# NO VANTAGE POINT

## REFLECTIONS, PROVOCATIONS AND EXPERIMENTS IN IMMERSION

DUNCAN SPEAKMAN

Contents

# Looking Outwards

Immersion might mean
looking outwards
listening outwards
Immersion might mean
there is no vantage point

From outside this might be seen as a way to
map the territory, but the process of mapping has
historically often involved some violence.

From inside I'm trying to think about common
lands, and about common words.
There is a linguistic theory that we can't talk about
something we don't have a word for, you can have
it in your head but you can't get a firm grasp of it.

I'm looking for languages that we can share,
languages through which we can exchange, ideas,
approaches, tensions.

I want to try unpacking this word immersion,
which recently seems to have become a short-
hand for specific forms of media and performance,
immersion as some kind of cultural signifier, of
immersion as a noun, or as a verb.

It feels that everyone is leaning towards the act of immersing as a kind of cocooning, immersive media as a thing that wraps around us.

Instead, I want to think a little about immersion as something that already exists
Something we live with all the time
Immersion as the way of describing the way we exist deep inside complex tangled ecologies.

And around this word, beyond it, underneath it, even woven within it, maybe we'll find agendas of care, of attending to the environments we inhabit.

Immersion meaning there is no vantage point.

# About this book

This is a book for anyone interested in ideas of immersion, it is primarily designed for makers but I hope some of the ideas here might be useful to a wider audience.

It's mainly focused around my reflections on experiencing artworks that describe themselves as immersive, alongside these I offer a selection of provocations and experiments. They can be thought of as leaping off points, things to kick start ideas, or as a release from a creative block. How you use them is up to you. They're drawn from my own practice and that of other people that inspire me or I've had the fortune to work with. They're not specifically designed for any one form of 'immersive' art, and in fact many of them could be applied to a wide range of practice.

I've grouped things together under a set of categories: presence, augmenting, locating, ecologies, networks, senses and edges.

These are not intended as hard boundaries, they were really just a useful tool while collecting my thoughts, you may find some of the provocations and experiments apply to more than one category. The experiments might even offer an unexpected insight into your process if you pick one from a category that seems unrelated to your project. Pick and choose, or remix and adapt as you desire.

One thing that you may find strangely absent from the text is any explicit references to what is often described as 'immersive theatre' (such as DreamThinkSpeak, Slunglow, Punchdrunk etc etc). I think for now it was just a little outside the scope of the book, and also maybe I was writing this more as a response to the current wave of mediated immersive experiences delivered through VR, AR and whatever labels appear  next.

You may also notice that many of the experiments are sound led. This is the world I come from so it's to be expected, but also I think there's a lot of learning from the inherently immersive nature of sound that's easy to overlook.

Finally it's important to say that this is a work in progress, a first draft of a collection of thoughts that I would like to add to, adapt and grow.  If you try out the experiments and have some alternate suggestions, or maybe some new provocations please do get in touch and let me know.


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# Presence

*November 2017, I am sitting down, the geographic location of my body is irrelevant, what my eyes see and my ears hear is the edge of a city in Korea, it is daytime, I seem to be standing in a gravel covered car lot, above me some kind of motorway flyover, but the scene seems almost static, I turn my head to look around but there is no movement, no visible signs of life, only the rustling of leaves and wisps of wind in my ears suggest movement, suggest action. The image and sound changes instantly, without warning I am suddenly displaced, it is night time, I am in the centre of a red light district, neon lights hum around me, trash litters the street around where my feet would be if I could see them. I hear footsteps approaching me, possibly from behind, it is hard to tell, I move my head and the sound of the clicking heels seems to leap around. They stop, I turn my head to face what I remember as being forwards, a Korean woman is standing there, her head slightly higher than mine, she is looking directly at me, we make eye contact, she is silent, wordless, but her stare makes me feel guilty for looking at her.*

*I'm in the middle of experiencing a piece of 360 video called Bloodless, created by Gina Kim, it's a docu-drama that traces the murder of prostitute in Korea by a US solider in 1992. This moment of eye contact is powerful, in the simple fact that I feel my presence is*

