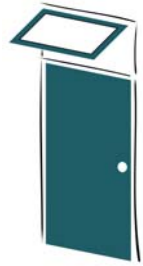


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Edited by Sydney Lewis

Alan Berliner



About Alan Berliner

Alan Berliner's uncanny ability to combine experimental cinema, artistic purpose and popular appeal into compelling film essays has made him one of America's most acclaimed independent filmmakers. *The New York Times* has described Berliner's work as "powerful, compelling and bittersweet... full of juicy conflict and contradiction, innovative in their cinematic technique, unpredictable in their structures... Alan Berliner illustrates the power of fine art to transform life."

Berliner's award-winning experimental documentary films, *THE SWEETEST SOUND* (2001), *NOBODY'S BUSINESS* (1996), *INTIMATE STRANGER* (1991), and *THE FAMILY ALBUM* (1986), have been broadcast all over the world, and have received awards and prizes at many major international film festivals. Retrospectives of his films have been presented at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and at film festivals from Norway, Finland and England to Spain, Argentina and Brazil. His films are in the permanent collections of many film societies, festivals, libraries, colleges and museums.

A recipient of Rockefeller, Guggenheim and Jerome Foundation Fellowships, Berliner has received multiple grants from the NEA, NYSCA, NYFA and in 1998, won his third career Emmy Award (he has also received six nominations) from the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. He was also the recipient of a Distinguished Achievement Award from the International Documentary Association in 1993, and was honored with a "Storyteller Award" from the 2001 Taos Talking Picture Film Festival. He received a "Cultural Achievement Award in the Arts" from the National Foundation For Jewish Culture in 2002.

In addition to his work in film, Berliner has also produced a substantial body of photographic, audio and video installation works. In 2002, he was an artist in residence at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, where he premiered an interactive multi-media installation, *THE LANGUAGE OF NAMES*. His interactive video installation, *GATHERING STONES*, was commissioned for the exhibition, *To The Rescue, Eight Artists* in an Archive, which premiered at the International Center of Photography in New York City in February, 1999, and traveled to Miami, Houston and San Francisco. It was re-commissioned for the Holocaust Museum, Houston in 2002.

Berliner was born in Brooklyn, raised in Queens and lives in Manhattan. He is currently a faculty member at the New School for Social Research in New York City, where he teaches a course entitled, "Experiments in Time, Light and Motion."

Intro by Jay Allison

Some people know Alan Berliner as a filmmaker. His documentaries, like "Nobody's Business," "Sweetest Sound," and "Intimate Stranger," have won awards all around the world, plus 3 Emmys. Other people know him for his video, photographic and audio installation art in museums like the Walker Art Center and the International Center of Photography.

His two audiences don't cross paths much. That's one reason we invited him to come to Transom, to talk about the intersection.

Alan is an image junky. And he's also obsessed with collecting sounds. You should see his studio. And hear it. Failing that, check out his elegant, Flash-animated manifesto: "Thirteen Ways Of Looking At Sound"



Find “Thirteen Ways Of Looking At Sound” at:

<http://www.transom.org/guests/specialguests/alanberliner.html>

(**Note:** *This presentation was created with help from Transom Editor Viki Merrick and Transom alumni and Flashmeister Jason Rayles, with support from the Open Studio Project*)

A Conversation w/ Alan Berliner

Captivating Tone

Michael Joly - *December 5, 2003 - #8*

I'm wondering if room tone, unlike other categories of sound you work with, is sound never meant to be shared.

Might it be a “ruminating space” - a quiet but highly detailed place that invites examination but not manipulation or distribution?

And, are you ever conflicted over the urge to quietly collect/examine room tone and the urge to manipulate and distribute?

I'm continually captivated by the beauty of a substance that is so hard to describe and nearly impossible to share.

