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*Budhadya Chattopadhyay*

## **Sonic drifting:** sound, city and psychogeography

Budhadya Chattopadhyay  
PhD Fellow, Department of Media, Cognition and Communication,  
University of Copenhagen  
[chatto@hum.ku.dk](mailto:chatto@hum.ku.dk)

[www.soundeffects.dk](http://www.soundeffects.dk)



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## Abstract

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*Studying and perceiving an emerging city by listening to its sounds might be phenomenologically reductive in approach, but it can lead to a framework for understanding the fabric of the urban environment through artistic practice. This paper describes a sound work, *Elegy for Bangalore*, and examines its artistic processes in order to shed light on the methodologies for listening to an expanding city by engaging with multilayered urban contexts and, subsequently, evoking the psychogeography of the city through sound-based artistic practice. The paper further investigates the project's approach, development and method to speculate on present urban conditions in countries like India experiencing rapid growth. Devising the unfolding auditory situation of an Indian city in corresponding acts of drifting, listening, recording and composing, this paper examines the processes of perceiving an apparently chaotic and disorganised urban environment with its multisensory complexity.*

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## Introduction

The evolving vision of a developed India has been one in which a majority of people will move from the countryside to settle in the cities. The potentially hypermodernising effects of an imminent urban life open up debates over the status of the city's atmosphere, ambiance and general appearance, particularly over the spatial dynamics that have contributed to a much larger set of concerns about the country's urban planning since independence in 1947. Burgeoning between the rural hinterland and an emerging urban landscape, the design of Indian cities undermines aesthetic choices by keeping its predominant interest in overwhelming growth and expansion. But, at the same time, the spatial dynamics of these emerging cities are severely affected by phenomena such as globalisation, hybridisation and digital convergence in which the old and the new are constantly shifting contexts and meanings.

In the present scenario of rampant and sporadic urban development, the active and intense interplay between tradition and current trends makes one's perception of a typical Indian city incomplete and lacking – though experientially overwhelming, urban planners and theorists associate these emergent urban spaces with words and expressions such as 'unintended', 'continuously thwarted', 'hopelessly inadequate', 'chaotic' (Bhan, 2013, p. 58, quoting Sen, 1976; Patel, 1997; Verma, 2002) and so forth. As urban planner Bhan further comments, '[Indian] cities [...] do not look like their plans' (Bhan, 2012),<sup>1</sup> perhaps shedding some light on the urban physiognomy<sup>2</sup> of transfiguring Indian cities. According to veteran urban planners such as Raj Liberhan, who is also the director of the India Habitat Centre in New Delhi, this disparity between the conceived scheme and the perceived appearance of an

Indian city is largely due to urban design being kept on the margins. Urban planners have come to rely heavily on rapid development and growth while ignoring the fundamental realities of the citizens' well-being. However, basic tenets of urban design prescribe the creation of spaces that nurture a healthy relationship between people and the city via the creative processes that emerge from a subjective understanding of an urban environment (Wall & Waterman, 2010). Liberhan comments, 'Design was never a conscious primary consideration in the way the [Indian] cities were being planned. It was always a by-product, landing second or third on the [planners'] list'.<sup>3</sup>

This disparity explains the generally syncretic, chaotic and inchoate structure of Indian cities. The effect is evident in the general disposition of the urban environment, particularly in the complex character of the everyday soundscape of the city, with multiple layers of sound from pre-industrial, industrial and post-industrial eras simultaneously active in juxtapositions or in contrapuntal relationships with one another. The sound environment is thus evolving in a spatio-temporal fashion, but it is also sonically overwhelming and potentially disorienting for the listening subject. It might be argued that speculating on the nature of the sound environment of a typical Indian city by relying on the lived experience of listening to everyday sounds could be considered a phenomenologically reductive exercise (Cogan, 2006). Nevertheless, a goal of the present investigation will be to discover if this method is capable of producing a comprehensive understanding of the structure and dynamics of the sound environment in question.

