people, and specifically pedestrians.

The second part of the paper is the case study of Duncan Speakman's audio walk piece *SittingStillMoving*. I chose this piece due to its creative background and testimony given by people who listened to it. I will report on a small series of semi-structured interviews I conducted of subjects who participated in both a regular non-audio and an audio citywalk. I will use the comparison of reports on the experience of both different kinds of walks as an exploration towards how soundwalks could help remystifying the future city for the sake of its inhabitants

THE FLANEUR IN THEORY

The Concept's Origin in 19th century Paris

As Cultural Studies scholar Keith Tester lays out in the introduction to his monography "The Flâneur" (Tester 1994), the origin of the flâneur persona can be found in Baudelaire's poems on the historic Paris in the 19th century. The author expressed his "poetic [...] vision of the public places and spaces" (2) in the description of a (male) poet, who's "passion and [...] profession is to merge with the crowd" (3), to go out into the public streetlife in search for meaning. The poet (or flâneur) attempts to understand what is going on and make meaning of what he sees. The role of the flâneur therefore is an active one that surpasses that of a mere observer. Since the flâneur craves for this kind of urban mystery that he can attach meaning to, Tester goes so far as to call him a "metropolitan vampire" (19) on the hunt for urban discoveries that he desperately needs to fill his own emptiness (7).

The concept of the flâneur is not homogenous in the writings of different authors and in the everyday understanding the word "flâneur". Probably originating from the Scandinavian "flana", which means "thoughtlessly wandering" (Keidel 2006), flâneur stands for the much less theory-inflated concept of taking a walk without a specific purpose and therefore being easily distracted by whatever casts the stroller's attention. However, even this less complicated reading of the term

seems to fit with Baudelaire's perspective, who, as Keidel argues, attests the flâneur a pre-conventional perspective, much like the one children have when they first explore a new environment. The flâneur does not need more than his curiosity in his city and the crowd around him. Therefore, much like the mentioned child, he is not interested in the objective reality of his surroundings. Rather the meaning he attaches to his sensations is purely subjective and a reflexion of his own identity.

The Elements of Flânerism – What is it about Walking?

The primary mode of the flâneur when engaging with the city is that of a city walk. In order to understand this flânerism and be able to conduct contemporary research on it, it is necessary to connect the original theory with contemporary writing on the flâneur and tease out which aspects of walking the city are of relevance to the concept. When it comes to engagement in the observed city scenes the descriptions differ: some scholars describe the flâneur as an outsider who “see[s] everything without partaking actively in anything” (Gleber 2012, 130) or as a “lonely figure [...] who watches the spectacle of modern life” (Küppers 1999, 308) and thinks his own thoughts while observing others. De Certeau however, in his study of everyday city life (de Certeau 1984), sees the flâneur not in an isolated position, because “to get to grips with everyday life, we have to be part of it, to experience it, engage with it.” (Lavery 2005, 152) The city walk is a “form of concrete participation” (152), therefore level and kind of interaction with city life should be an interesting aspect of the city walk.

In all writing, the essence of flânerie is the observant walk in the city streets that distinguishes the flâneur from “most of us [who] have the experience of framing our world-view through the car window (or the TV screen), dissociating from the content of our surroundings” (Küppers 1990, 309), or see walking merely as a “locomotive means to very particular ends” (Lorimer 2010, 19), namely getting from one place to another. The flâneur is capable of subjective meaning-making of the everyday city scenes, because “walking permits [...] embodied knowledge, [...] it compels the walker to be physically present in the space she observes.” (Lavery 2005, 152). Especially the physical limitations to a walking speed seem to be important in this, as several authors note that it was a fad in 19th century flânerie to bring a turtle on the walk, which would then dictate the stroller's walking speed and slow him down to a tempo that allows extensive observing (Tester 1994, 15; Küppers 1999, 311). Speed and perception of time therefore seem to be relevant aspects of the city walk, just like the absence of a clear destination.

The moderate speed of movement also might be what gives the flâneur enough time and serenity to focus his mental forces on seeing things others do not see and being a “reflective critic of his city, a close analyst of its architecture, a collector of scenes and images” (Gleber 2012, 130). It can be

expected that a city walker of this kind is able to create some special impressions of the buildings and sites of the urban scenes for himself. However, physical walking in the streets is impeded in the ever-growing modern cityscape, when, as already Robert Musil mentions in his writings, the flâneur is distracted by the noises of the motorized city and threatened by omnipresent traffic of the urban streets (Tester 1994, 11). It should be relevant to observe to what extent this aspect of urbanity inhibits the city walker in his experience.

