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# Sidewalk stories: Janet Cardiff's audio-visual excursions

ANAMARIJA BATISTA AND CARINA LESKY

## Introduction

Everyday situations in public space have been attracting the interest of artistic work since the beginning of the twentieth century. In the 1960s the performance of the artwork shifted into the public space and as a consequence the site-specific analysis of spaces with their complex layers and topologies has become an important subject of contemporary artistic practice.

Sound is increasingly being considered as a component of the spatial texture and its atmospheres. Thereby, the mode of listening in combination with the practice of walking is one of the experimental formats applied. Soundwalks are part of soundscape studies, urban design, and artistic practice, and emerged "from an interest in the immediacy and the adaptability of walking in the context of qualitative research."<sup>1</sup> They share the assumption that the acoustic environment depends on social and bodily interactions of moving through a space. In this respect not just the sounds heard, but also the context in which they are produced, are analyzed and interpreted. Hence, the way in which people listen to their soundscape not only depends on their specific social, cultural, and political background, but also on their individual hearing experiences. Usually, the main aim of a soundwalk is to increase the awareness of a given acoustic environment. Applying different interpretive and inventive listening practices, walkers are asked to encounter their everyday sounds actively.<sup>2</sup> The format of the soundwalk opens innovative narrative possibilities in terms of textual production in connection to space.

This article explores the experimental use of soundscape, word, and image, which is at the center of Janet Cardiff's work. In her site-specific audio walks the Canadian artist invites her audience on a walking tour, immersing them in a spatial narrative produced through their own bodily movement and the fictional site-specific story coming from their headphones. The soundtrack in their ears is a combination of a narrative voice and recorded sounds mixed with multi-layers of effects as well as other fictional elements. The narrator directs the walkers on their way but also relates thoughts and anecdotes to involve them in a story, which engages their own physical environment as it takes place. Cardiff records her walks in binaural audio to create a three-dimensional spherical soundscape. She uses miniature microphones placed in the ears of a dummy head to achieve this effect. Played back on the headset, the recorded events appear very vivid and material.

As in the practice of the soundwalk, Janet Cardiff invites her audience to step into the public space and to face its atmosphere. The main difference to soundwalk practice is that the sounds are recorded and Cardiff's intention is to provoke the synesthetical experience of the space rather than just focus the sounds on the audio track. The actual soundwalk, one could say, is produced by the artist during the production process. The walks that follow are variations of this, as the recorded sounds and the architecture of the place remain the same, but the interactions and contingencies of the places change by occasion. In every single walk, the context of the space, but also its transformation, are explored.

As the recorded sounds and the details referred to by the narrator do not correspond with the visual impressions of the listener, the walker is challenged visually and acoustically. The overlapping situational perceptions create moments of confusion of space and sound. "The virtual recorded soundscape has to mimic the real physical one in order to create a new world as a seamless combination of the two."<sup>3</sup> In her work, the artist highlights the ephemeral nature of the spatial experience by making use of parallels from the experience of physical space in motion to the cinematographic disposition.

As Thierry Davila explains in *Marcher, créer* (Walking, Creating, 2002) walking and cinematic practice are related. The composition that a passage creates by playfully restructuring the environment takes the form of a track that is cinematographic in its principle. Both are ways to move in order to produce an original invention of physical reality.<sup>4</sup>

Based on these notions and observations, in this article Cardiff's practice will be contextualized and connected to the soundwalk practice and the role of sound in spatial imaginations. Focusing on the practice of walking in various discourses and contexts, in theory, literature, and film, we will read the artistic work within a framework of cinematic phenomenology and theories by the Situationist International.

## Writing in three dimensions

The act of walking, which is at the center of Cardiff's work, places her in a long tradition of artistic and exploratory practices and theories. The movement of walking provokes a particular rhythm of ambiguities and contingencies. Opening sequences of distinct points of view on individuals in relation to physical and social space, it has offered a stylistic technique

to writers to explore and portray a city. So, for instance, in his famous poem “The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock,” T. S. Eliot has the reader follow the protagonist on a journey through his city. Similarly, Charles Baudelaire, Edgar Allan Poe, and later James Joyce discovered the point of view of the flâneur as a way to portray city experience.<sup>5</sup> They were masters at having their narrators wander the streets of Paris or London or Dublin to observe and criticize the social conditions in these crowded metropolises. Similar to Cardiff’s walks, such wanderings often center on a pursuit, following the trace of something or someone through a labyrinth of city streets. Guided by the narrators the reader confronts detailed descriptions of everyday street life, people, and the atmosphere of the spaces that she or he passes.