Contemporary India's urban soundscape indeed suggests an amalgamation of overwhelming sensory interactions with the city's shifting landscape, encompassing the flux of people and life, which are part of the ongoing narrative of multilayered auditory experiences in the city. Many of these experiences are dominated by an interaction with urban 'noise' (Voegelin, 2010, p. 43). Noise in an Indian city may be considered as layered in tone-colour, texture and depth along a broad spectrum of frequencies supplied by traffic, machines, household sounds and general architectural vibrations. There are varied sounds from people's speech and daily activities, media practices and other kinds of sonic objects; the noise content of a city thus offers a cacophony of different sound events scattered about the urban landscape.

According to traditional sound theorists such as R. Murray Schafer, sound abatement is necessary for a balanced soundscape (Schafer, 1994). I would argue that Schafer's method is non-inclusive in nature and unnecessarily burdened with the idea of urban pollution (Thompson, 2004). Rather, I assume that it is important for us to hear the fuller spectrum of sounds, incorporating them into our personal experiences by 'adaptive perception', a term I use here for the specific purpose of articulating an approach that suggests that sound pollution or an imbalance in acoustic ecology in any given urban landscape can be considered as a lack of playful design

and aesthetical mediation between sound sources and the human ear. A comprehensive and inclusive understanding of the urban sound environment involving the listener's subjectivity is a necessary prerequisite to this approach in order to gather knowledge about the sonic character and ambiance of a city.

### Tracing the ambiance: the premise

Given the specifically chaotic and disorganised nature of Indian cities, it is challenging for a city dweller to envisage the city before appreciating the 'soft ambiance' (Sadler, 1999 p. 70), such as the sound environment, in order to mentally speculate on the 'hard ambiances', such as the outlines of the architectural and the urban landscape. We can think of a city as being a circular urban constellation with inner and outer peripheries. A mental and subjective aural mapping of the city would then involve a journey from the inner to the outer, delving intensely into spatio-temporal experiences and conjuring up sonic imagery by interacting with and reflecting upon the specific ambiances and 'auditory situations' (Chattopadhyay, 2013) of the city.

In a similar fashion, the Situationists, who were active in Europe in the 1950s and 1960s and whose ideas have attracted the deep interest of urban theorists and artists, employed the concept of 'psycho geography' to describe the subversive and experimental practice of the subjective and mindful exploration of urban terrain by means of playfully walking or 'drifting' (called the *dérive*) across the city (Bassett, 2004; Coverley, 2010, p. 12). While to some, the term psycho geography might encompass the personality of the place itself, to others, it describes the 'minutely detailed, multi-level examinations of select locales that impact upon the writer's (or artist's) own microscopic inner-eye' (Self, 2007, pp. 11-12) following various mental as well as bodily encounters. Some profound differences notwithstanding, the *dérive* is generally considered to be the method of choice for the psycho geographic exploration of place, in a manner 'in which the contemporary world warps the relationship between psyche and place' (Self, 2007, p. 11).

In this sense, by listening to and drifting through an unfamiliar place, one indulges in a subjective analysis or mental journey through the urban sound environment as a psycho geographic exploration of the city in 'an attempt to transform the urban experience for aesthetic purposes' (Coverley, 2010, p. 10). One can take in and excavate a part of the acoustic geography without affecting it by 'nomadic listening' (Chattopadhyay, 2013)<sup>4</sup> or by drifting through the realm of sounds, altering the perspectives of the unfamiliar city into something creative or imaginative, which, according to Guy Debord, entails a 'playful-constructive behaviour' (Sadler, 1999, p. 77). It is my contention that finding an urban imagery and speculating on the hard ambiance of a transitory Indian city through sound and listening can be

achieved by exploring the specific artistic potential of psychogeography. The primary methodology for the project's fieldwork may therefore include the practice of psychogeography by playfully drifting through the sound environment – an experimental approach that can be complemented by sound-based artistic practice. This process may involve various innovative methods of listening and field recording, and the following studio work of composing. I perceived this trajectory of artistic processes following my 'lived experience' (Cogan, 2006) of Bangalore and a personified sonic interaction with the shifting urban environment of the city, which I could not approach in a cartographic sense. Instead of mapping the unfathomable and indiscernible city to specify the acoustic terrains, I preferred to act as what I am calling a 'sonic drifter' – an auditory equivalent of enacting the *dérive* (Coverley, 2010) in psychogeographic practice. In this connection, I find Simon Sadler's articulation of psychogeography pertinent:

As its name implied, psychogeography attempted to combine subjective and objective modes of study. On the one hand, it recognized that the self cannot be divorced from the urban environment; on the other hand, it had to pertain to more than just the psyche of the individual if it was to be useful in the collective rethinking of the city (Sadler, 1999, p. 77).