*acknowledged, but not in some hackneyed fictional way, I am not a character.*
*It is me, staring, and my staring is highlighted, I didn't film this, I don't feel like I am actually in Korea, but I do feel responsible for something, even if I'm not sure what that is.*
*The experience of Gina Kim's Bloodless is immersive, both in its promotional copy and in its artistic intention. Yet even with its approaches to presence it is for me immersion as isolation.*
*At best it is an offering to be another, at worst a step towards the dystopian visions of social isolation and abandonment of the physical as seen portrayed in the humans of Wall-E, or by the flacid and aging body of Bruce Willis in the 2009 film Surrogates, where rich humans live vicariously in the physical world, their real bodies sitting and decaying in lounge chairs at home, using a VR system to remote control idealised robotic visions of themselves that go about the city. At the time it might have been seen as the empty threat of Second life, but the fear remains.*
*This last year I've found myself too often watching rooms of goggle wearing people, groups tightly packed in small spaces, but unaware of each other, at IDFA the VR viewing room was even placed in a greenhouse, through the glass we could watch people grow into their virtual selves.*

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## PROVOCATIONS

Is the audience member present in the piece?
Not just as a mute listener or impotent observer,
but as a physical body with embodied experience.

Is the interaction you offer meaningful, are you
creating more than a toy to play with?

When and where is the audience, if they still have
a sensation of the room they are in, the body they
inhabit, can you really ignore that?

Have you acknowledged that the audience has
already crossed the fourth wall?

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## EXPERIMENT #1

Often when we talk about immersive experiences we are talking about placing the audience inside the work. When we do this are we simply giving them eyes and ears in a situation (and maybe some kind of control, haptic or otherwise), how much attention have we given to their awareness of their physical presence. What happens if we highlight it in different ways, from different perspectives, from different times even?
This experiment plays with simple changes in language to explore the different kinds of impact they have on your experience.

*What you need:*

Somewhere to sit, something you can record and playback sounds on.

*Try this:*

1.  Sit down, record a short (1 – 2mins) description of yourself and your surroundings. Initially speak the words in first person e.g. "I am sitting in a chair, I can see a book on the table in front of me, the back of my neck is itchy.." etc.  Stay where you are and listen back to the recording.

2.  Try recording a description again, but this time speak it in the second person, e.g. "You are sitting in a chair, you can see a book on the table in front of you". Stay where you are and listen back.

3.  Make another recording but this time try changing the tense of what you're saying, e.g. "You used to sit in this chair, there used to be a book on the table in front of you, you used to be able to see trees out the window". Stay where you are and listen back to it.

*Extend this:*

-  Try out different combinations of tenses and address, like third person (he/she/they are sitting on a chair) or different tenses ('tomorrow I will sit in this chair')

-  Try limiting your descriptions to something specific, for example only talk about your physical sensations, or only talk about what is in the room.

-  If you've been listening back on headphones, try playing it back on a loudspeaker in the room and vice versa.

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-  If you're feeling bold ask someone else to help and record them describing you and the situation.

- Try taking one of your recordings and listen to it in another location

*Explore further:*

This exercise was inspired by work I've made in collaboration with the theatre company Uninvited Guests. You may also want to explore the work of Ontroerend Goed, especially their work 'A Game Of You'.

http://www.uninvited-guests.net

http://www.ontroerendgoed.be

https://www.ginakimfilms.com

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# Augmenting

*It is the end of summer in 2003, I'm sitting in a church in Somerset listening to the album Untitled #197 by Francisco Lopez,*

*Over 45 mins waves of resonant metallic tones slowly build in volume, starting from a silence I strain to listen in to until a point where I am entirely consumed by the sound field, as the volume continues to rise steadily I almost consider getting up to turn the amplifier volume down, but I resist, I commit myself to the experience, suddenly it stops and it appears the world has been silenced, an incredibly high pitched tone fills the now empty sound space and I'm not sure if it's in my ears or a final parting shot by the composer, as this doubt plays around in my head a gentle hissing sound begins to appear, entwining itself with the doubtful tone, the hiss becomes a patter and I realise it has started to rain outside.*
*My listening becomes stretched from the speakers, to the room, to the world outside, and there is no barrier between them, and I know exactly where I am, sitting in a church in Somerset surrounded by fields and weather. My attention has been shifted, my initial focus into the faint traces of a sound recording led me to shut out my surroundings, and yet now, here I was at the end completely aware of my existing surroundings, of my place within them, of shifting seasons and*

*changing weather.*
*In early modern England once a year on the Monday,*
*Tuesday and Wednesday before Ascension Day, people*
*marked their aural boundaries, Gang days, gationtide,*
*beating the bounds, many different names for local*
*customs. Declaring the church, the field and woods as*
*their place in the world, at the same time blessing new*
*crops or other core activities of the community, church*
*bells were rung, hunting horns blown, and processions*
*made around the parish boundaries. This was an aural*
*marking of space, a way of saying we are here. But*
*sound also marking our place in time too, the dawn*
*chorus of birdsong, calls to prayer from minarets, the*
*firing of guns at regular intervals from castles, each of*
*these placing markers in our continuous immersion in*
*the flow of time, what Boulez would call a striation of*
*a smooth space.*

