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Mobile Media

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Mobile Media Mobile Audio Paper

Step into My World and Listen: The Mobility of Audio

When sitting on a bus or subway, walking to work or school, what are you doing during that time? Odds are, you have your headphones in, locked into a world of your own creation while moving from one space to another. Whether listening to podcasts or music, you're immersed in an experience that you control, even if you can't control your physical space. This is what I hoped to accomplish with my audio project.

Following the project's goal, I wanted to create a soundscape representative of the space where I've spent the seven months of the pandemic —my childhood bedroom. I decided to have my voice guiding listeners through this space and experience while creating a strong relationship between my voiceover and the sound cues of the space. Therefore, the voiceover was scripted with intentional word cues for specific sounds of my room; these sounds included candles and books, objects which don't create constant noise in the space.

Additionally, I wanted listeners to be aware of movement throughout the room, with the sound of me pattering about, and windows and doors opening. This way listeners would understand not only the relation of space but how it sounds simply walking around.

My goal was to showcase how I find comfort in this space, especially during uncertain times, and show these off through sound. This ranged from activities I enjoy to certain sounds

that set a particular ambiance I find comforting. Not only that, I wanted the listener to feel immersed in the space, and not as though they were listening to a collection of different sounds. This is how my project comments on the mobility of audio. No matter where you physically are, you can experience my bedroom in New York through your phone and headphones.

My project plays on the concept of tuning out your physical space and tuning in to another through audio, a narrative explored in Michael Bull's *Investigating the Culture of Mobile Listening: From Walkman to iPod*. Bull's specific argument is that the iPod changed user listening habits in everyday life, in terms of how it made it more mobile and private, but also gave users a sense of control. Whether that control is over their space, experience, or social interactions varies but in the case of my project, it allows listeners to step outside their current space and experience one I've created. As my project pertains to comfort and a sense of calm, users may best utilize this for what Bull describes as controlling their "internal chaos" (Bull 2006). This is based on how users often feel unable to control their thoughts and emotions when alone and use music to create a mental space for themselves to inhabit. Users may find personal solace in the audio space my project creates.

For the sake of the experience, I wished to provide, editing my audio was necessary. When creating soundscapes opinions are mixed on whether or not creators should edit their audio. These are best explored in Seaward's article, which discusses the two different narratives regarding editing audio content. Some suggest that editing a soundscape is unethical while others argue that depending on the soundscape's aim it can be necessary. Seaward writes of mixing the two, stating, "...there must be a balance between unedited field recording and sound manipulation, for too much of the latter may mean it loses sight of what is inherent in the field recordist's art; the honest reproduction of a place." (Seaward, 2015). In the case of my project, it

isn't a fully unedited, raw experience of the space. I did keep most of the sounds raw, such as the outside noise from my window, my dog barking, and footsteps around the room. However, the experience itself is edited. If you simply walked into my room randomly you likely won't hear me lighting candles or turning book pages. But these sounds are added and edited in at specific moments to provide the listener with a more well-rounded idea of the experience of being in my space and what typically happens in that space.

The mobility of audio allows us to escape from our physical space and control our listening experience. My project is an exercise in that escape using raw and edited sounds to create my personal comfort zone in a way that others can escape their experience in exchange for mine.

References:

Bull, Michael. (2006). "Investigating the culture of mobile listening: From Walkman to iPod," in K. O'Hara and B. Brown (eds.), *Consuming Music Together: Social and Collaborative Aspects of Music* (pp. 131–149). Amsterdam: Springer.

Seaward, Matthew Ronnie. (2015). Urban Soundscapes as Narrative: Intentions and Interpretations of Field Recordings. *Journal of Radio & Audio Media*, 22(2), 299-303.

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