

## SOUNDS OF PLACES BETWEEN ETHNOGRAPHY AND EDUCATION

*Tullia Gianoncelli*

Contract Professor, University of Milano Bicocca, Italy

---

### Abstract:

This paper would be a contribution that connects the ethnographic and education work, anthropology and pedagogy. Through a three-step it builds the connection between ethnographic research carried out, starting from the sound phenomenology of a particular urban context, and seminars designed for university students of Education Sciences. In summary are presented those fundamental theoretical principles underpinning ethnographic research and are also the bases of the proposals seminars. Then it presents some methodological issues that characterize the construction of shared ethnographies: the relations established in the field with interlocutors activate processes of building knowledge and skills for both the ethnographer and the interlocutors. These educational modalities form the basis of the proposals seminars. The sensory approach and in particular the listening modes of the place allow you to access a different epistemology and therefore constitute an extension of skills. The seminars activities carried out in the same context of ethnographic research require students to test themselves and actively participate in the proposals offered. At the same time allows applying the theoretical constructs - learned in the classroom and on books - through experience and into reality of the context as it unfolds. This allows experiencing a real connection between theory and practice.

---

**Key Words:** Anthropology of Sound, Ethnography, Education

### Introduction

“The city holds the roar of the ocean as in the volutes of the shell, or ear: if concentrate to listen the waves you do not know what the palace, what city, ear, shell.”  
(Calvino 1995: 66)<sup>1</sup>

This phrase borrowed from Italo Calvino seems particularly suited to start because it draws a summary of some issues that are particularly close to my heart. The issues that I present in this paper are related to a deep interest in anthropological study of sounds that characterize and constitute the contexts of life, and the ways in which human groups live within and build relationships. The entire route starts from ethnographic research that I conducted in the years 2006-2007, dedicated to the study of soundscapes in public gardens “Indro Montanelli” in Milan, a public park situated in the city center. From that initial research focused on everyday life of an urban environment, I thought and designed the analysis of some findings by interacting different disciplinary contributions. At this stage my interest is to experiment the contribution of ethnographic method applied in training field and educational practices.

Considering the thread that connects that ethnographic research and most recent seminar that I proposed, I will present in some passages the development of research, theories that support it, the phases of implementation and some results that, compared with the seminar experiences and feedback from students, highlighting the potential and the value that can assume the ethnographic method as relational and educational opportunities. The seminars - which also included experiential field, right in the same place (Montanelli gardens) - acquire a special significance when you consider that have been proposed to students of the degree course in Educational Sciences<sup>2</sup>, who will become educators and teachers and will operate in educational institutions but also in informal contexts, in community, youth centers, etc.

This development of the research comes primarily from personal knowledge gained during the fieldwork. In fact, checking the assumptions of the research, regarding methods of listening and sounds of place, I had to consider also the issue of ethnographer’s position in the field (Clifford,

Stoller) and other emerging items and new elements to investigate or work on. The conversational modes that I established with my interlocutors in the field allowed them to raise questions that required further deepening and then assumed the character of new acquisitions and mutual knowledge, because of the circularity in feedback, in confrontation, and through a shared construction (Lassiter 2005).

The phenomenological approach to the sound manifestations of/within Montanelli gardens made me able to experiment on one hand the necessity to stay close to the context and on the other hand the discovery of ever new stratifications and possible openings. The intense and constant frequentation of field, but especially the longtime of listening, showed off the effects of a new epistemology. Reflection on some results, when search over, led me to consider further developments (research in progress), and among these, the possibility of proposing seminars in the same context where I conducted my ethnographic research, using - even in partially modes and for a very limited period of time - some methods borrowed from ethnographic work.