Unlike her literary forerunners, Janet Cardiff does not merely have her audience explore imaginary paths but invites them to step into the physical space. She turns the audience into listening practitioners of space who walk the spatial syntaxes of a spatial story while getting involved in her story.

Cardiff herself compares her audio walks to three-dimensional textual constructions. She explains the production process of “Villa Medici” (1998) as follows:

I walked and talked the script on site. As usual, the directions were out of sync. There were too few footsteps available for the amount of words. Turn right at the wrong time. The fountain comes too early. People are going to get lost. This line that I thought was so perfect in front of the monitor now seems corny and ill-placed. No resonance with the physical site. Lines must fit with the physical. It’s like writing in three dimensions. Spoken lines have to feel right in sequence as well as location and the pacing of the lines has to be right with the footsteps.<sup>6</sup>

This quotation surfaces the intense level of direct interaction with the structure and logic of the specific sites on which the artist’s work is based. In the production process the artist becomes an investigator of the environment she is working with, of the built environment’s topology, its historical and social context, and the atmosphere of the particular places passed. Cardiff’s approach recalls the work of Russian historian and writer Nikolai Anziferow. In the early 1920s he investigated the city in what he termed “research excursions” and collected the results in his book *Die Seele Petersburgs* (1922). These field trips were based on the notion that sensory experience of everyday life in physical space offered equivalently relevant findings as research in libraries and cartographies.<sup>7</sup>

The bodily exploration of urban space was also at the center of the Situationist International in the late 1950s and 1960s. In their strolls they experienced, but also actively formed, the perceived space of European cities through experiments such as the *dérive*. The psychogeographic technique of drifting is defined as a construction or montage of singular ambiances, which are bound to the urban scenery one traverses, formed by a succession of singular impressions and ambiances that befall

the stroller.<sup>8</sup> Similar to an urban collage the walker him/herself construes the sequential scenery through his/her bodily energy and the focus of his/her eyes.

This notion of the perceiving body in motion as a constructive element of the city is echoed in Michel de Certeau’s *L’Invention du quotidien* (1980).<sup>9</sup> Here, Certeau describes the power of everyday practices to alter social concepts, things, and places. In his terminology the “walkers down in the streets” are the *practitioners* of a spatial construction, which he compares to a textual construction. In this urban text, spatial trajectories serve as narrative structures arranging and connecting syntaxes through their bodily experience. The users of the city space actually create it through their everyday activities taking paths and turns, while the distanced viewer remains a separated reader of a text that is lived and shaped by others.<sup>10</sup>

By integrating the audience into the textual composition, having them connect syntaxes through their perceiving bodies, Cardiff offers them an active role in her works. In a Situationist manner Cardiff invites her audience to explore the atmosphere of their direct environment, while entangling them in a phantasmagoria of merged spatial impressions. In her audio walks she uses the movement and the pace of the walking bodies together with the focus of their eyes to build their own material track. Yet, this track is only partly created by the walker. Unlike the situationist *dérive*, which was intended as aimless and relaxed strolling through the urban texture, although the walker was interacting with his/her own environment, Cardiff’s walker underlies her prewritten script. Besides related stories and anecdotes this script consists of parameters and directions guiding the walking listener through the spatial narrative.

### The voiceover

The function of Cardiff’s voice structuring the story and guiding the audience through it, while not being visibly present, reminds us of the characteristics of an omniscient narrator in a movie. As Sarah Kozloff comments in her book *Voice-Over Narration in American Fiction Film*, “we put our faith in the voice not as created, but as creator.”<sup>11</sup> This confers a forceful inconceivable power to the intangible speaker. Cardiff’s voice presents an explicit persona of a first-person narrator outside the narrated diegesis, but still within the plot portraying her subjective perceptions. As omniscient narrator she is never seen but always heard. In a style that has become the convention in narrative cinema, her voice leads the audience through visual sequences and gives form and meaning to them.

