



Applying Feminist Methodologies in the Sonic Arts: The Soundwalking as a Process

MODALIDADE: COMUNICAÇÃO

SIMPÓSIO: A PRODUÇÃO MUSICAL E SONORA DE MULHERES

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Abstract: This paper proposes the use of soundwalking as a feminist methodology within the sonic arts and music technology. The paper will outline potential methods within this methodology including deep listening, sound mapping, and embodied performance practice, discussing the potential of each to support a feminist methodology. Finally, we propose that this methodology can support embodied examinations of socio cultural spaces, which consider senses of place and decolonial perspectives. These embodied perspectives, traditionally linked to feminist's methods, will then find a place to support the creative arts and the sonic arts.

Keywords: Soundwalking. Feminist Epistemologies. Artistic Research.

Aplicando Metodologias Feministas nas Artes Sonoras: o Soundwalking Como um Processo

Resumo: Este trabalho tem como objetivo apresentar o soundwalking praticado pelas mulheres como uma metodologia feminista para as artes criativas e sonoras. Para observar suas possibilidades, apresentamos as características de escuta profunda, mapeamento sonoro e soundwalking, discutindo as diferenças entre essas três práticas. Queremos propor o soundwalking como um processo e uma metodologia que pode ser aplicada às artes criativas e às artes sonoras, considerando-as desde as perspectivas de um conhecimento corporificado, as construções de um sentido de lugar e as perspectivas decoloniais.

Palavras-chave: Soundwalking. Epistemologias Feministas. Pesquisa Artística.

1. Introduction

In this paper we will explore the potential of soundwalking as a feminist methodology in the sonic arts.

As female researchers within the sonic arts and music technology our perspectives have been shaped by a strong engagement with feminist studies and feminist practices (one of us in Brazil, and another one in the UK), and have worked to develop this concept and a new type of sonic arts practice since October 2017.

In this process, we have been talking, discussing and investigating about feminist methodologies in creative and artistic sonic projects, and the soundwalking has been highlighted to us as an interesting process to be discussed and applied.



First of all, we started thinking about the soundwalking practiced by women as a feminist methodology to be used in sonic arts because it puts the women in the centre of creative process.

While walking and listening to the sounds, we are always making choices about what will be on the backstage and what will be on the first stage, and this puts our attention on the process of making decisions.

Lucy Green has argued that the creative music industries are historically gendered; what is defined as socially acceptable work for women lies in the areas of instrumental and vocal performance, and the teaching of music. Whereas composition, a largely male dominated field, is defined as a space for "imagination, exploratory inclinations, inventiveness, creativity" talents "explicitly described as lacking" in women (1997:196).

Additionally, we can argue that the structure of musical language has contributed to making women invisible in the creative process, affirming the authority of the score as something distant from the performers and putting performance in a step below composition, remembering that composition is a prohibited field for women.

The history of soundwalking is a contemporary one, contributed to by a mix of artists from, Andra McCartney to Hildegard Westerkamp and Murray Schafer. As a tool for composition it allows the artist to connect to spaces they are familiar with, to pay attention to the environmental and social soundscape, to reflect on the listeners connections to these sounds and to " lift the environmental sounds out of their context into the context of your composition" (WESTERKAMP, 1974: 25). In this way we consider that soundwalking does not contribute to validate the traditional system of art as a code and a language, and it does not contribute to validate the imaginary museum of musical works, in Lydia Goehr's words: by choosing our own sounds, after listening to the world and how it sounds, you can create your own poems, texts and story telling's.

In other words, soundwalking puts the sound production's goal on your own creative process, and not on service of a previous coded and structured language that we must achieve before thinking about sound creation.

The soundwalking focuses on the sonic space, on the sound itself, on your body on the space and how you signify the sound.

If we consider that a women's body is perceived in a specific form by the environment and by the social context, it brings a process of listening possibilities that are conditioned by this body itself, so we can talk about embodied knowledge and embodied listening.



A key asset of soundwalking, particularly for female composers and performers, is the number of female role models who have used this methodology in their practice. The next section will explore the contribution of some of these women placing them in their historical context and highlighting the importance of their contribution to the fields of contemporary composition and the sonic arts. This then allows us to construct an argument for the potential of soundwalking as a feminist methodology.

2. Deep Listening^{©1}, Sound Mapping and Soundwalking

Thinking about the methodologies or philosophies that work with sounds and places in a creative way, we must consider and think about the differences between the Deep Listening method, sound mapping and soundwalking and the ways they can be linked together to create a deeper awareness of the body in space.