Making The Invisible Audible

alan berliner - *December 7, 2003 - #17*

let's first clarify. every room has a sound. a sound that's underneath. that's behind. that's inside the space. every room has it's own kind of "quiet." what does grand central station sound like without any people? or carnegie hall without any musicians or audience? or a supermarket at four in the morning? how about an elevator without the muzak? or your bedroom without the television, the hum of an air conditioner or the hiss of steam heat?

what's left is a impression of something we call "quiet," (and often describe as silence) -- an acoustic space very often defined by the degree of insulation that succeeds (or sometimes not) in keeping the "outside" out. depending on the who, what or where, most interior room tones contain hints of traffic, birds, wind, and other subtle (or sometimes not)

forms of "exterior presence" -- not to mention the wildly unpredictable range of architectural features and acoustic anomalies, that control, contain and confound the "sound" of any silent space.

as we all know (outside of a vacuum) there is no such thing as pure silence. and that's what makes the sounds of interior "air" so interesting. anytime you're able to re-frame something that's habitual, when you're able to foreground the background and make the invisible audible, when you can change one's perceptual mode from just listening to really "hearing," then you're on to something.

each room tone is like a minimal abstract painting, each a variation on a simple color-field or monochrome canvas, within which all sorts of different kinds of *noise* -- colors, forms, textures and shapes (can and often do) declare themselves when studied closely. they teach you how to listen.

and... like minimal (abstract) paintings, room tones also teach you to re-adjust your experience of time. listening to "nothing" like looking at "nothing," requires patience and perseverance and a willingness to be surprised by the complexity often packed inside of simple things.

Sound File Stories

Viki Merrick - *December 5, 2003 - #12*

...You make stories with just a few sounds - I've seen/heard you do it.

your "sound files" which ,for those who don't know, is an innocuous looking file cabinet with labels like: full moon, nobody home, wits' end...and each drawer has a tape recorder with a looping tape of a sound that kicks in when you open the drawer.

At the Third Coast you showed a film of the file in action and I think you told a detective story and not a word had been spoken.

Do you rely on common experience of sound when you play around with sounds...was I one of thousands who heard a detective story or was it all in my own head?

Composing Cabinets

alan berliner - *December 9, 2003 - #19*

...the interactive audio sculpture...is actually titled, "AUDIOFILE."



Find "AUDIOFILE" at:

<http://www.transom.org/guests/specialguests/alanberliner.html>

AUDIOFILE consists of four metal file cabinets, each containing 27 individual drawers. Inside every drawer is a portable cassette tape recorder fitted with a continuous loop recording, electrically designed so that when any drawer is opened, the tape recorder activates, producing sound. When the drawer is closed, the sound ceases. At rest, the work is silent; when engaged, any number of drawers, from 1 to 108, may generate sound simultaneously.

From Gregorian chants to rap music, from water torture to crocodile tears, from a chorus of frogs to piano chords, the range of rhythms, textures, subjects and references contained within AUDIOFILE is diverse and eclectic. AUDIOFILE allows the participant to compose his/her own sound collage combinations using 108 unique sound elements -- from nuanced and delicate concrete musics to wildly implausible, raucous cacophonies -- that form the potential for an inexhaustible variety of narrative, abstract, musical, and philosophical auditory experiences. Several people can interact with AUDIOFILE simultaneously, allowing for an even greater range of serendipitous, and accidental sound collages. Every drawer has its own "name" -- setting up another level of engagement, expectation and surprise.

Here are a few examples of drawer titles and the sounds you hear when the drawer is opened:

no trespassing.....dog barking
light breeze.....wind chimes
wit's end.....man screams
all news radio.....live news radio ("wins" real time)

By slowly opening the drawers labeled -- mood music, dead of night, chorus of frogs, out of gas, no trespassing, 22 caliber, wit's end and then critical condition -- one after another in sequence, thus layering them over the course of a minute or two, a kind of horror scene narrative (what Viki describes as a detective story) is eerily evoked. One doesn't have to say a word.

Images And Realms

Jackson - *December 6, 2003* - #15

Given the choice between a photo cut out of a newspaper or a clean glossy of exactly the same image, Alan, which one would you prefer to have?

Meanwhile, back in the realm of systems of order in your collection, do you have a favorite? Chronological? Alphabetical? By decibel level? Liturgical calendar?

