

Wandering the Garden

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Over the last few weeks, we've been studying the concept of geolocative mobile media. This has extended from discussions of the history of the transistor radio to using augmented reality technology to interact with public spaces. Our mobile devices provide us with endless opportunities to connect with or isolate ourselves from the world around us and geolocative media specifically allows us to connect with stories in ways we wouldn't be able to with legacy media.

My project is a geolocative audio narration of the interaction between myself and my surroundings as I take care of the plants outside my house. The audio piece opens as I'm putting on my rainboots in my kitchen and follows me as I go outside and walk around the side of my house to access our hose, which I then use to water the plants along the side of my house. I skip watering our tomato plant and explain why I do this, before I continue on to fill our watering can. I then walk across my lawn to my parents' trees and explain their significance as well as tell a story of which they remind me.

In his 2014 text "Storytelling with Mobile Media: Exploring the Intersection of Site-Specificity, Content, and Materiality", Farman argues, "content is non-transferable across media and across situations; instead, as we are implaced, we give context to the information we interact with. The place at which a story is read will always impact the meaning and experience of the story and, vice versa, the story will always impact the experience of a place" (Farman, 2014). The story of my cousin visiting the psychic will,

as Farman states, 'always impact the experience of a place.' I will never be able to look at my dad's tree without that story coming to mind, as it is inherently linked to that place.

Through my audio project, I draw the reader into that experience, especially as I move toward the tree as I begin that story. The geolocative aspect of this project also adds additional importance to the story where it wouldn't come across nearly as significant if it was told solely by narration without the ambient noise surrounding it and providing context. In "Urban Soundscapes as Narrative: Intentions and Interpretations of Field Recordings," Seaward states, "It could be the intention with radio production is hidden in the fissure between the words spoken and the supporting soundscapes, the sum of the two parts creating the arresting listening experience. The choice of sound behind the words will uphold their meaning and, in return, the words will imbue meaning to the sound" (Seaward, 2015). I employ this tactic by leaning into ambience throughout the piece. You can hear ambient background noise of the street I live on as well as sound effects that indicate a change in location such as me standing up, opening my back door, spraying the hose, filling the watering can, and my neighbor's dog barking as I approach the tree closest to the dog.

This project is connected to geolocation in that I give cues as I begin moving around my yard that allow the listener to follow along as they listen. I think I capture this in a similar way to the episode of "99% Invisible" we listened to where Roman Mars wanders around his apartment, pointing out mundane things that actually have significant histories that we may often overlook (99% Invisible).

As stated in "Small, cheap, and out of control: Reflections on the transistor radio," Arceneaux argues that there are three main traits of mobile media. They are "ubiquity, 'the quality of always being in our presence'... portability, 'the ability to take a device with us wherever we go' and ...personality... 'an overall cyborgian quality of an extension of the self'" (Arceneaux, 2014). This differs from other types of media, in that it's much more personal. It blends into our lives more seamlessly than for example television or film, which are more often associated with not only a stationary media experience, but also with production by formal institutions. In contrast, the creation of mobile media is intended for use 'on the go' where it can blend into the background of our lives or as a tool to be used to help us connect more with our space. Additionally, since there isn't the expectation of content being associated with larger production institutions, the quality expectations are different. For example, in a movie theater, where the equipment is geared to the best possible audio experience, audio mistakes within the content itself are not tolerated by audiences. Whereas mobile media is already being consumed in a more chaotic space that isn't strictly designated for ideal media consumption, it's expected and tolerated for there to be more production errors.

I think this also extends to the experience of mobile production as well. Typically, when I record, my setup is more isolated. For instance, when I recorded the narration for my project, I had a lot of control over different factors associated with production. I recorded in my basement, which is carpeted, using a Shure SM58 Dynamic Cardioid Microphone with a pop filter on a Behringer U-Phoria audio interface. I turned off my air conditioning so that it wouldn't kick on mid recording and affect room tone. I turned off the lights, because they buzz, and you can hear it in the recording. I made sure I was

hydrated, and was able to produce a fairly crisp dialogue recording. This was especially necessary since I layered that voice over on top of a much messier mobile recording for the geolocation aspect of the project. Once I step outside, I have to relinquish a significant amount of control.

Ultimately, just like any other form of media, geolocative mobile media has its strengths and in order to create effective content, we need to play to the strengths of the medium with which we're working. Geolocative media creates a uniquely immersive experience, and my project particularly asserts the connection between the story I told and the location the story was about through the use of vocal cues indicating new locations as well as ambient sounds curated to tie the project together.

References

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