Since the first seminar activities available to students (2009) it was clear their scant attention to the contexts in which they lived or studied, compared to increasing specialization aimed at use of space; these were accompanied by restrictions in the field of experience also determined by the time factor, extremely compressed in a city like Milan is. But through the experiences seminars emerged also the importance of sensory - and especially sound - and the potential to raise awareness and knowledge became evident at the very moment in which were understood modes and strategies to use. By these considerations, I will present below a brief excursus in my process of design and construction of ethnographic research conducted in Montanelli Gardens, including the individuation and research of theories needed to support such scientific work. Then I will expose some results obtained by the research. These will lead to the seminar proposal and focus on particular aspects emerged during the seminar in autumn 2012, dedicated to the educational and relational potential of the ethnographic method.

### **1 - The listening ethnographer and the multiplication of places sounding**

I started my research curios by the prospect opened up by the sound studies and stimulated by criticism of visual hegemony and sensory hierarchy that characterizes Western cultures - and therefore also ethnographic researches - developed by early anthropologists of senses. These scholars (Howes, Classen, Stoller, Corbin, Idhe) proposed a re-evaluation of all the senses, their interconnection in terms of perception, and awareness of different organizations and sensory hierarchies for different population.

The main question I asked myself was about the real possibility of making sound anthropology, and the challenge I took was to experience, into the reality of an urban place, a different way of understanding and study of the context. The basic hypothesis was that the investigation and analysis came within the perception and listening to the sounds in the context, not in opposition to dominant visual epistemology, but as a path result of different knowledge that allow to understand the meaning of that place, and the meaning attributed to it by those who lived and attended. With these assumptions, I conducted the research named "Soundscapes public gardens "Indro Montanelli" in Milan: anthropological approaches and multi-sensory".

The issue of intersensoriality, that is the interaction of the senses and multi-sensory ideologies, considered in relation to the individual or to society, is central to the approaches of anthropology sensory. We can appreciate then, the importance of making the contribution of different senses - as well as visual - trying to discover or rediscover the action, even in an historical sense, into the game of the interconnections between different senses and their contribution in construction of knowledge.

The identification of a suitable context to my research went in parallel with the construction of the theoretical structure, both with respect to the study of the place, and for the study of sounds and listening activities and methodologies. I then made use of theories and concepts of anthropology places, for the section on urban features and everyday context, and I made reference to the contributions of anthropology of sound and sensory studies on issues related to the sounds.

Steven Feld (1982, 2003) has been an important reference: in particular the definition of Acoustemology that he identifies as sound mode of knowing and being in the world. The fundamental

concept that hold together both the issues of place and sound is the phenomenological one proposed by Edward Casey (1996), that consider "place as an event", meaning a space-time relationship where the place is not a static entity because it "happens" and takes on the characteristics of those who live there.

The research context had all the features of place - as it is considered by Casey - and the phenomenological approach allowed access to the complex layering of sound events and transformations of the place itself. Through the long frequentation of the field and the deconstruction of the overall soundscape I was able to identify the different stratifications of sound "presence" whose manifestations indicating specific activities. They are produced by - and produce - relations at various levels and social activities, therefore characterize the context culturally. As phenomenological events of ways of life that constitute that particular context, they shall inform the specificities, differences and identities, movements and information flows that characterize the weaving of local and global. Through the sounds can be traced various activities that take place within the context and environment. I stress again that to focus on the sounds should not be understood as a way of opposing or excluding visual perception but as a way to correlate with them.

Moreover, as shown by Paul Stoller and David Howes, sensory anthropology studies are essentially based on the paradigm of incorporation, understood as mind-body relationship, which allows to overcome the separation that has characterized the whole of modern Western knowledge. For Stoller (1997) is necessary to acquire "knowledge of the senses" and in his essay "The Griot's Tongue" is assumed for the ethnographer a complex and incorporated skill similar to performing skills and knowledge embedded in the griot. David Howes shows that the extent of incorporation paradigm to environment, both physical and social, lead to the paradigm of emplacement, an important theoretical tool for an anthropological study of the senses and places (Casey 1996 – Howes 2005). Emplacement has as mirroring the theme of displacement: both allow to bring up some relevant questions in the anthropological research: emplacement in fact involves identity relations, a sense of cultural and social belonging, but also highlights possible ways of inclusion/exclusion. The displacement from the sensory and social situations often leads to social marginalization, as documented by many ethnographic essays, and as I got to check out during the search.

