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Walking from Scores: An anthology of text and graphic scores to be used while walking - Elena Biserna (ed.).
Translated by Elena Biserna, John Minahane, Jack Sims, and Marie Verry. Dijon: Les presses du reel, 2022

By Sharon Stewart

Please note: The pop-ups within this review contain small excerpts of various scores. These were selected from the dozens of invitations from the various authors that I found inspiring and noted for myself as I was engaging with their scores. My hope is that it offers you a feel for the variety and scope of the explorations offered in this book.

This thick yet compact book offers a collection of over eighty scores from more than “sixty artists and collectives active in the fields of music, literature, visual arts, performance, [dance](#) and activism from the 1960s to our day” (p. 19). It opens with an introduction by Elena Biserna in which she lays out the premises, which include walking as a [relational practice](#) “particularly suited to questioning our relationships to our environment, territories and urban space, in the form of a [dialectical interaction](#) with the very

mobility of sites” (p. 21) and scores as catalysts for [actions](#) and experiences, which can “go beyond action and propose purely perceptual, sensorial, cognitive or [mental activities](#) (p. 29). An important criterion for all the scores included in the collection is that they be performable in places that can be easily accessed, whether “a street, a square, [a forest](#) etc.” (p. 35).

The Introduction and all the scores in the book – a number of which are offered in handwritten or graphic form – are presented in both French and English, and organized into three sections: “Walking / Marches,” “Itinerant Listening / Écoutes itinérantes,” and “Playing on the Move / Jouer en mouvement.” While perhaps only the second section, with its close to thirty scores, might be understood to overlap considerably with soundwalking as an art and (research) practice, each section provides ample opportunity to explore listening as a multimodal experience.

Besides the categorization mentioned above, in terms of style, three trends stood out to me: 1) poetic texts that open one to a convergently phenomenological and philosophical investigative experience of one’s surroundings; 2) sparse invitations to notice a [singular aspect](#) of the present ambulatory moment; and 3) those containing more complex action notation, some of which – it seems to me – would require at least a week of study before becoming performable without significant mental effort.

Of the more poetic approaches, notable to me are Open City and Emma Cocker’s “Postcard 4 / Carte postale n° 4” (2007)

“Trespass attentively in a stranger’s shadow. Somehow sacrosanct, it is our secular soul; our indelible echo, our ethereal twin.” (p. 161)

as well as Haytham El-Wardany's "How to Break With a Group / Comment sortie d'un groupe" (2013)

"Observe the multitude of social classes and structures that collide until dissolving into minute particles floating through the subconscious of the city." (p. 277)

and, finally, Ben Patterson's "close eyes / fermer les yeux" (1962, p. 183) offers perhaps one of my favorite (sub)types here – the score as conundrum, in which a seemingly simple invitation turns into more philosophical musings as one tries to imagine how to perform the seemingly impossible.

Of sparse invitations, Peter Ablinger's "White / Whitish 9, paths [Weiss / Weisslich 9, Wege]" (1993 [1986]) scores stand out

"walk and listen to the wind" (p. 229)

as does Yoko Ono's "City Piece / Pièce-ville" (1963)

"Step in all the puddles in the city." (p. 159)

as well as Anna & Lawrence Halprin's "Sensory Walk / Marche Sensorielle" (1968).

"Contact and experience the environment through the isolation of your senses." (p. 115)

Of complex notation, David Dunn's "Purposeful Listening in Complex States of Time / Écoute orientée au sein d'états temporels complexes" (1997-1998) could offer hours of focused engagement

"The parameters of these listening states include factors such as elevation, proximity, and direction. They also include dynamic changes of these factors over time." (p. 266)

as might Bill Dietz's "Quatre refrains de la rue" (2016) or Michael Parsons "Walking Piece (Intersections) / Pièce de marche (Intersections)" (2008, updated 2009).