The Flâneur Dies in the Modern City

Already in the classic literature, the position of the flâneur is seen to be endangered by the rise of the paradigm of rationality (Tester 1994) that gives city scenes a definite meaning and leaves nothing to discover for the strolling observer. Baudelaire's poet is dissatisfied by familiarity and predefined purposes. He is not interested in finding "an order which is imposed on the city as if by necessity" (13), but needs to discover unfabricated meaning by himself. Benjamin even labels the flâneur a "bygone figure" (13) that cannot be extrapolated from the context of 19th century Paris, because in the contemporary cities of his time the "rationality of capitalism and [...] commodification and the circulation of commodities itself defined the meaning of existence in the city so that there remained no spaces of mystery for the flâneur to observe" (Tester 1994, 13). In accordance to that, Musil states: "the flâneur dies in the modern city" (Musil in Tester 1994, 16).

This situation seems to mostly have remained the same as "[city] walking is still largely positioned as a homogeneous and largely self-evident means of getting from one place to another" (Middleton 2011). Beginning with the Situationist International, autotelic city walking (there in form of the drift) has been used as a disruption of streamlined city life (Sadler 2001) and is still considered a subversive tactic that "allows participants to counter the increasingly rational organization of the city" (Hind 2015). The survival of the flâneur, and therefore the citizen's ability to meaningfully relate to everyday city life, depends to an extent on the affordance of discovering the city's mystery by foot.

THE POSSIBILITIES OF SOUNDWALKS

Andra McCartney defines soundwalks as "a creative and research practice that involves listening and sometimes recording while moving through a place at walking pace" (McCartney 2010, 212). As an example she quotes *Aura*, an elaborate interactive audio walk where users follow or avoid each other's paths in an urban location and draw a soundmap of their walking route (Symons 2009). While there are several other projects of similar complexity, I will only focus on the effects private music via headphones can have on the walker, as the use of personal audio is becoming more and more ubiquitous (Bull 2000) and, as long as the user is walking, can already be considered a soundwalk.

Soundwalks and the Flâneur

Sound scholars argue that in the experience of the city and urban culture, the visual sense is dominant, also in respect to the relation to other city dwellers (McCartney 2010, 223 and Bull 2000, 71, 85). However, as Chambers states in his pioneering text on *The Aural Walk*, listening to music, especially on headphones, is an “intensely private experience” and therefore a “refusal of public exchange” (Chambers 2004, 100). McCartney elaborates that listening to headphone music “creates a sonic bubble around the listener, giving him the privilege of privacy and anonymity” (McCartney 2010, 233). Linking back to what constitutes the flâneur perspective it is relevant that Bull notes how the listener of private music becomes detached from the scene she is walking in and therefore assumes a kind of observer position (Bull 2000, 77). This is further facilitated by the headphones cancelling out distracting city noises, which can make users “see more clearly through the use of personal stereo” (Bull 2000, 82). As Chambers puts it: “Such refusal of public exchange and apparent regression to individual solitude also involves an unsuspected series of extensions [...], the extension of perceptive potential” (Chambers 2004, 100).

The main effect of listening to music while taking a walk therefore seems to be that the experience of the urban environment is mediated by the music that “works to rearrange the senses producing an experience of being ‘one step removed’ from the physical world” (Bull 2000, 73). Research on the mentioned example *Aura* showed that the soundwalk “adds an invisible digital sound layer to the existing architecture”, “changes [the listeners] perception” and “provokes [her] to reexamine [her] senses” (Behrendt 2014, 189). Since the listener vision is influenced by the audio, intense episodes in the music can highlight certain visual impressions (McCartney 2010, 224). Bull further mentions that listeners might develop their own “sense of time and movement” according to the music that might “differ from that of the outside world.” (Bull 2000, 80) That reminds one of the flâneur’s turtles.

Put together, these affordances for perception alteration of private music can lead to people feeling they are inside a movie scene, rather than in ordinary life. Bull even says that “music [...] appears to be the necessary spark to a spectrum of aesthetic recreations of [...] experiences” (2000, 96). Listeners reported an “attempted control of the environment or mood and the reappropriation or reassertation of the power of the user” (80), which indicates a very active role users take on in the creation their personal filmic experiences. In other words: the soundwalk listener actively makes meaning of his musically mediated vision, just like Baudelaire’s poet made meaning of the observed mysteries in the city, which Bull sums up in calling the soundwalkers “technologized flâneurs” (85). However, with the strong effect music has on the walkers, there is the worry that “the immediacy of the personal stereo experience overrides the functioning of the other senses which become subordinate to the vivid mental and physical experience of listening to music” (79), like in

Aura where some users reported that they prioritized the soundworld over their physical surroundings (Behrendt 2014, 199). This led some participants to get afraid of the dangers (e.g. traffic) of the outside world and inhibited their experience (202).