In summary, by listening to sounds in the environment (natural, environmental, human, technological, etc.) - and using "engaged listening" or "deep listening" mode, as suggested by various scholars of sound and sonority (Carter, Connor, Ihde, Erlmann, Bull) - can be traced back to the activities that produce them, to follow its development, and gain knowledge about place, relationships, social and cultural constructions. To deepen the analysis of these aspects I have used the contributions of Appadurai, Hannerz, De Certeau - relevant the study of the global and urban contexts, and aspects that characterize the sphere of the everyday life, but I do not discuss in this paper where instead I want to stress the methods and potential of listening activities and study of the sounds of a particular context.

The use of recording technologies becomes an additional contribution both alongside the research and in the written text (Feld, Stoller). But it is important to note that the recordings (audio and photographic) made to the field have also been an effective support during the process of shared listening and moments of collaborative re-listening and analysis that I have with my interlocutors, because have made possible a "dialogical sounding construction" (Lassiter 2005). It should be stressed in this regard that conversations with various interlocutors (habitual or occasional), have allowed to have different points of view and different "listening mode" about the place, moreover have set themselves and highlighted the further complex layering, and building different sound places within the same place.

The methodology of "immersion" in sound recalls those ways that Stoller calls "implication", where the subjectivity of the researcher is present, aware, and actively engaged in the context in sensory terms. "Engaged" listening as proposed by Carter (2004) is not just about intentional mode of listening sounds acoustically perceptible, but it involves forms of relational attention and dialogic construction. This approach offers the researcher reflexivity in relation to understandings, interpretations, meanings and ideologies, but at the same time adds elements of reflection and understanding of lived sound also to the interlocutors, bringing out the meanings given - or not - to the many different sounds present in context.

Finally I considered important to bring all these references and passages of construction and analysis, because on one hand, on these elements I based and made also seminars proposals - after conducted within Montanelli gardens - on the other, because they are useful to understand some research's results emerged through the conversations with interlocutors in the field and those witnessed by the students during the seminars and returns.

## **2 - Effects, training aspects, and relationships in fieldwork**

One of the aspects shown by the research is that the context of the public park, chosen as the field to investigate, is not merely "one" soundscape within the city but is the result of many sounding places constantly evolving and changing. They emerge from the generic set of sounds that characterize the urban environment - dominated by the traffic noise and filled with a diffuse background noise - and emerge in the foreground according to the different spatial walks, but they are also subject to different "positions and listening modes". We can become aware of own position in the world just from sensory perceptions - understood as channels of knowledge (Merleau-Ponty 1945) - and through direct experiences and thoughtful revision ways. The last one is a fundamental tool in all areas of relationships, particularly in teaching and education professions.

First of all, it should be noted that to state purposes of research by the ethnographer has aroused various reactions among interlocutors in the field: curiosity, disbelief, interest, but has also started new listening mode and clarify what belongs to sounding "unthought", that is, the mode of hearing which is a mindless listening. In fact, conversations and listening shared with interlocutors have highlighted some issues. For example, the persistence of the memory of zoo<sup>3</sup> and its sound was a recurring theme: the zoo evoked by the memory of sounds directly experienced or "known" by the children through the narratives of parents, is an example auditory imagination that operates through memory and become *presence*<sup>4</sup>, assuming also a function of identity recognition of public gardens and attribution of meaning to the place.

A second issue refers to the ideologies of the park that have occurred over time. The prejudices and ideologies - that is, those specific ways of thinking about the park and its use - that visitors take over the public gardens are related to the activities that take place there, influenced by the consistency of acquaintances, but also dependent on the temporal variations and climatic conditions, related to weekdays or weekends, etc. Among the different ideologies of the park, during conversations on the sound, emerged particularly the more recent ones who consider it "place for leisure and fun" and area devoted to "public park." According to the statements of interlocutors, it appears that the dominant one consider the park as a quiet and relaxing: paying attention to the sounds actually present, and documented through records, has been shown that Montanelli gardens - because located in the urban context - is a plurality of sounds that includes - in addition to those strictly internal to the park - every aspect of urban, global, multicultural life.