Cutting Collection Connections

alan berliner - *December 9, 2003 - #20*

at this point in my process, i'd much much prefer to have the image in newsprint, cut directly from the newspaper. the very act of cutting connects me to the image, somehow sears it into my memory, links it to the events of the day, the month, the year, the decade and where i was/am in my life at the time.

...over the years i've learned that i'm someone who needs to take the world apart before (because it's intrinsically interwoven with the way) i put the world back together. i think of my ongoing work as a life-long project, and maintain (despite the cost of time, sanity and money) this totally idiosyncratic collection of stuff (sometimes when i'd rather be doing a million other things) because i need to. it's too late to change; i'm just wired this way.

as for your question regarding systems of order.... there are many things here that are organized based on alphabetical order to be sure. at the same time there are some things that are color-coded, others that are size-based, others based on a simple but intuitive feel for the "feng shui" of the space and situation, yet others that are totally random, because i also want there to be some wackiness lurking in my midst. there's control -- but also lots of playfulness.

Sensibilities of Order

Jackson - *December 3, 2003 - #4*

What did you do before computers? Collecting material (or, in your case, materials) demands a sensibility of order you seem to have by nature. I wonder if you now organize your collections via database.

Do you find yourself relating to objects/images/sounds differently in the digital age?

Acting At The Speed Of Thought

alan berliner - *December 5, 2003 - #9*

I did what everyone did before computers -- i wrote everything out long-hand on paper and then eventually got myself an electric typewriter (what people did before electric typewriters is also an interesting story) and created lots of paper lists and notebooks and cumbersome files, many of which still fill my shelves...

in the end, it's all about creating models for memory. about putting things in orbit around me so that i can use them -- so that i can work with them when i need them -- whether it's a sound, a photograph, a piece of film, a newspaper article or even an old idea. it's about being able to act at the speed of thought.

the computer helps, especially when searching through voluminous amounts of material, but in the end, it all comes down to how you (and your biocomputer) enter your information in the database, so that one year, two years or even ten years later, you've created a system of enduring logic and elegance that grows and evolves with you over time...

Possession Possessed?

Jackson - *December 4, 2003* - #7

...do you look at all these various and sundry objects (audio and otherwise) as your possessions, or do you feel possessed by them?

Transforming Provocations

alan berliner - *December 5, 2003* - #10

I don't collect stuff just for the sake of it -- for instance, there's nothing here that's worth any money per se -- i gather sounds and other media information sources because i want to work with them, because i want to transform them into new things, new objects, new experiences. maybe my compulsion to give aesthetic order to the barrage of media flotsam and jetsam that surrounds me is, in essence, a way of coping with the inescapable information overload that accompanies living in a place like new york city...

as for categories...there are hundreds of them naturally, mostly based on the obvious, but several that are idiosyncratic to my way of listening and understanding. private jokes. hints to myself. seeds planted. provocations.

giving names to things (i made a film about that a few years ago) is a very delicate process.

Soulful Rawness

Nubar - *December 11, 2003* - #25

...I'm wondering about the introduction of the computer in your work/life... as a photographer, I've noticed that the more photographers use digital cameras, the more their work looks the same. It's like this designer friend told me recently that before Quark Express, where you can have an idea and see if it works almost instantly on the computer, designers had to cut and paste and do stuff by hand, forcing them to take TIME to do things. In his opinion (and mine in photography) the work was more interesting then. Yet somehow you are able to maintain a level of "rawness" to your work that is so soulful and entertaining and revealing all at the same time. It's as if you have these ideas and the technology doesn't get in the way of expressing them, but somehow you are able to use it in a way that keeps the process organic, letting the work lead you. How do you do this?