*In listening to the Francisco Lopez piece the sound*
*became a true vignette, the edges of the sonic image*
*blurring into the canvas.*
*My immersion was an existing condition, the sound*
*had not created it, only highlighted it, the fuzzy edges*
*of the transition let multiple things interweave*
*Intermmersive*
*They let things co-exist*
*Commersive*

*It's 2018, I'm standing outside a Flemish culture centre wearing a pair of augmented audio glasses, but the name is a misnomer, there is no glass, only frames with speakers discreetly mounted in the arms.*

*I can hear the people coming in and out of the venue doors, I can hear my own breathing, I can hear the tourist crowds in the nearby city square, but I can also hear music playing, It takes me a moment to consider that it might be coming from these glasses, the sound seems too rich, too full, but I lift the frames away from my head and the music disappears.*

*Soon I am walking the busy streets, navigating my way through the same tourists I heard from a distance. But I can also hear other voices, people walking the Campostela pilgrimage. I try to concentrate on their words but instead I am constantly distracted by my surroundings, they talk about why they undertook the pilgrimage, they talk about the decision in their lives that led them to that point.*
*I want to sympathise, to empathise, to feel that their story somehow connects with mine, but they don't know I'm here, they keep talking, words and words and words, but I can't follow it, I'm trying to attend to what is next to me, what is blocking and opening my path, what is making the city vibrant for me.*

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*The city wants to consume me,*
*to show me it's splendour,*
*the voices want me to hear their story,*
*neither gives the other space, the edge between them is*
*a brutal, not a flickering blur that allows me to easily*
*transition. I find myself between two layers of immer-*
*sion that do not care for each other.*
*I am stranded*
*de-mersed*

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## PROVOCATIONS

If you're augmenting something should it be part of the narrative?

If your augmented reality is presented on a tabletop, is the tabletop a crucial part of the mis-en-scene, or is it just to hand?

If the real world can provide you with content, isn't it a shame to waste it?

Is augmenting the same as adding?

Should augmented reality be a dialogue between your content and the world around you?

## EXPERIMENT #2

Sometimes the act of using augmented media seems simple, we are placing a sound or image into an existing landscape. If for example it is a virtual actor performing in front of you what are the differences to think about from that and a live actor in front of you on a stage?  If you're using recorded media (as opposed to computer generated) then one of the main complexities is that you are layering two different moments in time and space. They become intertwined but they are essentially unaware of each other. Advanced AR systems can respond to the spatial environment, but not really to events yet. These experiments in what I call 'ghosting' explore the layering of recorded sound into live environments so you can explore the tensions, problems and possibilities created by simple augmentation.

*What you need:*

Something you can record sounds with while walking around and something to playback sounds on through headphones as you're walking around. If possible try to make a binaural recording.*

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*Try this:*

1.  Plan a short walking route that's easy to repli-cate, any kind of environment is fine, but the more activity and sound going on around you the better. Walk the route once while making a recording, and not speaking. Then walk it again playing back the recording on headphones, try to walk at the same pace you went while recording.

2.  Try getting someone else to make the recording walk and then you listen back to it while walking. It can sometimes be hard to synchronise with their walking pace, look for auible cues that might help like opening/closing doors, walking past noisey cafés etc.

3.  Try the same as above but adding in spoken words while you are recording.  You might want to explore tenses/persons as in the presence exer-cise.

*Extend this:*

The headphones you use to listen back will change this experience greatly, especially in terms of how much sound they let in. See how it feels

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using isolating or noise cancelling headphones vs. small ear bud style ones.  At the moment many manufacturers are beginning to sell headphones specifically designed for augmented experiences. Sometimes these have microphones built in and software allows you change how much live external sound you hear (Sennheiser's Ambeo system) and others sit outside your ear so they don't block your normal hearing at all (BOSE AR glasses). If you get a chance try the same experiments using these systems.

You can also try adding video into this experiment. Repeat the same process but also carry a video camera in front of you, when you rewalk the route playback the footage on the camera, and try to line up the display as it was while you were filming.