This, bring us questions to the sense that some places may take. Apart from the real sounding situation, the park was often perceived as a peaceful place, a place *other* than the surrounding urban context. It is clear that this perception is guided by a specific use of the park by visitors, but also from the general "common sense" which considers that place intended as a "public park". But through the phenomenology of Montanelli gardens's sound, the research has also highlighted the existence of other ways of thinking and enjoy the park: in fact it's perceived as a place of work by those engaged in economic activities within it (kiosks, carousels, employees of museums, personnel engaged in routes surveillance, etc.), but also takes on the characteristic of place "housing" for those in social exclusion areas that use the park as a "dwelling", and people for whom is a reference of sociality in everyday life.

The various identities that the park takes, are therefore interpretable also in relation to the ideologies that tell us "a priori" on how it is thought and lived. They condition the phenomenological perception; in fact, to consider the park as a "natural" place and relaxing means to consider the presence of silence: the desired one that "would like" exist in a park versus the noise of the city that surrounds it, and that under the ability to activate forms of auditory imagination "is hearing" even though in reality there isn't. Similarly is highlighted the capability to exclude unwanted sound or those considered (ideologically) not relevant in a space devoted to relax.

Is highlighted thus the importance and uniqueness of listening to the "place" that made it possible to deconstruct and reconstruct the soundscapes of the park in many sound places present

within it, identify the components and know the complexity. But the listening assumes a relevant role also as a *relational experience with yourself*, because it gives awareness of its own contribution not only to the listening but to the construction itself of the same sonority. It also underline forms of agency made through modality of "non-listening", understandings as a possibility and ability to exclude what you do not want to hear.

It is necessary at this point to introduce a reflection on the *implication*, as written above, and assumed in this case as immersion in the sounds of the context. It requires the involvement of the researcher and the use of his body as a research tool: this is evident when listening is used - and then the senses of hearing - in the way of active, intentional, and committed from the relational point of view, as the fundamental way for a sound survey.

It can be added two other aspects that the implication, understood relationally, can contain and that is explicit in the activity of listening: the use of emotions as a way of learning and the use of forms of courtesy. The latter represents a form of "cure", an approach of particular importance in educational relationships. Marianella Sclavi (2003) proposes the use of emotions in ethnographic work as a way to understand: so the astonishment allows the "phenomenological reflexivity" that "leads us to reflect on the unexpected changes and forces us to make explicit the deep expectations, that is the implicit assumptions we take for granted". In the same way it works the discomfort, because it can be a starting point for new forms of understanding. Pay attention to signs of distress - whether emotional or physical - and forms of cognitive displacement, brings its own implicit schemes of knowledge: they can be used for new interpretations or to identify other epistemological frames. I have experienced both during the fieldwork, either in relation to interlocutors and in relation to the context.

It should be emphasized also a feature of listening that point out the possibilities of sound to work through forms of cognitive displacement: the listening of one sonority might suggest a source of sound different from the real one. Even in these cases we note the effect of pre-understandings in the phenomenological interpretation; is another example of how listening, precisely because it is characterized as relational mode at many levels, contain aspects of ambiguity that can provide elements of additional knowledge.

Another aspect that shows the relational act of listening, understood as an implication, can be found in the use of forms of courtesy. Giovanna Axia (1996) defines the courtesy "the attention for others as a form of intelligence", but it is possible to interpret this definition amplifying it as a form of listening and applying it broadly to relational modalities. In these terms, it becomes particularly important if considered as educational practice.

