

THE JOURNEY OF A JOURNAL ENTRY

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My research investigates the possibilities of using contemporary urban writing (fictional and semi-fictional) about London as a score for exploring the urban environment. It engages with literary text as a supportive device to the process. This article embeds different writing times framing a journal entry. The journal entry was written with the intention to provide additional information on an actual recording of a field visit. The text in red refers to thoughts and questions raised after the entry was written. It aims to shed some light on the thinking-in-progress undertaken in a PhD research; a process that leads to the generation of core concepts that then may be reflected in the practice. **The journey of a journal entry** addresses the notions of listening, self-reflection and the potential inefficacies of engaging with a location by deliberately trying to limit one's senses to hearing.

December 8th 2012: Muted streets, car parks and alleys.

On the morning of December 8th I walked along the railway path from Dalston/Kingsland to Hackney Central following in the footsteps of the narrator in one of the chapters in (Iain Sinclair's) *Downriver*. For this walk I was totally unprepared as to what sounds to search for and where. I embarked from Kingsland Shopping Centre's parking area where the contact with the railway tracks is immediate.

The trajectory began with the sounds¹ of a busker who roamed around the staircase leading to the parking area. I tried to record his motion while moving around him but the intrusive sounds of the cars and shopping carts made my work more difficult. On my way out of the garage, a kid came near me and asked me if the train had passed.

Sound becomes one of the many voices that inhabit the experience as part of a series of material clusters. It can be used to define relationships between these but it's elusiveness makes the whole attempt ambiguous and challenging. Does it really matter what it sounded like at that particular moment, what dynamics it had?

The itinerary rapidly enough became obvious to me. The contact with the tracks was lost after a while and I ended up walking along streets full of silent presences and the usual suspects: the sounds of traffic. Dysfunctional street lights, "unattended" garbage, heavily breathing tunnels² and deserted man-made constructions caught my attention. The signs of the passage of time and the ruin-like side of the city became more prevalent to my senses. The coldness of absence was there again to accompany my walk³.

This is perhaps the only sound that I physically remember, the breathy sound of the tunnel. It is a pity that it is merely audible in the recording.

The sound is not fore-grounded; it rather becomes an indirect source affected by the landscape that is part of. Absence and distance: I engaged with the heard world through the activity of recording but how was I listening at that particular moment? What references did I carry with me and how did these lead me to shape that particular understanding of the urban landscape? How did I negotiate my presence and movement in the landscape? Did the technology I used act more like an intermediate safety layer so that I ensure my proximity/distance from it?

The occasional Graffiti art would make its ghostly appearance and fade away at a glance. After about half an hour I arrived at Graham Road. The roads in London are too narrow to accommodate both pedestrians and double-deckers. Too many of both in such a small piece of land. I decided to cross the street and in a few seconds I was walking up the alley to the nearby mega-Tesco. And yet another site to confirm my idea of London's "under construction" vortex state. Again I engaged with the sounds of trolley carts, trains, people talking loudly (some of them foreign or drunk), car sounds and the distant yet persistent presence of a dog and a crow.

Somehow it all made sense to me. I could hear (and see) where the world of the writer stems from. That whole trajectory was nothing I had previously encountered, it was something new but it somehow felt familiar as it contained all the important ingredients of the Sinclairian world, and for that matter any world that struggles to come to terms with that everyday grind of materials, sounds and experiences. We all feel the need to either block all this information out in order to rest calm and safe or to let it all in and overwhelm our senses. For a writer, I can easily assume that the second state is more relevant; a state of hyper-sensuous neurosis where the mind escapes the reality by means of fiction. But again fiction may not be a stranger to reality; would it be naive to say that it's "realistic" in the same way that "futuristic" relates to the future as a vision of reality?