

Sarah Hobbi

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A Reflection on *Jiddo's House*

Audio is no doubt one of the most fundamental types of media due to its prevalence on its own, and its inclusion with other types of media, such as film or art. The great beauty of it is that, given the right device or mode of listening, audio can subvert place and be enjoyed most everywhere at any time. What happens when we flip the narrative on this? Enter mobile audio. Mobile audio is a unique subgenre that allows the audience to be taken to a place rather than an audio being taken away.

What is most unique about mobile audio is that it can do one of two things. Either it can enrich a specific place (take *Walking Wissahickon*, for example) or it can operate as a teleportation device and take the listener someplace new entirely. Standard audio, on the other hand, often aims to give audiences information or an emotional experience, rather than a spatial one. Geolocative technologies can provide users with the ability to have experiences that are personal to them in the moment based on the privacy of mobile audio listening and the specificity of their GPS location in relation to the space and its stories.

The project I created, *Jiddo's House*, is meant to transport audiences to my grandfather's home, in Damascus, Syria, in almost a dreamlike walk through of my memories of visiting there and the magic associated with my childhood reflections. Within it, I take my companion, the listener, from his outdoor veranda area, so that they might see the sites from his balcony and engage with the local community. From there, I take them inside, to the more precious and intimate objects and memories hidden

within the walls. Lastly, I encourage them to take my childhood wonder, which I explain to them was fostered with my grandfather's house, and continue to explore and experience something amazing.

The piece I created takes place in an outdoor area and an indoor area, which is exemplified by the changing of sounds and inclusion of walking and doors opening and closing. Outdoors, for instance, includes the ambient sounds of the voices of people and chaos of the traffic around the area, while, when moving to the indoor portion, I decided to record room tone and have it consistently playing underneath the voiceover and the rest of the sounds of the piece. This transition from "busy" to somewhat quiet illustrates the physical movement of myself and the listener, whom I ask to follow me from place to place. The piece I created has the potential to be connected to geolocation elements of mobile media if it is consumed in the place in which it takes place, a museum-like reproduction of the space, or, as it is intended to be consumed, which is through the power of the imagination. The "mobility" of the sound within this project speaks to the universality of childhood imagination and the pain of loss. Rather than take my audience to Damascus, and explore the great city and culture there, I instead transport them to a very specific place with specific triggers so that the message is not lost in the place.

There are many principles found in course materials and readings that I was inspired by while creating the piece, *Jiddo's House*, though a few were especially important to its creation. Although my project is not one of many episodes, I believe that it reflects some of the same principles that are brought up in the Sarah Murray article *Coming-of-age in a coming-of-age*. The author states that "intimate soundwork is

a project of reflexive selfhood tied to established modes of storytelling, documentary production, and the negotiation of publicity and privacy in radio sound,” (Murray, 2019). This connects very directly to my project because *Jiddo’s House* draws inspiration from not only my own life, and the intimacy associated with that, but also the countless documentaries that seek to tell greater stories through small interactions. This is also exemplary of human capital and its “forward-looking” trajectory, as referenced later in the same article, which shows that these are the stories that will push us towards greater understanding (Murray, 2019).

Site-specificity is not necessarily an achievable task when it comes to my project in particular because it would require travelling and visiting someone’s private home. However, in lieu of that, I still wanted to achieve some of the “deep connection” that Jason Farman discusses in the article *Storytelling with Mobile Media*. When Farman says that “materiality becomes an important concept when considering a reader’s relationship to these mobile storytelling projects,” it is originally in reference to “the space itself” and also “the medium through which the story is communicated and experienced,” (Farman, 2014). I took the liberty of extending that idea into the objects that I speak about in my audio project. Yes, the land and home will be foreign to most listeners, but the objects are somewhat universal and can be used to create another sort of intimacy with the audience.

The last connection I felt compelled to address is that of the conflicting ideas in Matthew Ronnie Seaward’s article *Urban Soundscapes as Narrative*. Seaward addresses the contradictory ideas of McCartney and Schafer, who disagree when it comes to the richness of sound. McCartney believes that urban soundscapes are

perfect all on their own, and Schafer says that editing sounds, such as traffic down, provide a richer experience. "It is the romanticism of quiet," Seaward posits, "idealizing the ecological over an urban environment that proves contradictory to what field recording is striving to attain," (Seaward, 2015). *Jiddo's house*, although not technically recorded in the field it is intended to represent, takes note from both McCartney and Schafer. In the indoor portion of the piece, quiet is definitely romanticized in order to not overwhelm the listener and instead allow them to focus on the place and object they are meant to be experiencing. In the opening portion of the piece, however, street noises are a welcome addition and provide the aura of business, another culture, and a community with which the audience is experiencing this place.

All in all, *Jiddo's House* is not only a reflection of the possibility associated with mobile audio, I think it is a testament to the universal themes that help bring audiences to new places and keep them interested, despite being out of their element or comfort zone.

Works Cited

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