Dialogue Diligence

alan berliner - *December 12, 2003 - #28*

in the end it all come down to process -- how the mind (remember: mind is what the brain does) goes about making discoveries and decisions. the process of making things often involves a conversation between maker and the thing being made. in the days of analogue, that dialogue used to be slow and laborious but also had the potential to be wondrously elaborate -- that is to say, intellectually and intuitively sensual.

pre-computer models of creativity allowed for the mind to lose itself in thought, in trance, in daydreaming or in whatever creative space caught your fancy while you waited, while you did and undid, while you re-wrote, re-printed, re-typed, re-painted, re-edited, re-recorded and/or re-thought whatever it was that you were working on. i can't overstate the importance of that. which leads me to...

...the biggest advantage of the pre-computer analogue days was that i had many more and more better "bad ideas" -- which by the way, as far as i'm concerned is the key to everything. getting lost inside of something gives you the time and the freedom to make wrong turns and maneuver around detours, all of which sets up its own kind of learning curve and the basis for the wide range of mysterious intuitive/rational problem solving dynamics we call "creativity."

the immediacy of non-linear and digital tools and technology (of which i am in complete and utter awe) has the potential to take us where we're going too quickly, and (sometimes) precludes us from going where we never imagined we'd end up. not always, of course, but one must always be diligent and on guard against the price of speed and the cost of efficiency.

The Space Of Work

Jay Allison - *December 12, 2003 - #29*

I often recall my analog days filling legal pads and index cards and wall charts with diagrams and other spatial representations of story -- pizza slices, rivers with eddies, freight trains, paths through the woods.

Now, I enter and leave through a screen. I know I have the power to keep to the old ways (Alan still clips and files), but I'm not good at the border between the analog and digital realms. I tend to inhabit one domain or the other, and the "space" of my work now resides mostly in the computer, for better and worse.

Squeezing The Psyche

Nubar - *December 12, 2003 - #31*

When I'm working on my own projects (different from shooting an assignment for a magazine) I don't want to know what I'm doing. In fact, I put the exposed film in the refrigerator to maintain the integrity of the "latent image." I only process the film when I reach 50 rolls or 100, depending on what I'm working on. This spaces everything out for me, creating possibilities that I might otherwise never imagine, avenues I may not have traversed. I too, love everything digital. But there is danger here, no? As you say so well, Alan, the fantastic tools the digital world provides are fun and interesting and offer other opportunities. But I'm interested in things I don't know that I know. And technology tends to squeeze the psyche at this very juncture. I see this happening everywhere. It seems to me, Alan, that the technology has provided a medium which can actually keep up with your mind. Yes?

Feeling The Medium

alan berliner - *December 13, 2003 - #32*

perhaps it's because i came of age as a filmmaker in the era of celluloid acetate, more commonly known as motion picture film, that i learned to make films with my eyes, my ears -- and -- my hands. every juxtaposition of image to image, sound to sound and sound to image was mechanically enacted with the help of a splicing block and a roll of splicing tape.

but there was something about the experience of doing things by hand that not only helped define my aesthetic process, but also unconsciously helped shape it. for one thing, it made me take more responsibility for what i did. the "act" of doing things by hand helped me appreciate the direct and poetic connection between cause and effect, which in turn helped raise my cinematic "iq" if only out of necessity. faced with the burden of having to do something over and over again until i finally got it right, i was forced to clarify my thoughts, instincts and inklings just a few neurons clearer than i might have otherwise.

after all, if i was going to go to all the effort of manually cutting this piece of film *here* on this frame, then cutting that piece of film *there* on that frame, then carefully lining up the sprocket holes of each, precisely fitting them over the spring taut metal registration pins on the metal splicing block, centering the two frames (one on each side) intended to be spliced together, and then eye-balling the pre-cut perforations on the sticky side of a small piece of 16mm splicing tape, before concluding the act by pressing down upon a small pressure plate with one edge literally razor sharp to both secure the splice and cut the edge of the splicing tape -- (i promise, once you got good at it, it took far less time to actually make a splice than i just took to describe it)... well then you'd better have your shit together and not waste too much time chasing ideas and strategies that weren't at least a little bit intuitively worked through. but yes, it was time consuming, cumbersome, wasteful, and a bit messy. did i mention time consuming? not only that but i cut my hand on the damned razor blade all the time.