Extension of Perceptive Potential

According to the literature, listening to music while taking a walk has great influence on the walker's perception with the chance to see things that would normally remain unseen and the danger of becoming too involved in the music. People can be expected to "shift between attaching new meaning to what they see and creating an internal experience out of the music where the external world isn't really attended to" (Bull 2000, 96) and therefore should have the potential to allow the user to break free from the repression of the rationalized city.

CASE STUDY: "SITTINGSTILLMOVING"

The Cinematic Audio Piece "SittingStillMoving"

I chose *SittingStillMoving* as the object for this paper's case study, because of my personal experience with the audio walk that I already reported on in the introduction. The intensely orchestrated music seems to be strong stimulation for experiencing cinematic scenes on a city walk. *SittingStillMoving* was originally composed by sound artist Duncan Speakman to explore how people's actions and especially walking can be influenced and steered by a musical score with the absence of explicit narrative. It was finally implemented as the background score of an audio experience of the same name at the *Guangzhou Young* tramline in Guangzhou, China. The music, interwoven with sounds of the environment and vocal narration of stories of locals, augments the view passengers of the tram have as they move through the city. It is supposed to make "the windows of the tram become like a cinema screen as an evocative soundtrack makes the passing world into an imaginary film."²

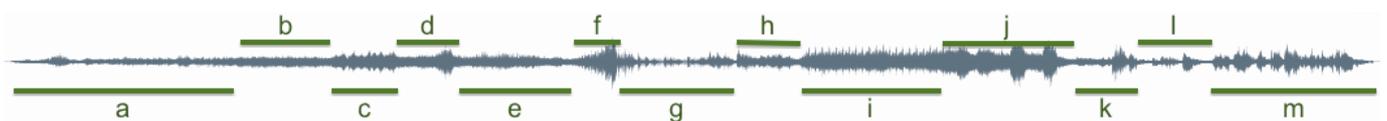


Fig. 1 – Visualization of volume levels in *SittingStillMoving*

The whole audio piece contains no lyrics. The music starts with ambient, calm piano that is joined by single strokes on a string instrument (see fig. 1³: a, 0:00 – 1:34). The piano then retreats into the

² <http://en.timesmuseum.org/programmes/detail/id-521/>

³ This image is produced by a free online programme, so its complete accuracy should not be taken for granted, but it does serve the illustrative purpose of this article.

background and another more driving instrument (that I cannot identify, but reminds me of fast-paced footsteps) takes over the lead with a slight increase in volume (b, 1:34 – 2:22), which is later accompanied by more intense playing of the string instrument and further increase in volume (c, 2:22 – 2:50). The unknown instrument (which I would describe as electronic, like 8-bit) then becomes the loudest again with a changed melody that invokes associations with sci-fi and spaceships in me. After a moment it is joined by the piano, which replaces the string instrument. Some background white noise is added (d, 2:50 – 3:18). The electronic instrument then returns to the footstep melody, accompanied by repetitive piano play which grows in intensity before finally retreating into the background, when another electronic instrument enters the track (e, 3:18 – 4:07). Then the strings return and lead the music to a peak in volume (f, 4:07 – 4:26), after which all instruments fall quiet and some kind of very dry sounding electronic drum dictates a rather fast beat that is later joined by warm and soft strings (g, 4:26 – 5:17). After another short moment of silence the beat goes on varyingly and the music becomes fuller as more string instruments join together with some echoing electronic effects. In the end of this part one of the string instruments plays with an own melody in the foreground (h, 5:17 – 5:44). The melody then becomes very dominant and is joined by more and more instruments, which makes the music increase in volume and generates a very cinematic and full sound (i, 5:44 – 6:45). The foreground is taken over by a melodically singing female voice, accompanied by a polyphonic background choir. The singing voice creates four peaks in volumes and intensity, then the music falls quiet again with an effect that sounds like an electric device on low battery (j, 6:45 – 7:46). A very soft string instrument takes over and increases in volume (k, 7:46 – 8:04) until the music all of a sudden becomes very ambient again and is only carried by a very soft wind instrument and some minimalistic guitar strokes (l, 8:04 – 8:40). The last part mostly consists in two string instruments that alternate in volume and sound like they are telling a sad story until the music fades out (m, 8:40 – 10:03). To me the music seems to have narrative potential, because of the many ups-and-downs and the broad alteration in volume.