*Explore further:*

There is a long history of audio walks that draw on the kinds of experience this experiment creates, far too many to recount here.  Have a look at the early Walkman experiments of Antenna Theatre such as High School that combined prerecorded audio with live performers or Teri Rueb's GPS triggered forest walks. The Soundtrackcity collective

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has worked extensively with walks that use field recordings, Uninvited Guests have blended fiction into audio walks of historic sites, explicitly layering past times into the present to work with the gap between. Splash and Ripple have combined fake skype calls with binaural sound to create more everyday experiences. Ant Hampton's recent work sometimes uses staged events in the binaural recordings that appear to be happening around you when you listen back. Video walks are less common, but Departures by Plan B Performance and Alte Bahnhof by Janet Cardiff are two great examples.

http://www.antenna-theater.org/

https://planbperformance.net

http://www.anthampton.com

http://terirueb.net/

https://www.splashandripple.com/

https://www.cardiffmiller.com/

http://sennheiser-ambeo.com/

https://www.bose.com

*binaural recording literally means two channel recording, most commonly it is used to simulate the way our ears work. The process usually involves placing an omni-directional microphone next to or in each of your ears (or in a dummy head), and then playing back the recording on headphones. You can buy microphones specifically designed for binaural recording but any omni-directional micro-phones will work.*

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# Locating

*I'm in Amsterdam, sitting at a table on which I see a map of the Netherlands, I put on a VR headset, the room around me disappears, as does my own body, but I find myself looking at the same table, even though I can't see my hands I can feel the table, I feel more present in this virtual space than most.*

*A simple interface means that I can move a virtual pointer by moving my head, it allows me to find out about places on the map, even giving me zoomed in districts, satellite imagery that floats above the map. I'm invited to explore deeper, by focusing on a point in a district I can find out more, when I do a beautifully rendered 3D model of an antique shop appears on the table in front of me.*

*I can't feel it but I can still put my hands on the table to lean over and put my head right inside it.  This consistent physical connection keeps me stable.*

*But there is something more.*

*This piece, 'The Industry' by Mirka Duijn…. is a documentary about the illegal drug trade in the Netherlands. About suburban king pins, dock workers and money laundering nail salons.*
*And right now I'm in the middle of it, not just within*

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*the piece, but experiencing it in Amsterdam.*

*Afterwards as I walk the Dutch streets I feel myself walking through this invisible network I just learnt about. The immersion of the virtual reality extends into the world around it in space I time, but I think I only feel it because I am in the Netherlands, it is loca-mersive.*

## PROVOCATIONS

Does the thing you're making care where it is?

Why this place?

What is unique to this place, and what does it share with others?

How does my experience change if I know this place well, or if I've never been here?

What aspects of the thing you're making will linger on for the audience?

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## EXPERIMENT #3

What happens when you're reading a book and it's set in a place you've been to before?
What happens when you're reading a book that describes not just a character who is similar to you, but also the place you're in when you're reading it?
Could we think about a city guidebook as an immersive experience, it shapes your path and your knowledge of a place, it positions you in time and space and offers you interactive choices?  What about a work of fiction? How does the environment around you affect the words you're reading, when you are feeling the same streets, the same grass, the same rain? Try this simple experiment to see what happens, what works and what doesn't. Think about what words you might add or remove to increase connections between the story and your situation.

*What you need:*

A book with a scene that's set in a location you know and can get to, and possibly some willing friends.

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*Try this:*

1. Take a book you know the location it's set in, or one chapter/scene in a book you know the location of, go to that place, read the relevant section of book.

2.   Choose another scene that you know the location of, but this time one that has multiple characters in it. Get together enough friends to represent the other characters and decide beforehand who represents who. Go to the location and read the relevant section of the book.

3.   After you've read book take some time to explore the location, but try to still 'be' your character, see it through their eyes, maybe even call each other by your characters names…..

*Extend this:*

Rather than using a book why not pick an episode of a TV series and do the same as above. Maybe just listen to the soundtrack of the episode, so rather than looking at the screen you're looking at your surroundings, listen to the story play out while you're there, then explore the location. Maybe even keep referring to each other with your characters names.