The Deep Listening methodology was created by the composer Pauline Oliveros as part of a sonic mediation practice Oliveros that

"Deep Listening is listening in every possible way to everything possible to hear no matter what you are doing. Such intense listening includes the sounds of daily life, of nature, or one's own thoughts as well as musical sounds. Deep Listening represents a heightened state of awareness and connects to all that there is. As a composer I make my music through Deep Listening" (Oliveros, Website).

Pauline Oliveros abandoned composition/performance practice as it is usually established in order to erase the subject/object or performer/audience relationship by returning to ancient forms, which preclude spectators. She was interested in communication among all forms of life, and especially interested in the healing power of Sonic Energy and its transmission within groups. We can immediately see the links between sound walking and Deep Listening, with an argument for paying attention to the sounds of the everyday. Deep Listening focuses primarily on a form of 'non-judgemental perception', whereas the listener takes in all sounds and sees the potential for the world's rhythms in a composition. This is perhaps where feminist sound walking differs; the feminist walker must pay attention to the environment reflecting on what impact sounds heard or produced have on her body in space. Sound is not ephemeral and without social context, it is like any other construct shaped by societal and cultural norms and rules.

Sound Mapping

The use of sound mapping as a technique allows artists and researchers to "explore how one understands or places soundscapes within geographic territories, by designating spaces of sound, noise, or ambiguous soundscapes" (O KEEFFE, 2015: 23).



Sound mapping, or as Thulin (2016) calls it 'cartophony', can and has become a composition technique for artists such as Ximena Alarcon who has mapped a variety of socio-geographical experiences and then presents these works as telematic performances. Her work *Sounding Underground* asks users to interact with the soundscape of three underground systems in London, Paris and Mexico via an online site of mapped journeys through sonic recordings of commuter's memories. Her work, like many other sound artists and sound studies researchers recognise the limitations of traditional cartographic approaches to mapping space which flattens spatial experiences ignoring the sensory subjective of three-dimensional space. Another element of sound mapping is its ability to make visible to stories and socio-cultural rhythms of a space, often ignored by city planners.

In Sara Adhitya's *Sonified Urban Master plan for Paris* she argues that sound in space is both temporal and polyphonic and can assist in the "in the representation of the multiple temporal flows which contribute to the urban dynamic of a city" (2014). Leandra Lambert in her project *Experienced Sonic Fictions*, works in tandem with the sound walking and Deep Listening method. She collected objects, sounds and stories from three distinct Atlantic sites: the Atlantic Ocean, the Atlantic Forest, and the Avenida Atlântica (Atlantic Avenue) in Brazil and creates what she calls intersensorial cartographies, "mappings that are not restricted to vision and language and that also seek to highlight the infra- and supra-sensorial dimensions of a soundwalk" (LAMBERT, 2014). For Lambert the sound walk allows the listener open up to all sensorial information in a space and to reflect on the body as it moves through these spaces. The mapping technique allows for the potential to document these intersensory moments.

Sound Walking

It is possible to link sound walking to autoethnographies as defined by Carolyn Ellis, she argues that it is necessary to have a socio-cultural connection to spaces and places we examine because we have internalised connections to these areas that give deeper meaning to the findings. As an autoethnographer the researcher becomes the focus of the research, you research your activities, feelings and emotions in some depth within particular cultural contexts. An autoethnographers practice includes documenting personal memories, chronicling events close to their happening, maintaining detailed reflective journals and documenting exterior and interior events through audio/video recordings, poetry, drawings and music.

Sound walking then fits quite easily within this collection approach to observing and understanding environments through the personal subjective experience. Where sound



walking expands this research and ties it closer to feminist methodologies is the potential to emancipate the walker in space. For McCartney "Decisions about the location, style, content, and montage of sound in a soundwalk have political, social and ecological consequences" (2014:212), and has a long historical connection to the act of walking as a means of knowing space such as de Certeau's flâneur, who parcels the city into knowable spaces, and Ruskins rural walker, who walks the natural environment to understand ecological and land management processes.

Listening to a space is not necessarily about paying attention to sounds, but widening our perceptual and sensory approaches to space. In listening to a space we gain a deeper understanding of community happenings and relationships to space that are often seen as ephemeral, hard to capture. Also, listening to a space gives us a sense of the architecture and top down structural design of spaces, as sound often highlights the shape of space through reflections and absorptions. Listening to the city means being informed, knowing what is going on and understanding the rhythms of the city (LEFEBVRE, 1992). It also highlights routines and social and cultural practices, some of which may reveal deeply entrenched values and societal norms, which form to exclude women from socio-spatial practices such as simply feeling safe to walk a space. Listening opens the listener to the subtle forms of exclusionary languages, which reveal who is defined as belonging or not belonging to a space (O KEEFFE, 2013).