The testimonies⁴ the other participants gave me when I asked them to describe the music seem to corroborate my own impression:

[...] there is one point in the music where it really sounds medieval. Like the music you could hear in fantasy like *Game of Thrones* series or *Vikings* [...] it really sounds like castles and dragons. (Interview subject 4⁵)

The music felt like a lone walk on Mars [...] It was really like a story in the music. (IS 5)

⁴ For reasons of limited space the collected, transcribed, and coded interview data, i.e. the appendix of this paper, cannot be part of this publication. The interested reader however can find it under <https://remystifyblog.files.wordpress.com/2017/04/dmc-strolling-through-soundscapes.pdf>.

⁵ These indicators refer to the appendix, which can be found under the link in the footnote above.

It can be inferred that the music affords the stimulation of the listener's imagination. Furthermore the subjects also stated that the music influences their experience of the walk:

[...]you think beforehand: "I'm going to make an eventful walk" and the music really amplifies that feeling, really puts you in the process of that. (IS 4)

[...] the music has a certain atmosphere and a certain mood, I guess, I projected the mood on what I saw. (IS 2)

The testimony and my brief analysis of the piece should make *SittingStillMoving* suitable for evoking the effects mentioned in the literature on soundwalks and private audio.

Method

My method is informed by the attempt to underpin the theory-driven hypothesis that private audio can augment a contemporary city walk to afford a flâneur experience, and therefore serve as a potential means for the remystification of future cities by exploiting the more and more ubiquitous digital realm, with an explorative small case study in the real city environment. While this case study, can obviously not claim any statistical significance, it should have the potential to fuel the discourse on city walking and the feasibility of soundwalks for future cities and therefore motivate future and more well-equipped work.

To examine the user experience of a city walk I interviewed several students on their personal experiences on two different walks. The subjects participated as volunteers, and were two females and three males, all students at Dutch universities, and between 21 and 26 years old. I chose these subjects, because all of them were familiar with the city of Utrecht on an everyday basis and all of them are relevant as citizens of a potential future city. I decided for a series of semi-structured interviews on their walking experience, because so far the academic engagement with the phenomenon "lacks a much needed engagement with the actual experience of walking" (Middleton 2011, 90). The setup of the interview sessions was as follows: I asked the subjects to go for a walk outside for 10-15 minutes, walk wherever they want, and not engage in any distracting activities as e.g. putting on music, texting, phoning, or entering shops. I stressed the importance of the serendipitous element and their freedom in their walk, since, even though de Certeau describes city walking as form of tactical resistance of the citizen against the top-down imposed rational strategic order of the city and its architecture (Certeau 1988) and walking is understood as the main mode of civic "engagement with the urban public realm" (Middleton 2011, 93), "it is doubtful that participants understand their daily walking patterns as they commute to work or do the shopping in such terms" (94). Therefore, after the subjects returned to the café I conducted a semi-structured interview under the guiding question: what do people do if they walk without commuting or any clear destination? In the academic literature effort is made to measure walking in standardized ways,

but “there is little relating to the meaning and significance of journeys on foot to different groups and individuals and how these journeys actually unfold” (Middleton 2011, 91). As a study on pedestrian street planning in Copenhagen found: “there is much more to walking than walking... Numbers alone are not an indication of the quality of a place” (Gemzoe 2001, 20). Therefore I asked about how the participants felt and to describe their walk to me in their own words. After their initial description I had them report further on the four elements I found relevant for city walks in the flâneur literature study above: their relationship and interaction with other people, their walking speed and thoughts on their perception of time during the walk, architecture or buildings they remember, and the perceived influence of traffic. Since “sociological work on the flâneur is often heavily theoretical [...] and overburdened with political interpretations” (Emmison and Smith 2000, 174), I tried to record as much as possible in this limited environment on the subjects’ own expressions of their feelings and moods and specifically asked for the emotions they remembered from the walk.

After the first interview I sent the subjects on a second walk. This time I asked them to listen to the audio track *SittingStillMoving* on their headphones from the moment they step out the door and to return when the music finished. I also repeated all limitations from the first walk (see above). After their return I conducted another semi-structured interview based on the same structure. However, this time I additionally asked for perceived differences between the two walks in regards to the mentioned aspects (if the subjects did not mention them on their own), added a question on what effect they think the music had on their perception, mood, and walking, and asked them to describe the music to me.

I transcribed the recorded interviews and coded them to single out the subjects’ statements referring to the aspects setting, subject’s feeling/mood/attitude, relation to others, subject’s thoughts, subject’s perception of time/walking speed, and buildings/sites on the walk. Then I contrasted the statements after the non-audio walk in a table with the statements after the audio walk, grouped by aspect and subject. From this table I will now attempt to flesh out the similarities and differences users reported between non-audio and audio walk to find answers to the question what music can add to the experience of a city walk. In the following section the interview transcripts can be found as block quotes, preceded or followed by my observation and interpretation in normal layout.