many younger people reading this must think it all sounds rather quaint and endearingly old fashioned and/but, most likely, just plain dumb. but my point here isn't to defend manual labor, antique technologies or even reminisce wistfully about the good old days. they're long gone. but i'm inexorably and undeniably shaped by them, for better and, i suppose, also for worse.

for me, some of the most meaningful metaphors i can conjure up about the process of editing (in general) still derive from analogies with things done by hand -- pottery and sculpture (don't get me started on music and architecture) -- most notably tarkovsky's expression "sculpting in time." when i start to edit something the clay is wet; as i approach closure the clay begins to dry.

those of you old enough to remember cutting audiotape in a similarly archaic fashion -- luckily for you without the sprocket hole alignment problem... speaking of which, who's to say that splicing pieces of film and magnetic track together (for what felt like) a few million times over the course of two decades (i exaggerate not) wasn't a daily exercise in precision hand/eye coordination, a skill and aptitude that comes in handy in all sorts of other ways in art and life -- you'll empathize with and understand my claim about the intuitive power of developing a "feel" for the medium. a shot needs to be longer or shorter; a sound needs another beat, or one beat less. nowadays we use the computer to calculate and calibrate our decisions down to the microsecond.

in those days, i rarely counted frames when i added or subtracted lengths of time. i (to use that word again) "felt" my way towards the solution by intuitively "knowing" the (or close to) the amount i needed to add or take away to make something work.

most of the non-linear editing programs today were initially designed to mimic the mechanical and aesthetic processes of motion picture film editing. Even the universally appropriated words common to all editing systems -- for instance, splice, cut, trim, extend, lift -- are based on the tactile hands-on vocabulary of film editing.

in pro-tools and other non-linear computer editing systems, one simply conjugates editing ideas with the click of the mouse. it makes perfect and exquisite sense; as i've said before, my entire process is geared towards being able to act at the speed of thought. i just thought i'd mention how patience then has made me a more careful speed demon now.

Constant Elements Of Arm Wrestling

Jackson - *December 13, 2003* - #33

If it's possible to set aside the fact that editing in the digital domain is not "destructive," there do seem to be some constant elements in the analogue and digital realms of creativity. For example, the word processor does not speed up so much the writing

process as the re-writing process. Collecting an hour of sound to begin with will always take far longer than an hour...

Alan, you've spoken about working in both the digital and "real" world. My question is this: Who are you arm wrestling with?

The Urge To Archive

Davia - December 12, 2003 - #30

...having visited you in your archive lair, I wonder about that urge to collect, to chronicle, to archive, to file, name and organize. How does that connect to the work itself? Could the work come outside of those surroundings, an empty room and table, and an editing station? Archive as installation, archive as inspiration. Digital or analog, I'm curious also about your relationship to your ingredients.

Albatrossic Haven

alan berliner - December 14, 2003 - #34

over the years i've come to understand that (in many ways) my studio/archive has become a "work" unto itself. like a garden, it needs tending, weeding, planting, watering, harvesting, raking and (well, you get the idea). although at times it feels like a kind of albatross, it's also a haven -- a place for me to find my balance and my center of gravity amidst the sometimes overwhelming array of sounds, images, materials, objects and ephemera that i've gathered around me over the years.

what for instance, do i do about twenty years of luscious life magazines that cry out for my attention each and every day?

when do i reckon with hundreds of found (and anonymous) family photographs, gathered from around the world, not to mention all the "orphaned" photo albums that stare at me from ten feet away every time i turn and look to my right?

what about all the room tones i've collected? when will i get around to the audio piece i've been contemplating for them over the past ten years or so?

what am i supposed to do with the large cabinet containing every photograph ever taken of me throughout my entire life, neatly organized in chronological order inside 27 albums (and counting)?

and then there's the image bank, the sound library; the file cabinet drawers of circles, spheres and pyramids (to name a mere three); the hundreds of audio speakers; or the collection of photographic negatives taken from a survey of hotel rooms from around the world -- when will they get my attention, my energy, my love?