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*Explore further:*

This experiment in some ways inverts common site specific practice, which more often involves a deep exploration of site *before* the work is created. How work relates to the site it's presented in is a very deep and wide ranging subject and too much to cover here thoroughly. For some site specific theatre ideas and legacies you could look at the work of Mike Pearson and Brith Gof, or read Miwon Kwon's 'One Place After Another' for some wider thinking on site specific art.
If you're interested in how literature might be influenced by site Anezka Kuzmicova's paper 'Does It Matter Where you Read?' throws up some interesting research, and the forthcoming book from the Ambient Literature project collects new thinking about situated narratives.


https://research.ambientlit.com/

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# Ecologies & Networks

*I'm in Krems in Austria, a small town on the Danube. I'm walking down the cobbled high street, small shops selling kitsch Austrian knitwear and lederhosen, and anything you make from apricots. Aside from the fact that the local prison houses Josef Fritzl, it is a quintessentially quaint environment. It is elderly couples, a few tourists, the pace is slow.. it is certainly not London or Tokyo, and yet my ears are being overhwhelmed by a crushing symphony of bleeps, pulses, whirs, whines and crackles.. I'm wearing a pair of headphones designed by Christina Kubisch and I'm undertaking one of her 'Electrical Walks'. The headphones are designed to pick up the electro magnetic fields in the area, I'm tuned into the dense streams of data, of shop security systems, mobile phones, electric doors and cash points. It is an articulation of the invisible structures around me.*

*Kubische's work is part of a field of artworks that explore the signification of these invisible electronic environments around us. This might seem like the obsessive approach of people concerned with technologies encroachment on our lives, but the ubiquity of invasive penetrating waveforms also finds itself in more commercial and artistic contexts.*

*The Bratislava company LOM make the Electrosulch, a cheap handheld device that let anyone tap into these unseen worlds. John Twells writing in FACT maga-*

*zine describe the first time he came across one "it was being passed around at a pub in London to a chorus of coos from an interested crowd of observers. It's the kind of device that sparks an immediate response, revealing the dense, eerie sounds hanging in the air around any electronic gadget".*

*Teresa Dillon's research has been asking whether learning how to listen to these radio waves provoke a sense of care about spectrum politics and publics? How it might address Anna Tsing's call for "noticing" that requires us to look around rather than look ahead and to know the histories of the human and non-human creators and participants that make up this world.*

*Highlighting and sensing the complexity of our environments doesn't always need specialised equipment or invasive surgery. Sometimes it just requires signposts. Ingrid Burrington's work on the physical manifestation of the internet shows how just a shift in your existing knowledge and attention can reveal the fragments of the digital infrastructures that facilitate so much of the immersive media I'm discussing.*

*If you know the right registration numbers of manhole covers in New York you can see where to access the time Warner cables placed as the first high speed internet in 1996. Walking the city we see markings embossed in metal and sprayed in chalk paint by engineers that*

*create a dense hieroglyphics. The physical network represented in languages of shallow cables, and even without these languages our eyes will let us see traffic signal controllers attached to road crossings but tied into a grid of data, of wireless routers on the walls of cafes, CCTV globes discreetly sitting in the top of street lamps, and the slightly too perfectly formed evergreen trees that hold cell towers by the side of the motorway. Ingrid says… " I have spent the last few years trying to glimpse the totality of the network in the fragments of network infrastructure, and while it is a far more coherent landscape today than it appeared to me a few years ago, at the end of the day these fragments remain the only forms I trust."*

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## PROVOCATIONS

Are you creating a new network, or exploiting an existing one?

What are the hierarchies of power, territory and ownership in the network?

What digital footprints are you finding or forgetting?

What would the most positive exploitation of this network look like? or the most evil?

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## EXPERIMENT #4

It seems so simple to access files from a mobile device, data moving back and forth between our hands and the cloud. WiFi hotspots and satellite transmissions converging to help guide us across a map on a screen. It's easy to forget that this data has a physical presence, electromagnetic fields penetrating not only walls but our own bodies. Whatever your feelings about the health impact of this it's hard to deny that we are immersed in things we can't see.
This experiment offers a simple way to tap into this invisible world without any invasive surgery.

*What you need:*

EMF microphones or sensor (see below)

*Try this:*

1. Use the EMF kit to explore a place you know well, try to identify the sources of waves. Can you find invisible zones and their edges?

2. Use the EMF kit in a place you know well, but stay in one spot. Listen to how things change around you over time.

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*Extend this:*

What happens at different times of day in the place you're exploring? What methods could you use to influence what the kit is sensing?