Following these sets of arguments and keeping in mind the nebulous, unplanned, overly noisy and chaotic structure of an Indian city that demands an inclusive and adaptive perceptual mode (as explained above), I embarked on an artist's residency in Bangalore<sup>5</sup> in the summer of 2010. The project that I developed during the residency proved to be an engaging as well as a definitive contribution to my artistic practice. Named *Elegy for Bangalore*,<sup>6</sup> an electro-acoustic composition stemming from the project explored emerging urban environments of Bangalore and was based on everyday lived experience in the domains of sound and listening. Infusing spatial perception with psychogeographic drifting, the sound work was intended to create a premise for in-depth observation and critical reflection on emergent urban spaces in India. As one of the outcomes of a large-scale ongoing project with varied forms of dissemination (from site-specific installation to sound composition), the work was released on the German sound art and experimental music label Gruenrekorder in 2013.

In this article, I describe the development of the piece primarily through my fieldwork, examining the artistic processes of *sonic drifting* and field recording to shed light on appropriate methodologies for comprehending an emerging Indian city by engaging with the multilayered urban contexts. These methodologies subsequently led to the composition of the sonic fabric and outlines of the city through a sound-based artistic practice applied with the intention of speculating on the present urban conditions in a rapidly transforming India.

## In the city

In order to locate the specific ambiances of the city, to limn the spatial span and to frame the essential shape of an evolving urban landscape, I needed an effective approach and a specific methodology. Bangalore was undergoing dynamic metamorphoses at that moment and is still recuperating from the debris caused by the large-scale metro constructions. The city has been affected by the metro alignments in various areas of its urban span, leaving major obtrusions such as construction sites here and there. The catchment areas of these sites scattered throughout the city ceaselessly upset the urban constellation, disturbing not only its natural landscapes and historic bodies of water, but also the city's collective memory, which was intruded on by sounds from the rapid and rampant urban development. These disruptions were received, however, with a sense of languid idleness by the city dwellers, as is quite typical of Bangalore. If we follow the urban chronicles, in an anthology entitled *Multiple City: Writings on Bangalore*, many of the contributors talk about the 'laid-back nature' (De, 2008, p. xvi), 'indolence', 'doesn't matter attitude' or 'leisurely pace' (Deshpande, 2008, p. 96) of the city of Bangalore. These writings frame Bangalore as a city that prefers an idyllic pace. This indolent approach is reflected in my encounters with the city during the development of the project and in the resulting sound work.

To understand the spatial dynamics and to explore what was to me a somewhat unknown city, I devised the project as a gradual development of a piece of sound art through listening, drifting and field recording, followed by the compositional phase of working in the studio. The point of departure for this process was knowledge of how various modes of my listening responded to the sound environments I encountered and the ways in which the experience was mediated artistically. Thus, the city provided the formation of sonic imagery comprehended by listening and mediated by field recording and composing. This multidisciplinary approach shed light on the urban experience at large within the contemporary phenomena of migration, hybridity and digital convergence. At the outset, these phenomena have introduced the intrusion of complex sonic elements such as the transitory ringtones of itinerant mobile phones and mobile phone-mediated voices into the otherwise laid-back character of Bangalore's sonic landscape, transforming the city into an ongoing narrative.

## Listening

In his seminal work *Listening*, Jean-Luc Nancy has argued that the act of listening operates on the edge of meaning or understanding in relation to encountering or experiencing previously unknown acoustic phenomena:

To be listening is always to be on the edge of meaning, or in an edgy meaning of extremity, and as if the sound were precisely nothing else than this edge, this fringe, this margin (Nancy, 2007, p. 7).