"For each performance, a range of values for x, y and z is chosen, appropriate to the size of the space and the duration of the performance." (p. 173)

Taking a step back to listen to how this collection resonates more broadly, one can hear how it offers echoes of the interests and curiosities, contexts and modes of exploration of the last sixty years or so within the developments of this Fluxus-related genre of walking scores. Experienced as a body of explorers, an assemblage, the "we" of this book skews – with notable exceptions – sharply Western and male, ever-so-slightly urban, and every now and then collective and international. It is largely preoccupied with other humans and slightly preoccupied with cartographies. While, on the one hand, this reveals an alignment with the historical and societal contexts and constraints in which these scores were created, performed, and published, what for me was a surprising and slightly confronting realization was how many of these invitations for exploration – emerging from arguably one of the most accessible and inclusively performative fields within the enormous domain of "art" – might offer exhilarating freedom to some but be felt to offer something off-limits to others.

Who might dare to be out there in an urban or rural environment, doing strange things, drawing attention to themselves, stepping outside the boundaries of [normality](#), and "inscribing [their] presence in space" (p. 27) without fearing that they might suffer (serious) consequences? Who might dare to performatively bump into others on the sidewalk, as does Jiří Kovanda in "Contact

[Kontakt]” (1977, pp. 138-140)? Who might feel comfortable or welcome in a [certain group](#) who are attempting to rewrite the space? For whom might the more daring or exposing scores be considered off-limits or unsafe, and what does this say about the societies we live in? There is certainly room for future scores from many more voices.

Taken as a whole – and because of the copious invitations to explore, be curious, and do things differently – this collection of scores does, thus, end up shining a bright light on the pervasiveness of social norms, the narrowness of whose territories are exposed through the act of confidently stepping outside of them. The Step by Step Guide to Unapologetic Walking by the Indian collective Blank Noise (2008, pp. 82-84) offers a guide for “Action Sheroes/Theyroes/Heroes” which explicitly puts forward “unapologetic walking” as a way to challenge specific societal structures and contribute to the eradication of sexual and gender-based violence: “walk without a duppata. walk without your arms folded. walk without a clenched fist. walk smiling. walk smiling. walk smiling.” (p. 83)

And Giuseppe Chiari writes in “Playing the City [Suonare la città]” from 1969:

“it’s illegal
try – if you don’t believe me
to play the city
and you will see that they will stop you immediately” (p. 379)

If you have never experienced such feelings of operating outside the norms of city behavior, I suggest you accept Elena Biserna’s invitation

“to break down the social conventions that define our relations with public spaces, as well as to intervene in specific contexts, to put your body to play in space, to practice listening as an opening and as porosity, to invest yourself in collective action, and to reflect on the aesthetics and politics of sound in the urban environment.” (p. 46)

Particularly poignant for me is the productive exchange between two scores that directly relate to this invitation. The first is Pauline Oliveros’ well-known “Native / Native” (1974)

“Take a walk at night.

Walk so silently that the bottoms of your feet become ears.” (p. 315)

which Biserna puts into playful dialogue with her score “The Resounding Flâneuse / La flaneuse résonante” (2018).

“Walk so loudly that the bottoms of your feet become a percussion instrument.” (p. 366)

As a final note – or, better, step – I would like to express my personal gratitude for this remarkable and carefully-compiled and translated collection of both well- and lesser-known scores that have already served as a welcome addition to my knowledge of text scores. They provide inspiration in my work both as an individual artist as well as my work as a teacher and facilitator of artistic processes. As a core teacher for the Center for Deep Listening at Rensselaer, I have been involved in numerous situations in which participants interact by means of text scores that offer [invitations](#) to explore the [sonic environment](#) (together) through [listening](#), moving, and sounding. The scores offered here offer a rich source of inspiration for pondering the relational aspect

of moving through and with one's environment, for setting up playful and game-like explorations, for engaging in systematic or improvisatory [spatial interactions](#) with others and the surroundings, and for sharing moments of deep [sensory](#) discovery.