*Explore further:*

To explore more of what people are doing and thinking in this area have a look at Teresa Dillon's research on electromagnetic spectrum, Christina Kubish's 'Electrical Walks' and the detectors project by Martin Howse and Shintaro Miyazaki.

http://www.polarproduce.org/

http://www.christinakubisch.de/

http://www.1010.co.uk

https://lom.audio

https://somasynths.com/ether/

*\*EMF stands for electromagentic field, you've probably already heard the interferance mobile phones can create in sound systems, but is just one audible artefact. Most EMF are at frequencies far outside the range of human hearing, but it's possible to get hold of devices that shift them to a range we can hear. Microphones and devices available from LOM (website) allow for close up monitoring of fields around devices, and the ETHER by Soma Labs is designed for wider environmental sensing. Searching around on amazon you will find EMF meters that are for simple level measurement, not as sonically exciting but they will point you in the right direction.*

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## EXPERIMENT #5

An aspect of physical networks that's worth thinking about is the way they traverse areas in a way we often cannot. The sewer pipe that runs from your house does not need to wait for traffic lights to cross the road, and it cares little for trespassing on private property or whether night time streets are safe. You can have a online chat with a support worker in a bank but trespassing private property laws mean you can't just walk into the call centre and talk to them. Travelling 'as the data streams' might sometimes be a contemporary flying crow. Even though you are connected by and immersed in these networks you are not always free to follow the lines.

*What you need:*

Access to some kind of infrastructure plan. In the UK it's quite easy to request these from www.line-searchbeforeudig.co.uk or get in touch with your local council.

*Try this:*

1. Pick a location that means something to you, maybe a friends house, or just a cafe you visit regularly.

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2. Using the infrastructure plan try and walk there following just one type of network, for example just following the water supply routes.

3. What kind of legal and physical barriers do you find? Does your physical consciousness of the environment change at all?

*Extend this:*

While following a network try and spot all the places it breaks through into your environment and becomes visible.  Try to work out which areas you move through are public space and which are private, this is not always as easy as it might seem. Sometimes it's just brass tacks on the floor that demarcate the edges of a private space, what other markers can you find?

*Explore further:*

If you're interested in the physical presence of the internet then Ingrid Burringtons book 'Networks of New York' is a good start, as is James Bridle's radio show 'New Ways of Seeing'. If you want to understand the markings on the street in your own area you should get in touch with civil engineers, or just ask a construction worker on the street next

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time you see them spraying chalk.
If you enjoyed trying to trace the networks and want to spend some time thinking more about different ways to engage with environments then a good start is to look at the work of the Situationist International (and then the many many artists who have been inspired by them).
For some more experiments in this direction and practical pointers the South West artist Wrights and Sites have produced a number of 'mis-guides' full of things to try. Also see Phil Smith's excellent Mythogeography and Counter-Tourism books.

To experience some artworks that immerse you in networks Robin Rimbaud (aka Scanner) has a new piece in London called Undercurrent which lets you hear the world of water and life under your feet in Greenwich, and the Platform Group have an audio walk called 'And While London Burns' which guides you through the networks of oil industries that weave together the City of London.

http://lifewinning.com/

http://scannerdot.com/

https://www.mythogeography.com/

http://mis-guide.com/

https://platformlondon.org/

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**EXPERIMENT #6**

The connections within networks are not all as tangible or easy to grasp as a physical cable or measurable transmission strength. These networks often carry the sound of our voices, and in that moment of spoken communication there is a shared acoustic space that exists somewhere between two phone loudspeakers in two different locations. Along with the inherent intimacy of having a voice so close to your ear, a simple phonecall creates a new sonic space of dialogue that we share with both a person and a network. This little experiment plays with some of these ideas and lets you experience intimacy within a network and a physical space simultaneously.

*What you need:*

Two people, mobile phones, a building you can walk the entire outside perimeter of

*Try this:*

Pick a building that you can walk around the outside of (it could be a row of buildings, it really just needs to be something you can circumnavigate in about 5 mins). Stand next to your friend, phone each other, once the call is connected walk in op-

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posite directions around the building. The only rule is that once you've walked past each other either of you are allowed to hang up the call whenever you want. What changes as you approach each other, as you pass each other?

*Extend this:*

A simple variation is to have a no talking rule, or no talking until you've walked past each other. Another possibility is to set up a conference call between many mobile phone users and send them off on individual journeys, all the while connected to each other by voice, chaos or harmony can emerge from this quite quickly.