As disembodied and omnipresent commentator, Cardiff’s voice also fits into the concept of the *acousmetre* formulated by Michel Chion. Referring to the Lacanian theories in *La Voix au cinéma*,<sup>12</sup> Chion connects voice in cinema with a fetish, insisting on the power of voice. According to him, the voice that derives from an unknown source brings us back to the stage of an embryo. He defines the *acousmetre* as a special voice-character specific to cinema, “that in most instances of cinematic

narratives derives mysterious powers from being heard but not seen.”<sup>13</sup>

According to Mary Ann Doane voiceover has the role of indicating space that cannot be registered by the camera.<sup>14</sup> It provides the context of a story but also adds thoughts and comments structuring the visual track for the audience: “when asynchronous or *wild* sound is utilised, the phatasmatic body’s attribute of unity is not lost. It is simply displaced — the body in the film becomes the body of the film. Its senses work in tandem, for the combination of sound and image as described in terms of *totality* and the *organic*.”<sup>15</sup>

In the following extract from “Her Long Black Hair” (2004), Cardiff uses this technique to create a tension between the images suggested by the soundtrack and the encountered materiality lacking the visual equivalent:

Cardiff: This very moment there is an organ-grinder in the street . . . it is wonderful, it is the accidental and insignificant things in life which are significant. The philosopher Kierkegaard wrote that. He was a walker . . . (*sound effects of kids going by, people talking, sound of dogs barking*)

Cardiff: Keep walking straight. Now I’m following a woman with long black hair.<sup>16</sup>

The narrative voice builds the frame of cinematic experience, creating gaps that we accept, blending them into what we really see. At the same time it colors our own associations with the thoughts and feelings passing through her mind. Involving us in an audible stream of consciousness, Cardiff has us meandering in her mind as we wander through the space directed by her voice. Doing so, she also reflects on the issue and bodily state of walking.

### A cinematic track produced

In her elaborate spatial stories, Cardiff addresses and makes use of the close relationship of the bodily movement through an environment and the disposition of the cinematographic track. As Davila describes in *Marcher, créer* cinema mates perfectly well with the perceptive notions of walking. Walking and *mise-en-image* are related to sharing both the dialectic of the accidental and the structural. The composition that the passage creates by playfully rearranging the environment takes the form of a track, which is essentially cinematographic in its principle. The tracks or paths live above all from a movement, which is able to produce an in-between, an intermediate picture.<sup>17</sup>

Taking form in a context and at the same time giving form to a context, walking is an essentially plastic, or actually, in terms of Davila, a *cinéplastic* process. It is a way of moving in order to produce something new. While fracturing reality through perspectives one opens it towards a new invention.<sup>18</sup> Being aimed at giving form to movement, the cinematic process is itself a plastic process, which makes it so capable of displaying the experience of the passage. It even stores the urban displacement it invents. Like the bodily movement of shaping one’s way through space, filmmaking opens space to a

subject. Both movements offer possibilities to put together spatial experiences playfully, thereby exposing the subject to the risk of being absorbed or surprised by the scenery he/she encounters. Making decisions on directions and pace we edit the cinematic track we produce. Cardiff reflects on this power of walking to affect our environment and the state in which we encounter or experience it, for instance by involving her audience in spatial experiments, as in this extract, which is again taken from the walk “Her Long Black Hair”:

Cardiff: Stop. (*no explanation for 10 seconds; count under breath*)

Cardiff: Now everything will have changed . . . the people we meet. The things we hear. Not in a big way but enough. Now continue.<sup>19</sup>

For the work “Her Long Black Hair” Cardiff recorded the sounds of Central Park’s nineteenth-century pathways. Following the traces of an enigmatic dark-haired woman, the story transports the listener into history. In addition to the soundtrack, in this work the walker also carries along some photographs, which she or he is occasionally asked to look at.<sup>20</sup> The recorded sounds combined with the narrative and the momentary insights of the photographs move the walker into the story intended by the artist. The voice provides the frame and content of the story, while Central Park as a space with all its characteristics and interactions builds the scenery for it. The atmosphere of the site is created by two components: on the one hand, there is the soundtrack composed by the artist working with recorded, remixed sound and voices, which comment on and describe the ambience of the places traversed. On the other hand there is the actual situation in the environment in which the walking listener moves, which mixes acoustically with the fictional one and is the one perceived visually.