Interviews⁶

Feeling/mood/attitude

For most of the subjects the first non-audio walk was already an exceptional experience, as they rarely go outside just for a walk without a specific destination⁷.

It was a bit like a break, [...] that short moment of relaxing, calming down. That was nice. (IS 1a⁸)

I felt relaxed. (IS 2a)

Relaxed, [...] because it was a day of studying and now it was a nice walk. I liked that I just had to walk [...] (IS 3a)

It was really nice, it was a good feeling. (IS 4a)

It's relaxing. (IS 5a)

All subjects found the non-audio walk pleasurable and returned stress-relieved and in a relaxed mood.

[...] the first walk more centered me. [...] During the first walk I focused on myself. (IS 1a)

I was then more in my head than in the beginning of the walk. (IS 3a)

Two of the subjects reported that they were primarily focused on themselves in the first walk, at least after they got accustomed to this unusual way of moving through the city.

The interviewees reported a lot more on the questions regarding feelings and mood after the second walk with added music:

Good, a bit lost in place. Isolation is maybe a good word. [...] the feeling of being lost, [...] it's only a bit of music and it had such big impact. (IS 1b)

I had this bubble around me. (IS 3b)

These two subjects really felt detached from their surroundings, because of the music. For both users the music evoked even more negative feelings:

I just walked and didn't really know where to go and I was mind-wise listening and at the same time I had to decide where to go and that was a bit too much action at some

⁶ The full interview transcripts can be found under <https://remystifyblog.files.wordpress.com/2017/04/dmc-strolling-through-soundscapes.pdf>.

⁷ Though interviews were conducted in English, all interview subjects were non-native English speakers. I decided to not correct their language in order to not distort what they wanted to express by making assumptions.

⁸ "IS xa" refers to excerpts from the first interview series, "IS xb" to excerpts from the second.

moments. It was kind of distracting. [...] this time I didn't have this center. Not I was the middle of the walk, but the music was. (IS 1b)

Not as relaxed as the first time. I don't know why. I was constantly a little bit confused by the sounds that were coming in. (IS 3b)

Both subjects who already felt isolated by the music, also felt stressed or confused and were overwhelmed by the added sound. However, the other three users reported a more pleasant experience:

I was more aware of things around me. I was really consciously looking around what I saw [...] it was more active [...] I was really looking around and instead of just walking I was trying to see things. (IS 2b)

I really noticed more. I remember feeling very different from when I didn't have the audio on. I remember thinking, or feeling this walk was more eventful, like I'm doing something. [I felt] excited. Maybe adventurous [...] When you start your mood is really on a normal level and then the music enhances this and makes you more active [...] I become really active when I have music on. (IS 4b)

I felt more adventurous this time. [...] I felt more focused during the walk. (IS 5b)

It seems like for some listeners the music is able to create a mood that makes the walker open for experiencing the surroundings in a more active way.

There are significant differences between the reports after the first and the second walk: During the non-audio walk the subjects generally felt relaxed and all reported a positive experience. During the second walk, however, some subjects were overwhelmed by the additional input of the music, while others were put into a more active and explorative mood and developed a very open and interested attitude towards their environment.

Relation to others

I saw people, but I didn't interact with them. (IS 1a)

The female I encountered under the Dom had a big scarf, [...] she had brown hair [...] we caught each other's glimpse when we passed, but nothing more. (IS 4a)

It's nice to hear foreign languages, I think. When they talk I don't know what they are saying, but I like the sound of it. (IS 5a)

Most of the interviewees were aware of the presence of other people on the first walk, but did not engage in any interaction that went further than noticing each other. However, one of the subjects had a really open attitude towards others:

I also looked a lot at people. I really had a need to get eye contact. [...] Especially when I walked into a street alone, a quiet street, I really said “Hi” to people. (IS 3a)

The same participant reported being sometimes annoyed by the noise and the interaction attempts from other people in the streets:

But there was one woman, she was homeless, and she was following me. Because I was alone and she wanted to get money. That was quite disturbing. [...] There was a baby crying and I was looking at her and was wondering why she was crying and it was quite annoying (IS 3a)

This user experienced quite a relief when the headphones on the second walk disconnected her from the sound of social life around her:

There was one school of kids, but I didn’t hear them at all. So, I didn’t bother. For example these kids: They were like 20 kids and they were screaming, but I didn’t hear them. They didn’t disturb me at all. And on the first walk this crying child really annoyed me. When I was walking I thought back of meeting that homeless woman and thought it would have been nice to have had the headphones back then, because I could act as if I didn’t hear her then. (IS 3b)