*Explore further:*

'A Machine To See With' by Blast Theory plays out an entire fictional narrative over a series of mobile phone voice messages. Rimini Protokol's 'Callcutta' engages an audience member in a journey across Berlin guided by a call centre worker in India. For a holistic take on these networks  you could read

about Dunne and Raby's idea of 'Hertzian Space'.

https://www.rimini-protokoll.de

https://www.blasttheory.co.uk

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# A note on senses

*When Jean Paul Thibaud was writing about the experience of using mobile music players he described them as 'a manager of sensorial channels'. My personal interpretation of this has always been about how once you use a medium to modify or restrict a sense our other senses begin to adapt or compensate. Our senses become split, in this case what we're hearing is dislocated from what we're seeing. Think about the opposite, when we wear a blindfold we often become more conscious of sound. When I went to a black out restaurant (the ones that use total darkness to change your appreciation of the food) I was amazed by how much more aware I was of the food's texture. A really common response I've heard from audience members taking part in one of my audio walks is how much more they noticed their sense of smell. So many forms of immersive media create some kind of dislocating split between senses. When we put on a VR headset our tactile and olfactory sensations are dragged away from our visual and aural senses, and if the headphones or visor aren't tight enough the world in which your body is present often creeps into the edges of the virtual space.*
*There is no clear cut method for addressing this schizosensory experience, but being aware of it might be a useful part of the design process. Instead of ignoring, we have the opportunity to accommodate, use and play with it.*

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*If we think about senses in relation to the previous chapter we might also think about how some tools expand and overlap our sensory categories beyond the common law five. Does being able to listen to electromagnetic fields or hearing remote network space also in some way manage our sensorial channels? Dowsing rods are still used by water companies, a pseudo science often explained as ideomotor responses that our muscles make to sensory clues that we are not even aware of. A more Daily Mail clickbait outrage version can be found in the world of bio-hackers, such as people surgically implating magnets into their bodies to feel magnetic north.*

*There are many non-human techniques for tuning into the world, and maybe some of them might lead to new sense of care for the dense environments we live in, that we are always immersed in.*

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## EXPERIMENT #7

In designing immersive experiences we often
spend a lot of time thinking about how we ad-
dress the senses that our 'content' is working on.
How do we shift our attention to the other ones,
that are still active but sometimes brushed aside.

*Try this:*

1. Take any of the previous experiments, repeat it
but this time concentrate on a sense that wasn't
the focus of the experience. For example you
could walk one of the infrastructure networks, but
this time concentrate on the tactile feeling of the
ground beneath your feet.

2. Try the above again, but this time what about
removing or overwhelming a sense? Maybe wear
a pair of industrial ear defenders while walking,
or go autopsy style and put Vapo-rub under your
nose while experiencing a piece of VR?

*Extend this:*

All of these sensory techniques can be doubled
up. Try putting on a blindfold, then plug a pair of
isolating or noise cancelling headphones into your
phone. Get a friend, or at least someone you really

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trust, to call you and guide you over the phone, so you hear their voice in the headphones. Make sure you pick a safe environment to try this one in.

*Explore further:*

Have a look at 'Door Into The Dark' by Anagram or 'Symphony Of A Missing Room' (check) by Lundahl and Seitl for artworks that use blindfolds in different ways. If you can (or have) experience Richard Wilson's installation '20:50' think about which senses reveal different elements of the piece to you.

http://weareanagram.co.uk

http://www.lundahl-seitl.com/

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# Edges

*I often find myself defining immersion in a very simple way, thinking of it as just meaning you are 'in' something, and immersive media as being something that highlights, reveals or creates one or more of the multiple layers of things we are immersed in.*

*Hopefully what the experiments and reflections in this book have provided is some thinking around how simple shifts in attention can change our awareness of these layers. The real challenge I think is to work out where the edges of these layers are.*

*Are they defined or do they blur into each other?*

*Are they edges in space or time or both?*

*It's 2016, I'm walking through city streets having a conversation with the artist Esther Polak, we're talking about how different parts of the city seem to change our perception of time.*
*Fighting our way through a dense crowd and everything seems to be moving faster than we can comprehend, but when we turn on to a quiet empty side street things seem to slow down, making us feel like we are the ones moving too fast.*
*Esther then describes how changes in her exercise routine have changed her awareness of the edges of*

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*experiences. She's a regular swimmer, and she used to cycle to the swimming pool. Using the bicycle, which is her daily transport mode for many parts of her life, she says arriving at the pool felt like the beginning of the 'swimming session', a mental transfer from city transport to physical exercise. Now she has taken up running, and runs to the swimming pool instead.*

*For her this now means the 'session' actually begins at home, when she starts running from her house, the arrival into the building housing the swimming pool is now just a transition moment within a singular experience.*