### Changing atmospheres

In his theory on new aesthetics Gernot Böhme discusses the ontological status of the term atmosphere. He defines it as follows: “Atmosphere is the common reality of the perceiver and the perceived. It is the reality of the perceived as the sphere of its presence and the reality of the perceiver, insofar as in sensing the atmosphere s/he is bodily present in a certain way.”<sup>21</sup> Hence, the concept of the atmosphere includes the physical environment as well as the subject experiencing it. Böhme underlines the importance of subjectivity, arguing that if someone wants to become familiar with the atmosphere, she/he has to enter it and experience it in terms of his or her own emotional state.<sup>22</sup>

The wandering listener of Cardiff’s walks is also invited to experience the atmosphere of the environments he or she encounters. Yet, this psychogeographic atmosphere is altered by the binaural fictional soundscape in their ears. To understand how Cardiff engineers such soundscapes manipulating the affective note of the visual track, we will turn to filmmaking, where the construction of atmosphere in relation to sound

has had a long tradition. Sound has the power to affect the atmosphere of a specific place and as a technique it contributes to developing and manipulating the way a space feels. The effect of a soundtrack on the way scenery is experienced makes obvious that the atmosphere of a space not only depends on the scenography but also on social interaction and on characteristics influencing its sensual experience.

Among the first to analyze the role of soundtrack as part of the cinematic experience were David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson in 1979. Their discussion of the film *Lettre de Sibérie* (The Letter from Siberia, 1957) by Chris Marker shows how different soundtracks connect to the same image creating different contents and altered atmospheres.<sup>23</sup> Not only do the voice-over or dialogues have an impact on the way a situation is perceived, but also a change of sound effects in terms of loudness, timbre, or pitch influences the experience of a film frame or sequence. “Normal perception is linked to our choices, the director’s selection of the sound in a film can control the audience’s choices and thus guide the audience’s perception,” comment Bordwell and Thompson on this phenomenon.<sup>24</sup>

In his research Brandon LaBelle has aimed at defining the appearance, configuration, and quality of sound. He describes sound as an intrinsic and un-ignorable relation, which emanates, propagates, communicates, vibrates, and agitates. Sound has the possibility to enter bodies and leave them, move them, let the mind dream.<sup>25</sup> Thinking about the interplay of image, sound, and word not as a synchronized activity, but as one formed by gaps opening spaces for interpretation, raises the question of how these differences are being created and which kinds of atmospheres are being produced. Typically, sound is used as a narrative element to combine sequences and to create suspense. An example would be an off-screen sound that is part of the filmic space, like for instance a dog we hear but cannot see. It is used as a narrative element announcing the next action, when the dog will be jumping into view on the screen.

Accordingly, sound offers a set of codes in relation to its role in the interplay of space, emotion, and social action. It operates through different modes of spatiality “from the immediate present to the distant transmission, from inside one’s thought and toward others, from immaterial wave to material mass, from the here and now to the there and then,” as LaBelle puts it.<sup>26</sup>

By means of the soundtrack the artist produces an affective space, which is opened up by the ambience of the physical space. In her work “Mallin’s Night Walk” (1998) Cardiff brings the walker into the forest. Cardiff explains: “A forest is a very dark place under the stars, filled with memories of mythic tales, and every sound that a squirrel or mouse makes frightens you.”<sup>27</sup> Her own feeling of fear is the motivation for this piece. The absence of view in the darkness of the forest makes the narrator feel uncomfortable until she escapes into the light. Dissecting her own feeling and relating it to words and sounds, she offers the audience the possibility of sharing her experience, or rather of making their own.

Again looking at the relationship of sound, spoken word, and image in film, we would like to introduce a typology suggested by Bordwell and Thompson.<sup>28</sup> They propose the distinction of diegetic and non-diegetic sounds. This characterization is based on the story space as the film frame defines it. The sounds heard within the frame are described as diegetic sound, which again they subdivide into external objectively present, and internal subjective sounds. Sound effects not standing in direct connection to the story are classified as non-diegetic sounds.<sup>29</sup> Depending on their synchronization with the visually presented activities, the soundtrack supports the image events, but also can render them ambiguous by contradicting them. The interplay of sound, word, and image produces different kinds of effects within the filmic narration, different contexts and different aesthetics opening a variety of possible combinations and overlaps. Depending on the actual situation in space, the sound can become part of the situational frame as a diegetic or a non-diegetic one. Varying from walk to walk, the discrepancies and contingencies produced by the situational story taking place challenge the synesthetic experience of the wanderer. The sound effects in the audio walks relate to what might be perceived on site. Here is an extract from “Her Long Black Hair” in which Cardiff uses sound effects experimenting with the concepts of diegetic and non-diegetic sounds:

*(sound effects of fair, kids, and people around; music; laughter)*

Cardiff: Now there’s peanut sellers and the squatters are doing tightrope walking, a line strung across between the trees.