all of these things (and more) are always in orbit around me, each in its own way somehow gestating and evolving in small increments -- day by day, week by week -- in some cases, year by year. seen in its entirety, this place is a serene cyclone of "information overload," a subject that has always been a major aesthetic force in much of what i do.

any one or more of these elements could have sparked their way into the alchemical equation that solved the challenge of my invitation to prepare a transom.org "manifesto." in addition to considering the history and mission of transom.org and its intended audience, i also decided to make "thirteen ways of looking at sound" because it coincided with a few things that are percolating inside my head at the moment -- and -- in ways that remain quite mysterious to me, felt like i was pushing and pulling a few other projects i have in mind one step closer to "ripening." as for jackson's question...

like most everyone else, i could claim that i've spent much of my life arm-wrestling with god... but no, in this case i'm in hand-to-hand combat with my father. the image is a publicity still from my film, "nobody's business," which is part portrait, part landscape, part verbal duet, part boxing match, part dance of love with/about my cynical, stubborn and stoical father, oscar berliner, may he rest in peace.

Pictures, Processes, And Playful Pushes

alan berliner - *December 16, 2003* - #39

1. although sound interests me tremendously, i've never "done" radio, primarily i suppose, because pictures also interest me tremendously. combining pictures and sounds together interests me even more, and the poetic potentials for juxtaposing and coaxing them into new meanings and metaphors that transcend the specificity of what you're looking at and/or listening to (at any given moment) tantalize me to no end.
2. i've done a fair share of interviewing over the years... I love getting inside of people's minds -- feeling the edges of their thought processes; their particular way of putting experience into words; learning what it is that they have learned and have to share; and fine-tuning my own empathy meter so that i can somehow make them feel they're not only being listened to, but also understood and appreciated. that they're connecting. there's nothing like a good story, told by someone who feels the listener is creating and shaping its poignancy right along with them -- word by word, moment by moment, image by image, pulse by pulse - into meaning. radio people know this all too well.
3. i struggle with convention. like a foolish sisyphus, i try and reinvent the wheel every time i make something. i want to - strike that - i need to -- make things that are unpredictable, that resonate with irony, humor and contradiction; that rely on an aesthetic of playful control (or controlled playfulness, take your pick); and that (when push comes to shove), i understand both totally and not at all. i would much rather fail in an interesting way than

succeed somewhere in the middle. bottom line: i want the stories i tell to be as interesting as the way I tell them.

Of Saving And Spontaneity

Regina Close - *December 17, 2003 - #40*

...How do you feel when you don't save something--or can you know that you didn't? Does this inhibit your imagination? Do you find that since you have a wealth of references that you can skim them for inspiration when necessary? What role does spontaneity have in your work?

Preserving Potential Portals

alan berliner - *December 19, 2003 - #44*

I save things because i have the patience to. i'm a "saver" because i "savor" the pleasure of coming back to things - images, sounds, letters, objects, ideas ... - months, years, even decades later, and experiencing the fluid rush of memories that they almost always trigger. elements of my personal, public and creative lives ("only three?" you ask) are not so much well documented as they are well preserved. the trials of my life are scattered around me (let's call it an "organized" kind of scattering) like birdseed. it's set up so that i can find my way back to any point along the path almost at will. it's fun. it's demanding. but in the end it all comes back to memory. i'm motivated to keep a record of where i've been and what i've done there. like the big picture frame of history, i keep imagining that knowing where i've been (the past) might help me better understand where i'm going (the future).