My early sonic encounters with the urban constellation of Bangalore surfaced somewhat at this margin of understanding and edge of orientation when my flight landed at Bangalore Airport. In the increasing air pressure that was clouding my earholes, there was a cry of a child passenger that sounded like it was coming from an unfathomable distance. This perception of distance in the sound perspective dominated when I got out at the new airport terminal, built with large panels of soundproof glass and metal frames, leaving no space for noise and sonic discomfort. The sound world changed, however, when I was on my way to the city centre. When I opened the car window, a multitude of sounds entered the closed space of the car, one being very prominent: the sound of metal bells from the hand-cranked revolving pots that produce roadside candy juice; these devices were located on street corners, and they made me aware of the rural, pre-industrial past of the city and the 'layered identities' (De, 2008, p. xiv) within the emergent global urbanity.

This experience of the city remained at the fringe of knowledge when, in the evening, the sound of temple bells reverberated in handmade loops within the small alleys of the middle-class neighbourhood near where I was staying. In the immediate audibility, I could hear the apparently silent room tone of my empty apartment as having the presence of a deep and diverse frequency spectrum and numerous sound elements at the margin of hearing. While listening to the city, the first thing that struck me as a listener was the juxtaposition of sound elements within an elusive silence. The act of listening was situated on the surface of the urban constellation in which infinite numbers of sound events (Altman, 1992) were taking place, immersing city dwellers into the sonic environment and taking away their capacity to observe. Therefore, I maintained my position as a *nomadic listener* to remain at the margin of sound with an observational-contemplative distance throughout the development of the project, and that was a strategy I employed, being aware of the problem of immersion in the overwhelming urban environments in India, a strategy that is well reflected in the artwork.

During the first three weeks of my stay, I spent time listening to the city from my residence, taking mental journeys to the streets of this unknown city as a sonic drifter. From morning onwards, the everyday environment of the neighbourhood offered an overwhelming number of sound elements. I observed that the morning sounds were clearer, more distinct and with finite beginnings and endings. I quote from the brief accounts of these ethnographic notes that have previously appeared in the magazine *Field Notes*:



Like an emerging sun, the sound events reflected over people and spaces without leaving any residue. As the day progressed, sounds began to elongate themselves, as if an event was stretching into mid-day when people lose their enthusiasm; and, as a consequence, indolence took its toll, and the lazy afternoon began to enter through the windowpane. As the sun passed overhead and made things conscious of their presence, the tone of the afternoon traffic inclined towards minor chords: the horn of a lone auto-rickshaw, the bells of a busy bicycle, the repetition of an impatient door-bell, a traversing crow and an unwanted male cat, all seemed to my drifting ears to be emitting minor chords at the peak hour of the working day (Chattopadhyay, 2012).

### My mental travels through the sound environment of the city reached the late afternoons:

It was time for the lonely housewives to switch off the TV and black crows to appear on the terrace while the domestic parrots were excited about the coming of evening. A few unemployed youths were getting together on street corners and their motor-bikes were waiting with their engines on. Exactly at this time, a street hawker was passing by to sell his handmade soap with melodious chants. This was the transition to a much-anticipated evening, an evening when most people would come back to their respective homes and prepare themselves for another working day. As evening was falling over the city like dispersing smoke, the absence of the sun was heard in the drone of traffic, sounds were stretched out in time, merging into one another; the whole city was emanating industrial music, which intercepted handmade loops of temple bells.

Standing at the large window of my sixth floor apartment, I could see the city landscape at evening and hear the indistinct sounds of people coming home on the main street with their discreet moans of fatigue. The car horns in metallic chorus seemed to melt into halogen light, and the insignificant residue was drifting toward darker corners of the city, windowpanes, and eventually to underground basements. Evening was merging with the night-time in the way television sets engaged with shouts and claps from reality shows. Alleys of the city were becoming emptier; windows and doors were shut; stray dogs were moving around and fighting each other over food. Drunkards were searching for their homes and involuntarily faltering. As the sound events grew thicker, the broadband frequencies could be located. A large-scale urban drone emerged from machines and electrical devices, which were hiding within predominantly man-made sounds. In this late-night drone, subtle sounds were emerging from here and there: a mosquito moved around; a drop of water fell into the empty bucket in my bathroom; the creak of the window was becoming distinct and overly clear. This was when I became conscious of my own bodily presence in this unknown urban constellation (Chattopadhyay, 2012).