Taking an example from the fieldwork, it is confirmed that even in this case is the astonishment to lead to reflection: an interlocutor at the end of a conversation thanked me for the time dedicated to him, I returned the thank evidencing the reciprocal gesture. Afterwards other speakers expressed themselves similarly. It should be noted that the astonishment involved both components in the relationship, pointing out - through the form of courtesy used - unexpected behavior, because little practiced in the "normality" of daily interactions. In these cases was operated a dual mode of listening, one related to the contents of a conversation and the other on listening to the conversation itself: it is so shown that listening mode as tension towards someone maintaining open communication, as mentioned by Carter (2004). The author believes active listening a cultural practice, in fact - considered as a device to evoke historical, cultural, social situations - it creates new symbols and meaning to the words that, in putting in a dialogical way between understanding and mutual misunderstanding, have the ability to root in a different way the communication: "Those who act on the basis of what they feel stress the erotic basis of communication. Instead of a monologue at two, from which is removed the ambiguity, representing a dialogue in which differences make a difference."

Conversations, listening and re-listening took place within the public gardens with the intention to highlight, on one hand, the meaning of listen, re-listen, and speak "the" park "in" park, and on the other the consciousness that this method has built. It was therefore a way of doing ethnography - and make explicit some mechanisms - as a way of listening to the park in the park at a meta-level, where listening, pathways, records and conversations intersect in their "sound and resonate" to use the Feld's words.

### 3 - From ethnographic research to seminars

From these experiences is assessed the educational potential of the place Montanelli gardens and the possibility of explicit trajectories of reflection directly into it. The particularity of the place allows you to develop educational practices because it has two distinct but complementary characters: the one of the outside opening - that totally differs from the usual contexts of the classroom - and the possibility of considering it as “educational setting” because perceived as a place *other*, delimited and protected compared to the surrounding urban environment. In particular, as already written, it presents features as relational context of knowledge, awareness and formation of the self, therefore particularly suitable as an experience place if proposed as a formation opportunity for university students in an academic preparation to educational activities and teaching.

To be specific, the work with students was developed through a theoretical classroom presentation, accompanied by documentary fragments from my previous ethnographic research, useful to contextualize the Montanelli gardens - unknown to most of the participants - and to propose some fundamental concepts which allow us to deal with the activities and be up and running in the field. Following the field experiences students were involved in writings - in terms of context documentary and reflective over the personal experiences and autobiographical - linked to shared experience and that did emerge relapse of experience in terms of education-training, for themselves and in perspective the commitment as future educators and teachers. The final phase was a time of sharing and returns, both writings and experience as a whole. Specifically, I will present here some aspects of the workshop held in autumn 2012 because dedicated expressly to the ethnographic method as a relational modality and training. On this occasion the focus of the seminar required students to do sensory experience, in particular in listening in the Montanelli gardens.

Returns from students, both in writings and in conversations activated on the field and classroom sharing, showed some significant aspects. Here I will list only those that bring to the front the active relationships with the sounds and the location, the sensory experience of the environment experienced by each student, the meaning attributed to the place, and the personal and collective acquisitions promoted by the experience.

One of the first aspects on which dwell concern the initial discovery - by students - about difficult to hear and listen the different sounds present. Emerged in particular the *non-habit to focus on the sound in general*, especially if perceived in the environment in a diffuse manner, distributed in space and not directional. In particular, since it is a context thought “a priori” as a place to spend your free time. Not surprising that the place is diffusely dense of sonority - it will be precisely the deconstruction of the whole to bring out and recognize the singularity sound - but the fact of carrying out academic lessons in that place was a proposal totally other than the usual place of the lessons at university. In addition, the proposed methods also changed: each student was directly called into question. It was not possible to postpone any activity to a later time because it was required the active participation in discussions, sensory engagement, and involvement in activities and documentation that would allow each to be able to spread the elaborate for the individual evaluation. Here we find the action of the cognitive displacement mentioned above, that the context and methodologies activated posed.

Adopted strategies have operated in terms of deconstruction and reconstructions of the experiential value bring, through gradual transitions, to the discovery of the sensory interconnection: the listening activities were initiated and activated also soliciting references to tactile perceptions. In fact, the quality of the ground and various paths provided different tactile information while on the move within the park.