I save things to preserve their potential as portals to the more distant spaces of memory -- experiences (both inner and outer) that i might want, or need -- to know -- or use -- one day. i'm rarely if ever focused on any one particular thing; at this point in my life the gradual accumulation of stuff has become rather daunting. but also very exciting. and that's because i realize that i've become a kind of living laboratory in my own memory experiment, standing at the center of a labyrinth of information and (multi) media in virtually every shape and form (the detritus of a creative life) within which i am seemingly able to navigate through at will. until i find myself getting lost... (on purpose, that is)...

and that's because there's no particular place i always want to go. in fact i let the winds of thought and serendipity and synchronicity and dumb luck take me where they will. this is where your question of spontaneity comes in. everything i do is based on the process of discovery; on the joy of making connections between things. it's a responsive kind of relationship to the world, because i'm letting myself flow to an understanding of the relationships between things, not imposing myself upon them. for me, there is no greater pleasure than the poetry of uncovering and revealing connections between disparate, unsuspecting and unlikely things.

anyone who has ever painted upon a blank canvas, produced a radio program, choreographed a dance, directed or edited a film (to name but a few things) knows that creation almost always starts out with a faint heartbeat and ends up with a strong personality. forgive the child-rearing analogy...but my point is that as the work grows, it also learns how to talk. and the wise creative person learns how to listen. making things is about that dialogue with something you've created, which in the end, (if you listen carefully) tells you how it wants (or needs) to be made. and so it is with all the things that surround me. each one of them (in its own way) is constantly shouting or whispering it's own potentials to me; reminding me, inviting me, inspiring me -- into a dialogue...

the other day davia asked me what I would do in a room with nothing in it.
hmmm...

if i had a pencil, i'm sure i'd draw all over the walls.

if i had a book and a pencil, i'd read the book, underline all the key passages and then draw all over the walls.

if i had a book, a pencil and a pair of scissors, i'd read the book, underline all the key passages, cut out all the key passages and then draw all over the walls.

if i had a book, a pencil, a pair of scissors and some glue, i'd read the book, underline all the key passages, cut out all the key passages and paste them on the walls. if there was any space left on the wall, i'd draw all over it.

Permission To Dig

Jackson - *December 21, 2003 - #50*

Is Audiofile permanently installed somewhere?

...you have discovered ways for your viewers/users/clients/whatever to experience for themselves the act of finding (or is it refinding?) the object. Part of the problem with "found objects" is just that: lookit/listento/see what I found. They're already found, like shards from a dig. The installations allow us to dig...

Constellation Of Sounds

alan berliner - *December 22, 2003 - #53*

a little history about "audiofile"...

it took six months (of doing nothing else but) to make and was premiered in the lobby of the walter reade theatre at lincoln center here in new york city in january 1994. it's been shown in several other exhibitions in the new york city area...mostly in one-person exhibitions plus a few group gallery/museum shows dedicated to sound sculpture and installations. audiofile also has a cousin...named "aviary" -- a 27 drawer file cabinet (one quarter the size of "audiofile"), each drawer of which contains a different bird call. the

range of sounds is extreme on several levels. i chose bird calls that were especially guttural, percussive, throaty, rhythmically peculiar or particularly sonorous. the result is what I refer to as an “impossible habitat” -- a collection of birds from all over the world that would never -- that could never -- exist in the same environment.

the thing about both "audiofile" and "aviary" is that they are both open-ended *forms.* i can always change the constellation of sounds in either of them to accommodate different exhibition situations and requirements, including (the sounds of) different site-specific contexts, and/or (the sounds of) different themes.

as a wild for-instance, i once considered transforming "aviary" into a “radio.” each drawer would contain its own individual transistor radio tuned to a different station. if you want talk radio open this drawer; if you want classical music open this drawer; all news radio, open this one; rock music, religious, sports, “npr,” etc. etc....

the twist is that by leaving more than one drawer open at the any time, you would be able to create layers and layers of sound cacophonies in real time. a true tower of babel. talk about information overload....

No Animals Injured!

Jackson - *December 22, 2003 - #57*

What about an online version of Aviary or Audiofile? At least, that's the first thought, but then I think that part of the deal is the solidity of the object ...The physical nature of pulling a steel drawer is simply not the same thing as clicking a mouse.