It is evident in these notes that I, as a listener, was becoming the subject and the 'self', as an existential 'de-connection and contagion' (Nancy, 2007, p. 14) in relation to the nomadic listening processes I employed to explore the city. This was a process where the 'interior' and the 'exterior' or the 'psychic' and the 'social' identities of



the listener were merging into a subjective understanding of the sound environment as ‘the city’s own enduring personification’ (Self, 2009, p. 11) from a psycho-geographic perspective.

## Drifting

Listening in this way led me to the margin of the circle of the nebulous urban environment of Bangalore; and, subsequently, I found the entryway into the circle. It was a process of what Nancy calls the sharing of an inside/outside, division and participation (Nancy, 2007, p. 14). In due course during this participation process, I indulged in random drifting through the city to encounter various urban locations. While drifting, I tried to understand people’s association with various sonic territories. I learned about the urbanism of Bangalore evolving from its colonial past, and certain sound marks unique to the specific locale directed me to a number of zones where the colonial history of the city was preserved in its particular sound environment. These zones offered sounds that belonged to a distant pre-industrial past, unchanged, unravaged by time and, in their purity, untouched by the hand of development. The zones were in the uncharted peripheries and the forgotten corners of the city, unattended by the crowds in their euphoria over better urban living. These discreet zones allowed me to comprehend a pre-industrial environment of the city by means of listening to sounds that were no longer contemporary sound objects, but, rather, were more properly objects of nostalgia – the distinct sonic events of temple bells, archaic overtones of people’s speech and voices from ancient ceremonies beside the murmurs of historical bodies of water and plantations surrounding bits of memory that were cultivated by earlier generations of city dwellers.

In one of these drifting sessions, I walked through my neighbourhood following the clanging of a temple bell, and this led me to the door of a temple beside a large pond. There, while listening to the water lapping on the stones, I heard the splashing of older women taking a ritual bath, something that was mentioned in the urban chronicles and which has been performed at every sunrise perhaps since the advent of Bangalore circa 1537. The rhythmic sound of someone else washing clothes on the stairs led me to a collective laughter. I followed the laughter to a tea shop where older generations of city dwellers gather. Through their talk, I came to know about the Sunday market on the busiest street, where used and discarded reel-to-reel spools and audiotapes were sold by the roadside.

Starting very early in the morning, the selling faded with the rising sun, as if it was an event in the twilight of a semi-darkened corner of the urban subconscious, disappearing into memory. I started to collect a large number of spools and tapes from vendors with blurry faces, who seemed to come from the forgotten corners of the city. These spools had hazy handwritten scripts on them, informing the user of

a mediated history of personal recording expeditions. By playing back these spools, I found samples of home recordings, radio broadcasts, speeches, fragmented music and half-erased tracks of sundry room tones, overdubs and clichéd silences.

Earlier, in search of a playback machine for reel-to-reel spools, I visited the lone curio shop with an audio section in the older part of the city. The section was a museum in itself, focusing on the heydays of the analogue audio revolution with the likes of Akai, Philips and Grundig semi-professional home audio equipment, ranging from secondhand reel-to-reel players, turntables and disk changers to used stereo tape decks and home speaker systems. It was evidently an environment alienated from the emerging global city of Bangalore. As an extension of my visit to the curio shop located in a dark alley, I finally ended up in a radio repair store to renovate a newly purchased spool player. The store housed junk radios, valves and transistor parts from the First World War in organised racks. Right beside rambling traffic, the constant clattering of mobile phone ringtones and everyday sounds of the city, the junk radios provided a stark relief, an urban refuge for indolent reflections. To Jonathan Sterne, 'radio, film, and sound recordings become the agents of acoustic modernity' (Sterne, 2003). My attempts to record the sound field of the hypermodernising city, on the other hand, considered these once active talking machines as the auditory legacy of the city, since they enhanced their sonic 'objecthood' involving memory and nostalgia.

## Recording

In a recent interview published in the book *In the Field*, I discuss my specific approach to field recording. I engage in recording a project as a phenomenological development of listening through a process of experiencing the sound environment during my own intervention with a particular concern for the locale and its historical transition over time (Chattopadhyay, 2013, pp. 54-55). As an exploratory practice, sometimes the locale itself directs me to find specific sources of sound that stand out in the experiential level, or, in other words, the sources seem to choose me to receive my attention. As I have already mentioned above, I do not approach a locale in a cartographic sense, and I do not think my work tries to 'map' or portray a place. Rather, my interests lie in formulating the psychogeography in which 'I' am the starting point of the methodology. Sometimes, I do not record at all; 'perceiving' begins and expands over the process of listening and develops into an intuitive structure that I later use as a point of departure for further listening, formulating an acoustic geography of the city within the mind as a process of subjective or 'adaptive perception' as explained above.