Walking is also a sound activity, which produces sonority and change the place “sonorously”, but in the simplicity of its realization requires you to put your feet on different soils, and consequently perceive tactilely these variations: the two sensoriality - tactile and auditory - are closely related to each other and intersecting to visual perception. Such experience is sufficient to enter into *relationship with themselves* to a greater level of attention and therefore an increase of consciousness. This is also facilitated by the change of the space-time dimension, because explore a place and to listen requires a slowness and rhythm that deviates from the usual daily proceed. These are other elements that students have taken and with whom they had little experience, but slowness, as Sansot

writes (1999:12-13) serves to "increase our capacity to welcome the world and not to forget about ourselves road doing it".

With the progress of the activities will begin to improve personal perceptual abilities and can *emerge skills un-thinkable before*: the recognition of "knowing how to do" something that you did not have awareness, and the amazement of discovery generate reflection on unexpected. This step represents the activation of *another epistemological mode*. The understanding of the need to proceed gradually, welcoming the curiosity and the unexpected refine the ability - not only sensorial, but also cognitive - to accept the otherness in general.

From a collective reflection initiated in the field, with respect to this issue, showed that it became possible to make sense of experience creating a link between the classroom theories and the reality of the context lived and met in a direct way: by walking among the users of the park and immersed in sound experience, even the simple perception of a phrase in a different language led into the flow of globalization. But also opens with the reflection on otherness in terms of sharing space with those who, for example, lives the experience of migration.

Another important point regards the *possible meetings*, not only in a random sense of the word but as real possibility of entering into a relationship, try to build a conversation with someone you do not know. The *surprise of unexpected encounters* also includes those unexpected and much appreciated by students whit people who make free music in the park, occasionally, or because they use this place to practice, individually or in small groups. Here comes the issue of pre-understandings and an ideology discussed above, but also implies the expectations of each in relation to what can be found in a particular place. Frequentation of similar places - often with peers - is the reference orientation respect expectations and understandings of a place. The park ideologies, also inform on the expectations about places, routes and meetings. On the other hand, unknowingly also suggest closures and restrictions: consider a public park only as a place of recreation does not prepare to take interest in research of all aspects, activities, acquaintances, conflicts that are layered inside.

In reworking phase was emphasized by students the opportunity during the experience to make a *concrete link between theory and practice*. Even more theoretical aspects and concepts learned on the texts in a detached and aseptic way, if properly connected, find the ability to take consistency, establish a connection with reality and become effective learning. One example is the concept of *threshold*: one of the key concepts in anthropology of places, it also applies to sonority, with direct or metaphorical implications in many other areas, including the educational ones. During the seminar was possible to experience the concept of threshold, check the real correspondence through the activities of listening and implementing what De Certeau (1980) calls the "practices of the space"; walking has experienced the transition from conceptual dimension to practice, from a word written in a text to a sensorial experimentation.

Taking up the statement of a female student "...for sure we agreed that was a new experience, which involved us". The value of experience - according to the feedback of participants - emerged at several levels: sensorial and cultural, personal and collective.

We must remember that, unlike the classroom lessons, experiences seminar (as such) were organized in a small groups of participants: this made it possible to participate in the exchange of personal and collective reflection and sharing during the experience on the field. In fact, many students have emphasized the exchange of ideas and experiences, which took place on that occasion for the first time, with classmates who recognized – by views - but that until that moment had been strangers.

Another aspect to add is that the size of the restricted group allowed the participants to interact with the place and its inhabitants or visitors in a state of 'authorization and protection'. Being in a group and recognize identity "as a group" has emerged as a facilitator and support element, both in enjoying the perceptual experience is in relating to the environment and people, especially if perceived as "other" or from elsewhere. The group has allowed the comparison, accepted singular narratives, but it was also a source of verification with respect to the perceptions and emotions of each. It has also given rise to a kind of complicity in the positive duty to observe, discover, learn, collect and share documentary material.

