

Where Should I Look?: an audio guide, 2019

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An Duplan's audio reflections are rooted in specific places upon the High Line that provide not only a sense of physical space, but also a political and personal snapshot of the moment. Duplan delivers his prose with measured intent, with an even timber. Subtle sounds of the public back up Duplan's audio.

1. Sounds of construction

There's always construction going on in New York. Something is always coming up: new housing, or shops, or galleries, or what have you. The city itself is in a constant state of flux, just like you and I are.

I like this part of the High Line--this scaffolded section--because it feels like it's covered in a mesh blanket. Like part of the High Line has gone to sleep in a mesh blanket and when it wakes up, it's going to look and feel brand new.

There's construction going on just beyond the High Line too, on the buildings around it. It's as if everyone in this small patch of New York City agreed it was time to usher in the new. It's hard to find agreement in New York, especially on a topic like construction.

Yesterday I heard an artist call Williamsburg a "corporate nothingness." Then the museum staff person who was interviewing him apologized to all the people in the audience who live in Williamsburg. Then the artist said, "No, you're lucky if you live there."

Think of all the buildings you've ever lived in. What sticks with you? What were the neighborhoods like? Where was there construction happening? What did it sound like?

One time I came to the High Line and this whole mesh-covered passageway was illuminated with the sounds of construction. It was loud and part of me found these sounds beautiful. Metal hitting concrete. Buzzing, humming, screaming tools. The people working them, who you can't hear except maybe when they yell to each other. And even then maybe it's hard to understand what they're saying. The language of construction. A private language only some people know.

When people say, "we built our house," usually they mean they designed it and someone else physically built it. Building a building can happen in the imagination and that's still called building. A building built of thinking. If New York City were built from

our thoughts, it might be even more chaotic than it is now. It would grow and change as fast as our thoughts could flicker in and out of our heads. Would you like to live here, if that were the case? Personally, I crave adventure, but that might be too much.

This is one of the quietest spots on the High Line, when there isn't construction happening. I think the scaffolding muffles some of the surrounding city noise. When I first moved to New York, I met someone in a dog park who said he likes to take trips outside the city because it's too loud here. I said something like, "You think it's loud?" and he looked at me like I was crazy. I guess I hadn't noticed it. I notice it now.

You can always hear something happening in New York. Usually you can hear many things happening at once. I like the most when I can overhear small pieces of people's conversations, like when I sit here. New Yorkers sound awfully similar to each other. We use many of the same words. We respond to the events of our day with similar expressions. We explain things to each other, we talk about ourselves, we decide where to go next. You can't go too far before you hear the sound of something new being built.

2. The back of the Statue of Liberty

You can see the back of the Statue of Liberty here, which I think is pretty cool. It's such a monumental symbol in American culture, and yet here it looks small and approachable. There are benches here you can sit on as you look at it. You're under the shade of trees, facing a row of shrubs. In the view ahead, there's a crisscross of horizontal structures. They create a frame through which, in the very distance, you can see the Statue of Liberty.

The first time I saw the Statue of Liberty, I was in the parking lot of a Fairway in Red Hook. I saw it by accident. By that I mean I didn't know I was going to see it. I didn't go to there to see it. I had gone to the supermarket with an artist whose studio assistant I had just become. I think we went to Fairway to get lunch or snacks for the studio. The artist told me that in Red Hook there's a lemon meringue pie guy. Apparently his lemon meringue pies are the best. He doesn't have a shop, he just goes around Red Hook selling pies. Or so that's how I remember this.

The artist was telling me about the lemon meringue pies as we walked out of the Fairway. Then, all of a sudden, I saw the Statue of Liberty and I screamed. I don't know why I screamed. I guess I thought my first time seeing the Statue of Liberty would be more special than that. It seemed wrong that you could see it from this supermarket parking lot. But I was happy to see it too--so I could say I've seen the Statue of Liberty.

In actuality, it's not that special to see the statue and there are lots of places in New York you can see it from. This spot on the High Line happens to be one of them. I like that you can't see the front of it. It makes this feel like *almost* a special moment. If the statue just turned around and smiled, then it would be perfect.

3. Fathallah Saad

People sit on these wooden benches to eat and talk to their friends. They look through the glass. The glass is there so you can take pictures on 10th Ave, right above the roadway, so it looks like you're hovering.

I've never tried to take a selfie or any kind of group photo in front of the glass, but I like watching others do it. Everyone is taking some form of the same picture. There are other spots on the High Line like this one, that have been built for taking the same photos as everyone else.

Taking a picture with your friends is like punctuating the action of your normal life. Like a burst of specialness between conversations about your family, work, a trip you're going to take, or something bad that happened.

At this particular place on the High Line, you can see the side of a building that has been partially painted white. There is text in Arabic and in English. In English, it reads, "This book belongs to its owner Fathallah Saad. He bought it with his own money at the beginning of March 1892." This is an artwork called "AP 3851." "AP" stands for "abandoned property."

There's nothing on the internet about Fathallah Saad. The only remnant of him is this artwork by the Palestinian artist Emily Jacir. At the Jewish National Library in West Jerusalem, Jacir took photos of 30,000 books formerly owned by Palestinians with her phone. The books had been looted by Israel in 1948. When I searched "Fathallah Saad" on the internet, I found pictures that other people had taken of this artwork from this spot on the High Line.

Lately I've been thinking about archives. For example, the photos on your phone are like an archive. Your house, if you live in a house, is like an archive of every time you or someone else has been there. There are official archives too, housed in libraries and museums and universities. What if someone one day wanted to do research in the archive of your life? Where would they look?

4. Marine & Aviation Pier 57

I'm reading a report at the moment about the time the New York Police Department used Pier 57 as a jail. That year, the Republican National Convention was being hosted in New York, which made a lot of people angry. They protested the convention. It was 2004.

Much of the protesting was peaceful. Nonetheless, the New York Civil Liberties Union reports 1,800 protestors were arrested between August 6th and September 2nd. At the time, Pier 57 wasn't being used by anyone, which made it a convenient place to hold such a large number of people.

The NYCLU breaks down the number of arrests by day. On August 26th, there were 22 arrests. On August 27th that number jumps up to 264. Then only 10 the next day. The day after that there are 253. On August 31st, there are 1,187 arrests. Most people were held for fewer than two days.

The magazine *Popular Mechanics* called Pier 57 a "superior" in 1952, in part because it was fireproof and very durable. The pier had burned down five years earlier and had to be completely rebuilt.

I've never been inside Pier 57. I can see it just fine standing by this restaurant on the High Line. As I write this, there's a private event going on behind me. It sounds like there's a jazz band playing. People have drinks and seem generally happy, or at least pleasantly bored. Other people are sitting at Hearth eating and talking. I like places like these because it reminds me that everyone needs to eat and it's nice to do it with people whose company you enjoy.

Looking at the pier as I sit in this patio chair, I find myself thinking about the 1,800 protestors whose experience of the pier is as different from the benign experience I'm having of it now as you can get. I wonder if they were able to see the water from inside the building. I wonder if they were worried about how long they'd be detained, or if anyone was surprised, after getting arrested, to turn up at Pier 57.