*(sound effects of crowds and carriage going by; yelling from seating area at night under awning; cell phone conversation as someone walks by, talking)*

Voice: Why would you want to do that? Stop it. . . . I told her she should just dump him. *(gunshots)*

Cardiff: Did you hear that? They’re shooting the scavengers, the wild goats and pigs. They were supposed to eat the garbage in the city streets. But they kept coming into the park so they have to be shot.<sup>30</sup>

While the gunshots are most probably intended as non-diegetic sounds, the diffuse sounds of children, music, and laughter are more likely to synchronize with possible visible sources as diegetic sounds of the cinematic track. There is one type of sound effect that is part of each of Cardiff’s audio walks: the steps of the woman narrator. Similar to the spoken lines, they structure the walk experience by linking the soundtrack to the physical reality. “I want you to walk with me. Try to listen to the sound of my footsteps so that we can stay together,” Cardiff’s voice explains before she takes us on the mesmerizing excursion of bodily interaction with a physical space.<sup>31</sup> The sound of the steps provides the rhythm and pace of the visual track and the walker adapts it, similar to regulating the frames per seconds when playing back a film roll. Like an analog film

rattling through a projector Cardiff's spatial story unfolds as we follow her steps and directions.

### **Walking and talking — technological developments**

The notion of film as a walking being which unfolds itself as it runs, and even has an existence of its own, is discussed by Vivian Sobchack in *Address of the Eye*. She writes that film enjoys an existence and a lived body on its own through which it experiences the spaces it encounters. “The mechanisms and technological instrumentation of the cinema can be understood as the film’s body, functioning as its sensing and sensible being at and in the world.”<sup>32</sup> It originally makes and expresses sense. Thereby, the camera functions as perceptive organ while the projector and the screen permit film to express itself in the world. Just as in the human body the organs work synesthetically. Just as human embodied experience cinematic presence is lived practically in space and movement.<sup>33</sup>

Sobchack argues that cinematographic development can also be read from this point of view. Analogous to a human being also, the film body started as an infant with blurred and fuzzy vision. Before it started to walk autonomously and increasingly steadily over time, it was put on auxiliary tools and mounted on vehicles to help it move. In this process of growing up, moving, and expressing itself, at some point the film body also started to talk.<sup>34</sup> In this regard, we could understand Cardiff's audio walks as a type of film body, which consists of a soundtrack stepping outside cinemas and living rooms to find its visual components in the real world. Before we come back to Sobchack's concept of the film body, we will take a short excursion looking at the technological development of the interplay of sound, image, and mobility.

The filmic experience as such was never completely silent. Even in the very beginnings of cinema a soundtrack accompanied film projections — it was edited live on location. The experience was acoustically supported by the sound of the projector as well as piano music but also laughter, comments, or anecdotes added to the overall cinematic experience. It was the audience who added thoughts and comments, or even a narrator leading through a storyline or also reading out dialogues. The following report, which appeared on October 24, 1907, in the *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly*, also gives an idea of the role of sound in the ‘*silent*’ area of film:

[At a London show] wonderfully realistic effects are introduced. In fact two men are behind the screen doing nothing else but producing noises corresponding with events happening on the curtain. These effects absolutely synchronize with the moments, so that it is difficult to believe that actual events are not occurring.<sup>35</sup>

While Cardiff's audio walks rely on ephemeral visuals from the real physical space, in its beginnings film adapted the acoustic dimension of a real place, having it enter and complete the cinematic experience. From the late 1920s onwards, sound and with it the spoken word started to enter filmic imagery as a

direct component and so the *talking picture* — or for short *talkie* — was born.<sup>36</sup> The recording of image, voice, and sound had become a simultaneous phenomenon. This synchronized interplay of image and soundtrack rounded out the fictional mimicry of the *real* life experience.