The activation of *personal memory* is a factor that acts at the individual level, but involves the whole group through the shared narrative of personal memories. As Montanelli gardens are a public

park, some students residing in the city reminded that they visited it when they were children - with educational tours organized by schools - or to have them visited with their parents or grandparents, or with friends. But it is through the practice of the travel which constitutes the place through the narrative space, as De Certeau says, and the various stages bring to the surface memories of visits or acquaintances in other stages of life. So, some students testify the emergence of memories that were believed lost, or, if they still exist, emphasize diversity than what was experienced during the seminar. The experience becomes a reminder to those who already knew the park, because it is lived by a different awareness: "This experience has made me rediscover this place through another sense." The sharing of these aspects by part of some it becomes a story for all and builds knowledge of the place as sedimentation of experiences and memories. The common narrative, in a certain sense makes to participate in the lives of others, to the places of others.

Finally, some notes on the *skills, discovered or acquired*. Returns from students shows that the picklock that changes consciousness, memories, and can also rearrange the lived past, is the practice of listening to the sounds of the context in the wide spectrum in which they occur, from the noise to the silence, also including the sounds produced by ourselves, by the physical action of walking, until the oral narratives and discussions.

As already pointed out above, even if the experience took place in a short time, asked to consciously *try to change a hierarchy sensorial placing hearing in the first place*. During experience that subversion has also acted as stimulus to increase attention to the senses in general. Support the proposed work with some suggestions made possible the testing of the importance and connections with other sensoriality, the inter-sensoriality of which speak to us Howes and other studios. "The sonority has educated us," said one student. In fact, many returns pointed out that the experience in the field has revealed the habits of perception and the use of a superficial glance, emphasizing not only a non-habit of listening but also a disregard for the sonority in general, except maybe the usual ones, known and reassuring or those personal choices daily to exclude others, for example the use of headphones to listen to music and at the same time isolate from the rest of the world.

This is a significant step forward because confirmed by another student who has experienced the chance to "let go hearing", as if to signify a way to indulge in it, by suspending a defensive attitude taken perhaps as self-protection. In this perspective, the sound and the sonority in general are considered in their potential involvement: because the ears do not have eyelids and auditory perception cannot be interrupted with a blink of an eye, it could be necessary for some people to have instruments to insert diaphragms between himself and the invasion of sound by the world; a device may be the activation of a mechanism of exclusion of sound through other selected sounds with which to live (eg music from iPod ...).

A listening "engaged" is hard and different feedback claimed the effort that such an experience entails. Requires intentionality, commitment, new learning, but also provides the knowledge to be able to listen, not just hear or feel. At the same time implies a necessary involvement of listening in the relationally that characterizes the practice. Then, let yourself go to hearing, sounds no more as a declaration of surrender, but as the acquisition of new possibilities to explore aspects that are often not obvious to eyes and therefore not considered important. "Try the feeling of amazement," unexpected in a place like the park, implies the disruption of the usual and the obvious and is accompanied by the acquisition of new knowledge, with respect to the place and everything in it. But above all, it shows a possible path of transformation, as highlighted by a female student: "Was like taking an experience of change and growth that I experienced just a few days after." This statement summarizes the dynamic perspective that can produce a targeted listening experience engaged in the world in which we live.

## Conclusion

The final part of the previous paragraph contains some quotes with words that students returned and commented on their experiences during the seminars in Montanelli gardens of Milan. I chose to include them because is a way to make them sounding and at the same time to give voice to the participants. The context in which we worked was characterized by participants as a place *other* if compared to the surrounding urban context and to seminars, unusually carried out outside the classroom. The activities and training objectives required commitment and involvement, and were

organized by adopting some methods that belong to the ethnographic work - like knowledge of the context through exploration and sensory paths, listening to the sounding place, documentation forms and reflective writing - but especially conversational and sharing modes. The latter also includes the conceptual references that, discussed within the same place of the experience, made it possible to translate theoretical aspects experienced in practice.

