

Soundwalking

There is an audiofile on the audio page called 'soundwalking', which was recorded in Manchester city centre in late January 2007, where 2 of the mywalks team were attending an event based all around sound in the urban environment. This event was the first of several events planned to think about senses in the everyday city and titled "Rethinking the urban experience: the sensory production of place - Seminar One: Sensorial studies of place" – see <http://www.sensescapes.co.uk/index.htm>. Organised by Mags Adams (Salford University) and Simon Guy (Manchester University), the January event included an evening 'soundwalk' led by John Levack Drever (Goldsmiths, University of London).

Now, this was the first time us mywalkers had come across formal soundwalking, having been playing around with recording walks and thinking about the sound on your everyday walk only relatively recently. Turns out, there's heaps of academic research and writing about it, and of course environmental (health) policy-making has been concerned with 'noise' (sound that is a problem) for a very long time.

But rather than go into all of that, we'd just like to say something about the recording you can listen to on our site if you feel so inclined There were about 18 of us who gathered on a cold, cloudy but dry evening at 5pm, meeting up at Piccadilly Gardens in the heart of Manchester. John told us that we had to walk in single file, not so close to the person in front or behind that we could hear their footsteps (not so far that we lost each other!), and not talk at all, but concentrate on REALLY LISTENING to the environment around us. A strange experience indeed – but absolutely fantastic for focusing on the sounds we often drown out/ignore/take for granted. It was actually quite hard at times to concentrate on the task at hand, and not drift off into dreamland, but being part of a long crocodile of solemn adults walking through different parts of the city centre did help ... in that many people gave us more than a second look and it made you feel quite self-conscious!

Photos of the walk have been posted in the walks pages, under the title 'Manchester Soundwalk'. We started taking the pictures as we journeyed, and thought they represented what was going on, and our experience of it, pretty well – a focus on the aural rather than the visual; the visual floating by ethereally, the blurring of lights, and odd moments of clarity....

The actual walk in Manchester took an hour and 10 minutes, and we didn't want to put the whole sound file up, so instead we've picked out snippets to highlight some of the range of sounds we experienced. Now, that's a problem because the file has those sounds that we think are interesting or relevant or could strike a chord with any listeners ... we may have missed out bits that could mean more to people than we think they do – we may have different values around sound than you ...

But please bear with us, have a listen, make a comment. And the next time you're doing your everyday walk, instead of going over in your head what work will entail today/what you need at the shops/the homework you've forgotten to do/etc. – have a *really good listen* ... anything surprise you?