In 1930 the British filmmaker and critic Paul Rotha declared in the first edition of *The Film Till Now*:

A film in which the speech and sound effects are perfectly synchronized and coincide with their visual image on the screen is absolutely contrary to the aims of cinema. It is a degenerate and misguided attempt to destroy the real use of the film and cannot be accepted as coming within the true boundaries of the cinema.<sup>37</sup>

But other critical voices of the time also warned of the risks of the new technological development. The Soviet filmmakers Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Grigori Alexandrov discussed the possibilities of a misconception of the given potentials and their consequences for the development of cinema as an art form. Considering the practice of montage as the “chief means” of effect they feared that the direct involvement of sounds could disturb the culture of montage. They called for a contrapuntal use of sound in relation to image: “The first experimental work with sound must be directed along the line of its distinct non-synchronization with the visual images.”<sup>38</sup>

Indeed, the emergence of sound film had a considerably dampening effect on film — especially concerning the mobility of the medium. Before the implementation of sound, the pioneers of filmmaking had worked with portable devices. The Cinematograph developed by the Lumière brothers in the 1880s was a portable device<sup>39</sup> and the film camera, which Thomas Edison developed in 1896, could also be carried during the recording process.<sup>40</sup> When sound film emerged, the mechanical noise of the cameras was too loud to record synchronized sound and they had to be encased with isolating shells. These cases were too heavy for hand-held usage and mobility was the cost for perfect synch-speed. In the late 1930s a lighter camera, the Arriflex, was introduced and used for documentary purposes during World War II, and after the war it eventually entered the film industry.<sup>41</sup> It was also due to sound issues that the studio became the preferred environment for shooting a film, avoiding too much movement and noisy “real” spaces for these delicate and sensitive recordings. The dynamic traffic and moving masses of the vibrant urban environments that film had so naturally incorporated in its beginnings were largely replaced by structured static studio shots, locking out uncontrollable contingencies.

In her audio-recordings in public space Cardiff faces similar problems. Yet, digital sound technology allows her to deal with these difficulties. She commented as follows on her work on “Her Long Black Hair”:

We've tried recording the walking tracks at night, in the early morning, on Sundays, but the heavy hum of the traffic is

always there. I have to separate my voice from the main sound track because of that. Normally I walk and talk with the head right on the site, but it is too noisy here, so I record the voice in the studio and the footsteps on site.<sup>42</sup>

Computer-assisted post-production today facilitates the division of the soundtrack from its original source and favors the separate production of the visual and acoustic dimension, expanding the range of opportunities to emphasize particular sounds and even to add, remix, and compose them on an independent basis. This opens up an experimental field for the mixing of spaces and temporalities while testing aesthetic and social ambiguities of perception.

### Becoming film bodies

Experimenting with atmospheres by merging spaces and fictionalizing everyday life environments, Cardiff's ephemeral walks live from the uncontrollable moments of possibility opened up in public environments. So Cardiff has her audience step from their theater seats or living rooms into the street to produce the cinematic track she intended. There the dialectic of the structural and the incidental by which the practice of walking is defined as much as that of filmmaking can unfold in an interplay of fiction and reality. In terms of stylistic features and narrative elements Cardiff's cinematic track can be placed and understood within the tradition of flâneur cinema.

For instance, similar to Janet Cardiff, Nouvelle Vague film director Agnès Varda incorporates ephemeral contingencies into the film frame of *Cléo de 5 à 7* (Cléo from 5 to 7, 1962). She has us follow a female character on a stroll through Paris, while the spatial and temporal diegetic action of Cléo almost exactly corresponds to that presented to the viewer.<sup>43</sup> The young singer is cruising Left Bank Paris killing time, while waiting for her diagnosis after a biopsy. During about ninety minutes of her life we accompany her as she visits a fortune-teller, meets friends and strangers in cafés and ateliers, rides the bus, walks streets and parks, and climbs stairways. Varda makes use of the ability of film to move and explore while storing the track it encounters and invents. Staged scenes mix with real city scenes fictionalizing the physical environment. In the living space of the real city the structure of the narrative opens out for uncontrollable factors of possibility entering the frame.

The director not only liberates the medium from the artificial environment of the studio, but by using hand-held shots she also frees film from the static tripod. Combining the synchronized and mobile recording of sound and image, hand-held camera allows shots to match what is happening to the character in the story. In *Cléo de 5 à 7* shaky point-of-view shots visually immerse the viewer directly in the narrow alleys, unrolling the cityscape together with its architecture, the passersby, traffic, and other glimpses of daily city atmosphere.

In particular the second part of the film consists of unusually long tracking shots intercut with point-of-view (POV) shots of the surrounding architectural scenery and people moving by.