In conclusion we can add one more thought. Experiment with forms of active listening of sound phenomenology of place shows, among other possibilities, the potentials of action that allows rooting into the context and at the same time allows to learn and to review other epistemologies. Exchange and direct comparisons become a source of knowledge that enriches the background of each and everyone. Such sharing is particularly effective because it took place in processual path. The foresight to work with small groups gives every person the possibility of speaking and respect for individual times. For an osmotic principle, or a sort of mimetic behavior, occurred the sharing of experiences and thoughts, perceptions and emotions, comments and listening that have prompted further reflection not only on the specific themes of seminar, but also from the sensory experience itself, that each participant has lived and that assumes the value and recognition at the time of narrative shared. The circularity of the process during the field experience added to a reflective action produced by the writing of each participant has allowed reflections on a second level, as resulting in the final moment of the seminars carried out in the classroom. This dynamic can be summarized and represented as a circular route - starting from the academic institutional context – that allows you to bring the theory in reality, try and verify it in the field, and then reworked it back to the beginning, ready to start again with other experiments, and listening.

#### Notes

1. Personal translation by the original text: “ La città trattiene il rombo d’un oceano come nelle volute della conchiglia, o dell’orecchio: se ti concentri ad ascoltarne le onde non sai più cos’è il palazzo, cos’è città, orecchio, conchiglia.” (Calvino 1995: 66).
2. Refers to Dept. of Humanities Education, University of Milano-Bicocca – Italy.
3. Until the 90s of the last century a zoo was housed within the gardens Montanelli.
4. The entries in italics are the writer full text.

#### References:

- Axia, G. *Elogio della cortesia*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996
- Basso, K. and Feld, S. eds. *Senses of Place*, Santa Fe: School of American Research Press Santa Fe, 1996
- Bertolini, P. *Pedagogia Fenomenologica*, Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 2001
- Bull, M. and Back, L. eds. *The Auditory Culture Reader*, Oxford - New York: Berg, 2003
- Calvino, I. *Sotto il sole giaguaro*, Milano: Mondadori, 1995
- Carter, P. *Ambiguous Traces, Mishearing, and Auditory Space*, in Erlmann, V. eds., 2004
- Casey, E.S. *How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena*, in Basso, K. and Feld, S. eds.e, 1996
- Clifford J, Marcus G, eds. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* . Berkeley: Univ. Calif. Press, 1986
- De Certeau, M. *L’invention du Quotidien*, Union générale d’éditions, 1980
- Howes, D. eds. *Empire of the Senses – the Sensual Culture Reader*, Oxford – New York, Berg, 2005
- Corbin, A. *The Auditory Markers of the Village*, in Bull, M. and Back, L. eds. 2003
- Erlmann, V. eds. *Hearing Cultures – Essays on Sound, Listening, and Modernity*, Oxford – New York: Berg, 2004
- Feld, S. *Sound and Sentiment*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982
- Feld, S. *A Rainforest Acoustemology*, in Bull, M. and Back, L. eds. 2003
- Feld, S. *Doing Anthropology in Sound*, *American Ethnologist*, 31-4 - November 2004, pp. 461- 471
- Gianoncelli, T. *Percorsi, incontri, memorie. I paesaggi sonori dei giardini Montanelli a Milano* in Giusti, M. *Formazione e spazi pubblici*, Milano: Franco Angeli, 2010
- Ihde, D. *Auditory Imagination*, in Bull, M. and Back, L. eds. 2003

- Lassiter, L.E. Collaborative Ethnography and Public Anthropology, *Current Anthropology*, 46 - 1-February 2005, pp. 83-103
- Lassiter, L.E. *Collaborative Ethnography*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005
- M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Paris: Gallimard, 1945
- Sansot. P. *Du bon usage de la lenteur*, Edition Payot & Rivage, 1998
- Sclavi, M. *Arte di ascoltare e mondi possibili*, Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2003
- Sterne, J. *The Audible Past*, Durham – London: Duke University Press, 2003
- Stoller, P. *Sensuous Scholarship*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997