Unfettered

alan berliner - *December 23, 2003 - #58*

it's interesting that you bring up this question about adapting a version of "audiofile" for the computer. back in 1998...i was commissioned to do just that.

and i tried. very hard. i worked with a graphic artist to come up with a two-dimensional representation (an illustration) of a bank of file cabinets whose drawers would "open" when clicked. the main problem with this approach was that any animated representation of a drawer opening also made it appear “larger” as it moved forward in space -- which unavoidably blocked part of the view of the drawers above, below and to the sides of the drawer being opened.

one of the implicit requirements for playing with “audiofile” is that you have equal and unfettered access to (each and) every drawer (source of sound) at all times. the 2d/3d spatial paradox on the computer monitor made that impossible.

my solution (i had no choice) was to come up with another strategy which didn't adapt the "audiophile" concept so much as "transform" it into something else altogether.

the new work, titled, "found sound" is a complete, stand-alone application you can download to your computer and operate with no extra plug-ins. once it's on your hard drive, you can interact with it immediately and as often as you like. [www.ntv-artbytes.org.]

Re-Framing The Flotilla

alan berliner - *December 27, 2003 - #60*

as my guest-ship slowly moves its way into port...i'm feeling just a bit wistful, and have begun pondering whether there's anything I still might yet say of interest to people who have committed their lives to telling stories through and with sound.

i've no great words or epiphanies to insert here... i wanted to use "13 ways of looking at sound" as a means of telling you a little bit about my own personal (artistic) world, as a way of re-framing the larger world we all live in - and -- as a metaphor for my love of the world of sound itself -- that invisible flotilla (look it up: it also means "a large force of moving things") of waves (fathom that!), tones, noises, voices, silences and other mysterious and meaningful energies that allow us to truly hear one another.

Next Portal?

Jackson - *December 31, 2003 - #63*

I envy and admire your patience. What's next on the horizon?

Wide Awake

alan berliner - *January 4, 2004 - #64*

truth is, i'm not much of a sleeper. that doesn't mean i don't need sleep -- we all do. it's just that i don't get enough of it. i don't get tired when i'm supposed to and i don't (make that can't) wake up when the rest of the world says i should. insomnia is nothing new to me; i've been this way ever since i can remember.

...i'm finally facing up to and dealing with my sleeplessness in a film project. titled "wide awake" -- a project about the frustrations, the struggles and the exasperations of insomnia and sleep deprivation, an affliction experienced (in some form or other) by more than 100 million Americans. as someone who has suffered from lack of sleep for most of my life, i want to portray the layers of urgency, obsession and insight that have impacted upon my daily battle with fatigue -- how it feels and what it means to be awake all night and tired all day -- while also laying to rest the pervasive set of myths and dysfunctional beliefs that currently surround insomnia.

i'm also on the lookout for "fellow sufferers" to interview and chronicle (their problems and their solutions) as part of the film. if anyone out there knows someone who knows someone who knows someone...

About Transom

What We're Trying To Do

Here's the short form: Transom.org is an experiment in channeling new work and voices to public radio through the Internet, and for discussing that work, and encouraging more. We've designed Transom.org as a performance space, an open editorial session, an audition stage, a library, and a hangout. Our purpose is to create a worthy Internet site and make public radio better.



Submissions can be stories, essays, home recordings, sound portraits, interviews, found sound, non-fiction pieces, audio art, whatever, as long as it's good listening. Material may be submitted by anyone, anywhere - by citizens with stories to tell, by radio producers trying new styles, by writers and artists wanting to experiment with radio.

We contract with Special Guests to come write about work here. We like this idea, because it 1) keeps the perspective changing so we're not stuck in one way of hearing, 2) lets us in on the thoughts of creative minds, and 3) fosters a critical and editorial dialog about radio work, a rare thing.

Our Discussion Boards give us a place to talk it all over. Occasionally, we award a Transom.org t-shirt to especially helpful users, and/or invite them to become Special Guests.

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ATLANTIC PUBLIC MEDIA

Atlantic Public Media administers Transom.org. APM is a non-profit organization based in Woods Hole, Massachusetts which has as its mission "to serve public broadcasting through training and mentorship, and through support for creative and experimental approaches to program production and distribution." APM is also the founding group for *WCAI & WNAN*, a new public radio service for Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket under the management of *WGBH-Boston*.

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