This matches the reports of other users who also felt less connected to the people they met on their second walk:

I didn’t care about them. I noticed that there were people, but I didn’t look at them. I didn’t think about them [...] (IS 1b)

It was my first glance into the store. It was like: “Oh!” And he was just speaking, really. It was like, I had music, so I was more in my own world. And then it was like: “Oh, he is just doing his work.” I was aware that he didn’t hear what I was hearing, so he was in another mood [...] (IS 2b)

Now there was only one woman who saw me smiling and smiled back. And on the other walk it was really a lot of people. (IS 3b)

Even though none of the users really interacted with people on the second walk and some of them felt isolated from the others, they reported more thoughts on other people they saw in the city:

And then there was a man, kneeling on the ground. I was not sure. Should I stop the audio and ask him if he’s alright or should I just go on?” (IS 1b)

[...] there was a guy standing in a store inside. He was on the phone and looked out of the window and I looked at him. And then on the way back he was outside, still on the phone. (IS 2b)

I noticed the photographer sitting on the ground in the last moment, so I had to in a natural way walk around him to not cross the photograph. I noticed two girls crossing

me, going in the other direction and looking me in the eye for a second. There was this really big guy on the square [...], who was suddenly next to me. He was like twenty centimetres taller than me. I was thinking: “Wow, he is really, really big and he is walking close to me.” I was wondering where he was going, what direction. (IS 4b)

I am aware of people going to do stuff. (IS 5b)

It seems like the added audio does not facilitate social interaction with other people, rather it seems to make the city walker feel more detached from others in the streets. However, the users seemed to notice other people more on the second walk where they were not likely to talk to them (already for practical reasons, as they were wearing headphones now), which inspired their imagination and made them remember more thoughts they had about the encounters in the city.

Thoughts

I didn't think about [my day] I just walked, actually. (IS 1a)

I was just looking around, just walking [...] With nothing really on my mind. The first walk I didn't think a lot. (IS 2a)

During the first walk two of the interviewees either had not much on their mind or did not remember what they were thinking about. However, the other subjects did remember some thoughts:

I thought a bit about the Dom. I thought a bit about the architecture. (IS 1a)

I walked by the Dom and it was open and I don't remember I went in once, so I was wondering if I could walk in like that. (IS 3a)

And there was a lawyer office with a chess piece as a logo. And I thought: “Why would you have a chess piece as logo for a lawyer's office?” [...] As I walked under the arch of the Dom there were these four hatchets or something. And I thought: “What were these used for? Like for some oil [...] to be thrown down or something?” (IS 4a)

These two users' thoughts were at least at some point occupied by what they saw and by the implications or meaning of their surroundings. Also two users spent time during the walk to think about their everyday life:

I thought about my [academic] paper. (IS 4a)

What do I all need to do today [...] made a to-do list of stuff I need to do. (IS 5a)

During the second walk the thoughts of the walkers revolved around what they perceived:

I thought things were beautiful [...]: “Oh, beautiful sky, or beautiful building or light. It's nice out here.” [...] with music it was more about things I saw. (IS 2b)

During the walk I was only thinking about the music and what I was seeing and not much other things [...] and I didn't think about that I was cold I didn't have any disturbing thoughts about the work I have to do today. (IS 3b)

Here, none of the subjects asks for the intended purpose of the city surroundings, but their statements rather reflects the more raw input they perceived. The main thoughts reported were on the music and its correlation with the surroundings:

I was thinking about the music and what it does with me. (IS 1b)

I remember that when the music was running I thought about the music and how it matched my surroundings and I sometimes I thought sounds that came through. [...] during the walk I was only thinking about the music and what I was seeing. (IS 3b)

I noticed that my brain started working differently. It was not thinking about stuff too much, but just going with the music, in the same rhythm. (IS 5b)

Most users reported a neutral stance towards this occupation with the added music, but one felt disturbed in her experience:

I really had this feeling that I had to concentrate on this music and I didn't really feel like. (IS 3b)

During the first walk the thoughts of the users differed a lot: some were busy with more rational thoughts about their everyday life, some wondered about the meaning of the signs and implications of their surroundings, and some were just enjoying the relaxation they achieved due to the calmness of just walking without a purpose. After the second walk most people reported reflecting the music and its influence on the walk, so they were definitely aware of the music being there. One user was even overwhelmed by its affordances. Some walkers were able to blank out distracting thoughts and focus more on the raw impressions they got from their senses.