For the first couple of months of being an artist-in-residence in Bangalore, I mostly listened to the city, waiting for it to unwrap before my ears as described

above. My recording machine (a Sound Devices 702) and two microphones (MKH 60 and MKH 30 as an MS stereo combination), along with a Rycote windshield, were mostly unused, left lying in the corner of my residence during those intense and compulsive listening sessions and directionless drifting through the streets of Bangalore. These sound walks eventually motivated me to unwrap the surface of immediate actuality of the essentially indolent nature and idyllic character of Bangalore, guiding me towards other peripheries of the city – the metro construction sites – for field recording to keep chronicles of my interactions with these hyper-active zones. From the very first day I went out with my recording gear to explore these parts of the city, my auditory senses became dominated by imagery of rapid growth. The enormous metro construction was ceaselessly striking like a whip on a large part of the emerging metropolis. As a straightforward approach, the first thing that prompted me to record was the industrial drone with a repetitive rhythm of machines at one of the busiest metro construction sites.

Traditionally, in sound scholarship, the recording of sound is discussed in terms of dislocating sounds from their respective sources. Both Rick Altman and R. Murray Schafer have spoken about the ways in which recording displaces sounds in time (Schafer, 1994; Altman, 1992). The field recording, therefore, helped develop a repository of sonic events recorded from the location as ‘sound objects’ (Schafer, 1966/2004) into the creative realm of composition. The methodology behind the field recording was to search for a wide sonic variety, aural juxtapositions, documentation of disappearing and newly found sounds and spatial associations by an MS stereo combination of microphone techniques, capturing inclusive aural information from the urban locations. The act of recording the drones became an immersive activity; one event merged into another, keeping residues of the natural crossfades entangled with each other. It was difficult to take a conscious pause in the intensifying process of field recording as the act became more instinctive in its execution and the microphone increasingly became an extension of the man (McLuhan, 2003). With total immersion into the task of translating listening to the location into recorded audio files through self-indulgent choices of angle, directionality, perspective and movement, the field recording at the construction sites of the city contributed to the artist’s working palette of dislocated sounds.

Once started, the process of field recording continued to evolve towards saturation: A location did not offer multiple layers of sound events at a given time and place; rather, the sonic phenomena became repetitive. Recording transcended the mere effort of documentation to develop into the impressions, reflections and musings of a field recorder. The city of Bangalore turned into a character or an antagonist who appeared in many faces in the layers of impromptu recordings of everyday traffic, rumbles and vibrations. The periphery of construction sites at night particularly offered exclusive sounds of crickets, the wind’s reflection on tin sheets,

fleeting sirens and train whistles in perspective. One recording session ended, and another began; the same places were exposed repeatedly to recording media. The subtle changes between the sounds of different days became unrecognisable. The nearly identical audio files outgrew compact flash cards. Nevertheless, the city continued to display its repository of sound events to develop an archive of disembodied sounds with each day that passed.

## Composing

Following the arguments of composer and sound theorist Barry Truax, we can consider soundscape composition as a form of sound art that stems from both location-specific sound recording and subsequent studio processing of the 'artistic material' of recorded and disembodied environmental sound (Truax 2007). Field recordings gathered during my artist's residency at different locations in Bangalore exemplified my interactions with the city as I experienced urban growth in terms of the enormous metro-rail construction that was forcing the city to reorganise its spatial dimensions, appearance and outlines. The disruption happened with an anticipation of idleness quite typical of Bangalore, as mentioned earlier in reference to the urban chronicles.

Informed by these experiential accounts and tracing the notion of composing with field recordings, the work *Elegy for Bangalore* represents an indolent mood prevalent within the urban constellation of the city reflected in the recorded sounds. As 'artistic materials', these recordings shaped the composition as a process to enable meditative and in-depth observation of the chaotic and 'noisy' exterior of the city. Further, they facilitated the finding of an entry into the city's multilayered interiors to allow a perception of the transformative and manifold sound environment as a whole. Sounds restored from collected tapes found at the flea market provided such insights into the city's auditory legacy forming another sonic layer for the work.