The street scenes appear incidental and authentic. As in Cardiff's walks we hear the character tapping over the pavement. We also sense voices and snatches of conversations, as Cléo is moving through different atmospheres. As we follow the young woman on her trajectories through Paris we are guided by the film body, which also has us perceive the city through the subjective eyes and ears of the character.

For a moment, viewers accept this perspective identification, immersing themselves in the spatial and temporal reality of the character. We accept that the visual track seen by the camera corresponds with the impression of the character. As Vivian Sobchack points out, this illusion can only be upheld for short sequences following a set of rules, as for instance in a close-up on face or eyes to introduce or end such a shot. In general, the presence of the film body and his view observing a character's activity cannot be suppressed. The corporeal presence of film becomes obvious in *The Lady in the Lake* (1947) by Robert Montgomery. As the first movie to use the POV shot throughout the whole movie, it became known as one of the greatest flops of film history. According to Sobchack, its failure can be traced to the neglect of film's own materiality. It lies not in the spectator's incapacity to identify with film, but rather in the impossible equation of character and film body.<sup>44</sup>

Younger films of the POV genre, such as *Blair Witch Project* (1999) or *Cloverfield* (2008), work differently, as instead of pretending identification of film body and character, the point of view claims merely to be that of a camera held and operated by a character. In these films the film body is merely telling us about the point of view of a character saying: "I was looking at this and it looked like this, when I was there." Similarly Cardiff's walks reflect on their own materiality as recorded media. The audience is aware of wearing headphones and listening to a recorded audio-track presenting the point of view of a character telling a story: "I was looking at this and it looked like this, when I was here, where you are right now." The overlapping spatial reality allows us to perceive the transformation of the places we encounter while being invited to share the situational memories and thoughts of someone else. Thereby the device is incorporated as an embodied element of the story. In "Villa Medici" (1998) Cardiff points out this effect, as she incorporates a voice recorder into the recorded story:

Cardiff: I found his voice recorder in my suitcase. This machine has become him now, his words floating like a ghost in front of me. I want you to walk with me. I need to show you something. . . . Go through the doorway in the wall to the right . . . past the iron gate, then go to the left.<sup>45</sup>

While the device allows the story to express itself, our bodies are turned into vehicles making it move and construct images. Thereby, together with the digital player, the recording devices, the software used in the post-production process of the audio track, the voices, and of course Cardiff herself, we become part of the synesthetically functioning organs composing the spatial story. Expressing the narrative by living it in the

real world, we act as an interface incorporating the surrounding landscape into the story as we perceive it.

This process corresponds to Sobchack's description of the film body borrowing technological equipment as well as human beings to flesh out its being in the world. Lacking corporeal materiality, film borrows human bodies to flesh out its experience. Besides filmmakers and actors it makes use of the recipient's body. The synesthetic capabilities of the spectator allow for this transubstantiation. Sobchack writes as follows:

We do not experience any movie only through our eyes. We see and comprehend and feel films with our entire bodily being, informed by the full history and carnal knowledge of our acculturated sensorium.<sup>46</sup>

The theorist means that, although we cannot perceive the taste, touch, or smell of what we see on the screen in the truest sense of the word, it remains a diffuse but real experience. Film touches us not only metaphorically, but literally as it transubstantiates our bodies to engage in what Sobchack calls "enhanced figural experience."<sup>47</sup>

Accordingly, in Cardiff's work the body of the walker becomes part of the filmic apparatus as it would be in a traditional receptive setting, where members of the audience similarly live the filmic experience with their own bodies. The walking spectators produce the images synesthetically as they project the heard into their surrounding clarity, blending in what the narrative voice and especially the sounds effects in their ears expect them to see. Cardiff relates to invisible things in her walks, which we as spectators accept as being heard but not seen; however taking their existence for granted.

As the visible is never experienced by us as complete materiality, we are used to accepting the existence of invisible "off-screen" objects. As Jean Baudrillard writes:

looking requires that an object conceal and reveal itself, that an object suggest its own disappearance at any given moment, which is why the act of looking contains a kind of oscillating motion . . . in which the visible parts render the others invisible: in which a kind of rhythm of emergence and secrecy sets in.<sup>48</sup>

Although we follow Cardiff's narrative voice and her steps, through acoustically manipulated atmospheres fictionalizing our spatial experience, we are still aware of our own perceptual encounters, which we contrast with those pictured by Cardiff's track. As walking listeners, we take a position, for which Sobchack finds the apt analogy of a host getting immersed in the stories told by a guest:

I am not a mere bodily receptacle for the film's visual address, but rather a hospitable host, allowing this other visual address temporary residence in my visible address, in my body. . . . And in fact I may "see" what my guest sees. I may become wrapped in his or her vision, a rapt listener whose consciousness of my own address and body fades beside the color and vividness of what I hear. As my interest in my guest's

narrative or argument increases, the intentional direction and terminus of my consciousness locates itself there, in what my guest sees. I am, however, not really where my guest sees. I still and always am embodied Here. And both of us are located in this particular encounter at what is, after all, my address.<sup>49</sup>

The spectators whom Sobchack has in mind are sitting in front of a screen encountering the visual experience that they flesh out on their own bodies, while Cardiff's audience experiences her narration on site. Still, the dialectic of Here and There remains. Having the spectator interact directly with the environment, Cardiff sharpens the senses of the spectator for his/her environment, together with its real, hidden, and possible sphere, as well as with its historical layers.

### Summary and outlook

Janet Cardiff's audio walks involve the listening walkers in complex fictional stories with plot and narrative voice, as well as major and minor characters. These stories do not unfold in purely virtual spaces, but instead take place in the scenery of public space, where they merge with ephemeral contingencies. Expanding the boundaries of the cinematic disposition by combining its features with the practice of the soundwalk, the artist experiments with the components of image, word, and sound.

In her work, walking as a practice of discovering and experiencing space is mixed with the dramaturgy of the soundtrack. In the tradition of the Situationist International, Cardiff invites her audience to experience the space through their own bodies, and goes a step further by creating inconsistencies in overlapping pre-composed sound recordings with the physical visual experience.

These moments of randomness and astonishment, which are caused by the uncontrollable factors and ephemeral contingencies encountered, lead the audience to question and deconstruct their own perceptual mechanisms. The effect of sounds on the experience and sensual perception of environment becomes evident in Cardiff's work. Exploring the characteristics and qualities of listening habits, but also of sound texture, puts her approach in line with the discourse of sound studies. Applying computer-assisted post-production devices, Cardiff creates a narration that is based on her own experience and feeling for the space. She produces the narrative voiceover, which in a stream of consciousness builds the frame of the track, produced as it directs the walker through the story, and relates to possible overlaps of the heard and the seen.

Through her audio walks she enters a dialogue with her audience, sharing with them her observations and association with particular places. The variation produced by ongoing changes in the space opens gaps that bring the audience back to their own bodies and sensual perceptions. In a state of walking, the recipients create their own cinematic tracks. Their bodies moving and perceiving in the real world serve



to make the film live its corporeal existence in space. Taking form in a context and at the same time giving form to a context, just like filmmaking, the practice of walking is an essentially plastic process. Moving in order to produce something new, both practices share the dialectic of the accidental and the structural.

From the point of view of film in public space, the video walks created by the same artist, which exceed the scope of this article, present an interesting subject for further investigation and detailed analysis. Following very similar approaches and narrative features to Cardiff's audio walks, they challenge traditional receptive settings and raise questions of *mise en scène* as well as the use of off-screen space. Also, a placing of her work within a framework of expanded cinema practices could reveal worthy correlations.

Moreover, a focus on the audience reception of Cardiff's site-specific audio walks could open relevant insights for further research on this topic. From a transdisciplinary point of view, these could provide valuable sources for urban planning and development strategies. Explorations of the specific experience of an audience undertaking Cardiff's audio and video walks or the question of framing the artistic practice of Janet Cardiff in the tradition of expanded cinema could be interesting topics for further research.

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#### NOTES

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- 3 – Ibid., 138–40; Miriam Schaub, *Janet Cardiff — The Walk Book* (Vienna: TB A21, 2007), 15.
- 4 – Thierry Davila, *Marcher créer: Déplacements, flâneries, dérives dans l'art de la fin du xxe siècle* (Paris: Regard, 2002), 42.
- 5 – As examples for writings by these authors which explore the concept of the flâneur, see Edgar Allen Poe's detective story *A Man of the Crowd* (New York: Wiley & Putnam, 1845), James Joyce's modernist novel *Ulysses* (Paris: Shakespeare & Co., 1922), T.S. Eliot's modernist poem *The Waste Land* (New York: Horace Liveright, 1922), and Charles Baudelaire's collection of poems *Les Fleurs du mal* (Paris: Poulet-Malassis et de Broise, 1857).
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