*I've been thinking about this a lot in relation to constructed immersive experiences. What are the shifts that may extend or contract the edges of the works we create? Are they abrupt or gradual? Can it be as simple as saying to the audience 'it begins now'?*

*You may have heard of John Cage's composition 4'33s, in which the instruction is for the musical performer to not play anything for the eponymous time. There are many interpretations of the meaning of this piece, mainly around how it is not about silence, but about making all the other things the audience hears during it part of the piece.*

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*For me the most interesting thing is that it uses time to create its edges, for those four and half minutes nothing has really changed about your environment or activity, but you are 'in' the composition until it ends.*

*You're immersed in everything you were already immersed in, but you are aware of it differently, in some ways it is just you and your shifts in attention that create the piece.*

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## PROVOCATIONS

When you don't have to explain the technology to your audience, how will your piece begin?

The room for presenting your VR piece has the same aesthetic feel as the VR content, is it also part of the narrative?

How does the smell of the city change over a day, is it part of your augmented experience?

If there are no end credits, how do we know it's over?

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# No Vantage Point

*It's the autumn of 2017, I'm in the first stages of building my own new augmented audio project 'Only Expansion' . I'm standing high up on a rooftop in Bergen at night, I can just make out the shape of the mountains, below me are the lights of boats and buildings, they mark out the edges of the black surface of the harbour water.*
*I'm wearing a pair of headphones with binaural microphones attached to the outside, they feed in and out of a small embedded computing device.*
*The microphones let me hear cars on the streets below and the faint cries of revellers, blending them in the headphones with any pre-recorded material I have.*
*I begin playing a recording of desert wind through the device, the recorded and the live are mixed together in my ears. Even though I know what it looked like I do not picture the edge of the Sahara where it was recorded, instead it just becomes a new sound of weather around me and I can only see the harbour. Then slowly the wind from the sea picks up and I can feel it against my face.*

*Timothy Morton advocates for literary and sonic art works that produce heightened awareness of self and environments, arguing that the self and the world are intertwined. He says "If we could not merely figure out but actually experience the fact that we were embedded*

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*in our world, we would be less likely to destroy it".*
*Robert McFarlane suggests that old forms of rep-*
*resentation are experiencing drastic new pressures and*
*being tasked with daunting new responsibilities. "Is*
*the romantic poem still enough to address our con-*
*temporary rising sea levels, terrorism,oceans of plastic,*
*subjugation". Donna Harroway and Bruno Latour*
*argue that Gaia affords no single vantage point, and,*
*as a result, we have been monstrously tricked by the*
*comforting singularity of the point of view produced by*
*NASA's image of our warm blue planet floating in the*
*void.*

*If the story is one of entanglement of scale, from mi-*
*crobial to hyperobject and from the immediate pres-*
*ent to geological or networked time, then to tell it, to*
*understand it, we might need to develop new forms of*
*attention These forms of attention might not be the cu-*
*riously static subject/object contemplation produced by*
*encountering the scale of ecological disaster, not just us*
*as humans looking at a picture of a collapsing glacier*
*or a stranded polar bear, not human vs nature, but a*
*tangled singular system.*
*Modes of attention that offer us the potential to trace*
*these networks of entanglements, to not just see or hear*
*about, but to actually experience the inter connected-*
*ness of multi-scales of agents and entities.*

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*In The Sound Machine, a short story by Roald Dahl, a man called Klausner is obsessed by sound. His theory is that there are sounds in the world that humans are not able to hear because of their extreme frequencies. He invents a machine which is able to turn those frequencies into ones that are audible to humans. When he first tries it out in he hears shrieking in his headphones when his neighbor cuts the garden roses. There is a shriek each time a flower is cut. He tries an experiment for himself and cuts into a large beech tree with an axe. When he does so he hears a deep and pathetic moan from the tree in response. He rushes back to his house and calls his friend who is a doctor. "Please come. Come quickly. I want someone to hear it. It's driving me mad!". The doctor comes over to listen to the sounds but this time when Klausner hits the tree with his axe a branch crashes down and destroys the machine. Klausner is deeply shaken and asks the doctor to treat the tree's wounds. The doctor says that he didn't hear anything in the headphones but agrees to Klausner's pleas and attends to the wounds.*

*Immersion might mean*
*looking outwards, listening outwards*
*Immersion might just mean*
*there is no vantage point*

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riences that engage audiences emotionally and
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phonies in Christchurch, performative audio walks
in Saitama, radio pieces for the BBC and sound de-
sign for VR.  His current artistic research explores
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