Stemming from this myriad of phenomenological experiences of the emerging Bangalore and its composite sound world, the work formulates a sonic construct that investigates the multilayered listening processes of the city undergoing dynamic metamorphosis. Working on the assumption that the passing of time in a once inhabited, but rapidly emergent locale could be captured by employing a contemplative-poetic mood of elegiac pace in a listening methodology, the work explores the mood of indolence and the pace of idleness to facilitate meditative and in-depth observation involving a keen sense of temporality and spatial historicity. This working method also reshaped memory associations disconnected from and erased through the process of listening and subsequent phase of composing in the two-year time span of its development.<sup>8</sup>

The strategy of composition has been a digital-acoustic mediation (Chattopadhyay, 2012, p. 226) of recognisable environmental sounds into auditory contexts, the aim being to evoke the listener's association, cognition and imagination of the city. As mentioned above, in this piece, the keen sense of passing time works as a mode of observation. Observation opens up the scope for examining the urban environment studying the city's spatial dynamics in current flux. The method also helps to develop an understanding of the inchoate and rapid urban expansion using the subjective intervention of the listener. The slow pacing and the indolent mood compositionally explored in the piece provide the premise for the evocation of the urban psychogeography, a premise from which the processes of knowing and comprehending the sound environment of the emergent city evolve into adaptive perception and take a specific shape within the mind of the listener.

## Conclusions

The sound work *Elegy for Bangalore* was based on field recordings made at various metro construction sites in Bangalore. Materials also included retrieved audio from old reel-to-reel tapes found at the city's flea markets. This extensive repository of field recordings and other audio materials eventually took the form of an elegiac composition, infusing spatial perception gathered through sonic drifting, reflecting on the perceived longing of the past prevalent in the rapidly modernising urban experience. The work created a conceptual, practical, and methodological premise for in-depth observation of the corresponding historicity and passage of time, and psychogeographic reflection on emergent urban spaces in India with its chaotic, noisy and hybridised sonic environments. This premise can be considered as a prototype for reading other emerging cities in developing countries. Starting with a mental journey through the acoustic geography of the city, the artistic methodology involving psychogeographic drifting helped to give shape to the general outer appearances of the city that were registered in the mind of the listener as a personified construct within the subjective and adaptive auditory perception of a nomadic listener. The sound piece and its artistic process proposes an appropriate methodology for listening to an emerging Indian city by engaging with the multilayered urban contexts and, subsequently, composing the essential disposition of the city by way of exploring the interplay between various modes of listening, drifting, field recording and composing. The work encourages speculation on the present urban conditions in rapidly developing countries like India by examining the processes of perceiving an apparently chaotic and disorganised urban environment with its multisensory complexity.

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## Notes

- 1 Gautam Bhan made this comment questioning the relevance of urban planning in Indian cities in a draft version of this paper, which was previously published as a working paper at the Indian Institute for Human Settlements, entitled 'Is urban planning relevant for Indian cities?' (New Delhi, 2012).
- 2 Lavater, Johann Caspar. 1826. *Physiognomy*. Oxford University.

- 3 Mr Raj Liberhan made this comment as an opening comment to the Urban Habitats Forum Roundtable called 'Re-imagining Indian cities – Design for urban spaces' in Gurgaon, 2008.
- 4 My own term used in an article: 'Auditory situations: Notes from nowhere'. *Journal of Sonic Studies*, 4.
- 5 The BAR1 residency, website: <http://bar1.org/2010/index.html>
- 6 The fuller published work is here: <http://www.gruenrekorder.de/?p=9749>. A shorter excerpt of the work is attached with this article. A broadcast version can be listened to here: <https://soundcloud.com/budhaditya/elegy-for-a-city-1>
- 7 Brief accounts of these ethnographic notes and a description of the project have previously appeared in the magazine *Field Notes*. Chattopadhyay 2012a.
- 8 See information sheet on the work at the label website: [http://www.gruenrekorder.de/?page\\_id=9517](http://www.gruenrekorder.de/?page_id=9517)