Time/speed

After the first walk most users (with one exception) were surprised how quickly the time went by:

It went over quickly. (IS 1a)

Shorter than I expected it to be. (IS 2a)

It didn't feel like 15 minutes. I don't know how long I have been gone. It went quite fast. (IS 3a)

I thought: "Oh, let me check the time and oh, already 15 minutes." I kind of forgot about the time. (IS 5a)

After the second walk the users gave varied testimony about their perception of time. For some it felt longer, for some shorter:

[It felt] longer than the first time. (IS 1b)

It didn't really feel slow, but I was surprised how much music fits in 10 minutes. (IS 2b)

It was not very long. It felt even shorter than the first time. (IS 3b)

Also it felt really fast or short in comparison to the non-audio walk. (IS 4b)

When it comes to walking speed there are two trends in the reports. Some of the users walked slower, because of their attitude towards their surroundings:

Slower, because I didn't have [an] idea where to go. (IS 1b)

The second one I walked a bit slower. I was more looking around for stuff. (IS 2b)

Others, however felt more like the music steers their tempo:

I think the music made me a little bit hurried. (IS 3b)

[...] music really dictates your pace, because there is a certain tempo and a beat in it, so you're going to walk faster if the music is going to be faster. (IS 4b)

I felt a bit rushed at first. (IS 5b)

In general just walking around the town seems exciting enough for most users to see time fly by, which indicates how unusual of an activity an autotelic city walk might be. The addition of music changes this perception, however, it seems to differ for different people in which direction. All users reported, that the music influenced their walking speed. Some seemed to enjoy it in combination with the increased perceptual awareness of their surroundings, others felt uncomfortable and pushed by the music.

Traffic

I had to watch out for the traffic a little bit. I just wanted to walk wherever. I didn't want to wait or watch out. So, I was just looking around and then thought: "Oh, I have to watch out!" (IS 2a)

It was very busy. Lots of noises, no beautiful sounds, babies crying and cars running. (IS 3a)

I almost ran into a bicycle, but that was because I wasn't paying attention. (IS 4a)

During the first walk three of the interviewee reported that they had been annoyed by the noise and the traffic of the city. In the second walk, when they most likely could not hear the noises anymore, their testimony changed:

I remember, there were some cars. [...] Wasn't the first thing I remembered, though. (IS 3b)

There was also a street working drilling tool. So when the music became louder also the surrounding sound was really bombastic. (IS 4b)

I turned on the music really loud, so I couldn't hear any traffic. [...] Cars looked like they were just floating or something. I couldn't hear them, so I didn't mind. I was walking on the curb, putting one foot before the other foot, because that's fun. You can hold your balance and then I couldn't hold my balance and walked on the street and then I saw a car, but it went by me, easy. (IS 5b)

While the traffic and noises of the city seemed to be a significant distraction for the walker, during the soundwalk the annoyance totally faded. The users did not remember much inconvenience and rather enjoyed the isolation from the outside noises. However, it seems that also the awareness for the potential dangers of traffic faded.

Buildings/sites

I observed my surrounding and now I observed the Dom a bit and looked especially [at] the windows. Parts of the Dom are extremely thin and I wondered how they could do it. (IS 1a)

On the Neude there were cafés and a few stores. There weren't a lot of people, just an empty terrace. I think, [I noticed] the buildings. For example Oudegracht. I like Oudegracht and the buildings. It were old houses and there is water in between. (IS 2a)

I was really looking at all the shop windows and the Dom. (IS 3a)

I was looking at the shops and the buildings. And there is this really ugly building, apartment, in the middle of the street, and it's super ugly. (IS 5a)

The participants were very aware of the buildings they passed by on their first walk and reported a lot of what they saw. However, the statements are very descriptive and do not go further than describing the visual. One user reported, though, that he saw a lot more than he normally would while walking through the city, with his music, to get somewhere specific:

For instance, if you walk to the Drift there is a gym and coffee bar, which is an old church or something, which I never noticed, because I didn't look up. [...] You notice a lot the shops that you normally just pass. [...] When I saw a Tesla car and then my eye just caught some buildings. And there were logos at some houses of companies. I

just checked out what these were. Things where you normally just walk by, they caught your eye. (IS 4a)

After the second walk with the music the users gave lengthy reports on the buildings they saw, but the tone and the focus of their description changed drastically:

There were two statues. Those were interesting. One reminded me of a film, the other one reminded me of something else. (IS 1b)

I saw a street, just an empty street, with just old buildings and beautiful light; you normally just walk through it and don't notice it. And the music was just beautiful and had a beautiful atmosphere. (IS 2b)