3. What makes a feminist methodology?

A feminist methodology is concerned with the construction of new knowledge and often located with within a grounded theory approach, as the goal is first and foremost in the production of social change. Interviewing is one of the most "frequently used data collecting methods in Women's Studies"(IKONEN; OJALA, 2007:82), it is seen as a pivotal within social studies of collecting the woman's point of view.

Since the early days of feminism there has been a movement to challenge and transform methodological approaches and epistemologies of social science research; a long term goal of challenging the production of knowledge.

Key to these challenges is a concern with power relation between the researcher and the researched. Feminist researchers sought to find ways to empower the researched through emancipatory methods. The emancipatory process is "the placing of control in the hands of the researched, not the researcher" (OLIVER, 2002:18); it is allowing the researched a type of ownership of the knowledge they produce. Feminist methodologies argue that we must take into account "the observer's standpoint, a direct challenge to universality and



objectivity” (SCHWARTZ-SHEA, 2006:89). Participatory methods such as photo voice, a method developed by Wang and Burris (1997) involve giving participants a camera to document their daily experiences. This has been used to great effect in a number of research projects, most notably Holtby et al's ((2015)) research on the experiences of queer and trans youth where issues of representation are central to the research question. In developing a feminist methodology researchers make central the concerns of "the interests and desires of our societies' most economically, socially, and politically vulnerable groups" (HARDING AND NORBERG, 2005).

4. Sound walking as a feminist methodology

The goal of the feminist sound walker is examining spaces through an embodied approach using listening as the primary sensory engagement as listening often reveals the hidden contexts and meaning of place. The design of place is located within patriarchal systems of the social and structural design of space, which historically have excluded women in the conversation. In other words, we live and operate in spaces that do not include the voices of the marginalised in their design. Women therefore have found new ways to adapt or alter spatial use through imaginative means. Women traditionally occupy public spaces more than men for a variety of reasons, from child rearing - parks, gardens and public streets, to stay at home parents, living in and occupying homes built and designed by men. This is a very small example but it is still significant.

Mags Adams (2009) has used soundwalking to bring designers, urban developers and architects through spaces prior to design projects so that they might have an understanding of the spaces they intend to reconstruct. This method presupposes a disconnect with the everyday use of space by particular social groups such as designers, planners and city managers, who in the main tend to be middle class white men. If we consider what we know about positions of power, we can make a supposition that most organisational hierarchies are dominated by men, which means that they have the larger say on the shape of society.

This takes into account ideas about feminist methods which are concerned with participatory processes; “feminist researchers have long advocated that feminist research should be not just on women, but for women and, where possible, with women” (DOUCET AND DUGNAN, 2012). In soundwalking methods conducted by O Keeffe (2015, 2017; 2015), all participants take a key role in listening, walking, mapping and discussing place and space. The sound walker is not new to a space; rather they already have a connection, one that is embodied through historic, socio-cultural connections, and in some instances, economic ties. Lefebvre argues that the traditional model of exploring space is one of a body occupying



an empty space. This places the space and the body as ‘indifferent’ to each other therefore “anything may go in any ‘set’ of places” and again “any part of the container can receive anything” (1974:170). However, a sound walking method encourages listeners to pay attention to familiar spaces and locate “synchronized and regularized sound that follows social patterns and activities” (O’KEEFFE, 2015:12).

Finally, Anzaldua tell us about the creative process on a decolonial perspective, talking about the hybridism and the borderlands, calling women to “discard the abstraction and the academic learning, the rules, the map and compass. Feel your way without bulkheads. To achieve more people, one must evoke the realities personal and social - not through rhetoric, but with blood, pus and sweat.”

Integrating the social environment, the women’s role and the creative process, Anzaldua points out:

It is not on paper that you create, but inside, viscera and tissues. I call it organic writing. A poem works for me not when you say what I want you to say, when you recall what I want evoke It works when the subject with which I started to metamorphose alchemically in another, another that was discovered by the poem. It works when it surprises me, when you tell me something repressed or pretended not to know. The meaning and the value of my writing is measured by the the way I put myself in the text and revealed level of nudity (ANZALDUA, 2000:7).

Considering all this subjects and statements, we discuss about the use of soundwalking as a feminist methodology for sound creation, and we are beginning the process of developing this method in practice during a collaborative research residency from July 2018.

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Notas

¹ The founder of the Deep Listening Method, Pauline Oliveros and the Deep Listening organisation have copyrighted this term.