There was much more light and that was exactly the moment, when in the music they start singing. So it was really like "Oh!", it went open or something. In that street there was this building and there also was a statue on this building: Atlas with this globe in his hands. And I really was staring up there. In the music there was singing and so it was quiet, I was really impressed by the statue. (IS 3b)

[...] I passed a bed store called "Morpheus", which reminded me of The Matrix in some way, but I know Morpheus is also the Greek god of the dreams. So it just fitted really well into the sounds I was hearing. And when the music became the loudest I was at the conservatory. So it felt like I had to be there at the climax of the stuff. [...] I walked around the corner and there was a photographer on the ground and the light just hit him perfectly. Or it felt like it was perfectly. All of the buildings become more of a scene than just objective buildings. They feel like they fit together. When you walk through a city without audio it feels to me there are just buildings and stuff, but with the audio on it felt like a city, alive. All of the streets and the houses connected in some sort of way. They make up a scene instead of just random objects. (IS 4b)

The city is more awesome with music. [...] I got good memories from it, because I also went there on New Year's Eve and I haven't seen the building since then. It brought me to think about that evening, which was a fun evening. (IS 5b)

While the walkers were aware of the surrounding buildings and sites during both walks, in the first walk they only seemed to notice and reflect their surface. During the second walk however the users rather reported mental associations they had when looking at the scenes, sometimes only loosely connected to what they saw. The music significantly altered their perception of the architecture in the way that it made the buildings look more beautiful, more connected and overall more meaningful. Especially in moments when the music coincidentally fitted the visual scene the users seemed to have the most intense impressions.

CONCLUSION

Conducting an experiment on how to remystify a rationalized and streamlined city already seems problematic when considering the old town of Utrecht as the locus of this investigation: its

architecture is rather quaint, it is fully accessible by foot, and bicycles dominate the traffic. However, from the interviews I conclude that the added music on the second walk indeed did have an effect on how the users perceived their city walk and on all the aspects that are relevant to the experience of *flânerie*. What changed if the city itself was already affording the *flâneur* perspective?

The added music influenced the mood for all participants, but in different ways: while some walkers felt more open for their walk's impressions, others felt overwhelmed and stressed by the partly intense music. Added music therefore seems to put the walker in an active position with decisions to make and scenes to observe. The city ceases to be a passing obstacle, but rather a series of observations that have to be taken on by the observer. On the soundwalk the participants felt less connected to other people in the city and were visually signalling not being available for socializing, as they were wearing headphones, which resulted in less interaction. However, participants reported of assuming an observer position that gave them time and interest to think about the people they encountered and about their stories. Much like the *flâneur*, they became more a "man [or woman or else] of the crowd" (Tester 1994, 9, emphasis in source), an observer that wonders about what they see, instead of getting immersed in being part of it.

On the first walk without the music, people were occupied with more rational thoughts about their everyday obligations and the surface of their surroundings and reported that they did not remember much of what they thought about. After the addition of music, participants reported less goal-oriented thinking, as it mostly revolved around their perceptual sensations. They were very aware of the music, as can be seen from their reflections on how it fitted their visual impressions and how it altered their perception. The participants found their perceptual experience to be more pleasurable than without the music. Second, time went by faster or slower for different users with the addition of music to their city walk and they felt that their walking speed was guided or even dictated by the sound from their headphones. Therefore the added music influenced walking speed and perception of time for all users. A third difference is that during the audio walk, the participants gladly ignored the threats of traffic in the city streets and showed a very relaxed attitude towards this omnipresent danger for the city walker they encountered on the first walk.

The biggest effect of the music could be found in the perception of and reflection on buildings and sites of the city: while the users already described and noticed the surface of the buildings they encountered during the non-audio walk, their reflection became rich with imaginative associations and memories connected to places in the city after the audio walk. Also, the language they used for reporting on their experience became richer and the descriptions more lengthy. After the audio walk, participants had simply a lot more to say about what they saw.

Even though the centre of Utrecht already might afford a flâneur experience thanks to its intriguing architecture and walkability, the participants in my case study were not in the right mind-set to appreciate it. They rarely went on autotelic city walks on their own, and if they were asked to, used up a part of their cognitive ability to plan for the rest of their working days instead of engaging with their surroundings. This whole attitude changed when the personal audio was added and all the participants were more open to discover what is around them and enrich it with their own imagination and meaning making.

This effect, the remystification of known and clearly defined environments, via allowing the user to take on a flâneur attitude, achieved by a very simple application of personal music. Together with the growing availability of wireless internet connection and increasing capability of mobile devices, this should be a strong motivation and inspiration to consider soundwalks as a simple and inexpensive, but powerful art form for making the future city not only smart and sustainable, but also a meaningful space for the people living in it.

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