Gabi Keane

Dr. Ben Miller

Composing Digital Media

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Audio Reflection

I wrote this piece a few years ago in a workshop class with Jenny Johnson that focused on time. I’m very interested in the concept of queering time (we talked a lot about it in this class), and how you can do that with sentence structure. I wrote this as a challenge in repetition and right-branching, reaching sentences. This was part of a short story, but this excerpt works much more like a prose poem or spoken word when it’s remediated for audio. The change in medium gave me a chance to pause when I shifted topics. The scenes take place in a car and then on the road in the snow in the middle of the night. There’s an element of personal myth to these two scenes that I wanted to emphasize with sound.

In the car, the sounds are very literal, but jumbled. The audio starts with the brief blip of a car horn. Unlike a lot of spoken word, I decided it would be better if I didn’t use a musical lead-in. I wanted the pacing of this scene to be slightly uncomfortable, like being in a car with someone who has a lead foot. The girl this scene is about does have a lead foot, and we would often sing loudly to songs. I considered including music in the car, but felt it would distract from the words themselves. I end the scene with a question, and I want that to feel completely unanswered. I decided to fade out using the envelope tool into the next scene, so the sound sort of melds the two thematically. At the beginning of the next scene, it sounds like a car has just passed. I’m really proud of this transitional moment.

The snow scene posed a challenge because I wanted to communicate both silence and light. My terrible headphones recorded quite a lot of noise, so it was important for me to use the noise reduction tool, but also to introduce some background noise in the preceding silence before this scene. I hated the contrast of actual, dead silence and the little white noise of recording, so I copy-pasted some of my recorded “silence” into the dead silence space to create the illusion of silence. It’s fine, nothing is real anyway.

With the snow scene, I wanted to transition specifically from the literal to the figurative with the music. I spend a lot of time describing the world around us, and our movement toward something. I really loved the track by Anonymous 420, which happened to be called “Time to go home.” I did not choose it because of the name, however I like that the artist was trying to convey the same thing I was. The sense of being tired, and walking home. I also like the atmosphere of the sounds they use, and I think the pace pushes things along, just like the right branchedness is supposed to.

I spent most of my editing time on this project fixing the recording I had made. I think the next time I work with audio, I’m going to try to borrow a nicer microphone. I have a very slight tooth whistle that I usually don’t notice, but this recording made it sound like I had a lisp. After obsessively going through and shortening all of my s sounds, I’m still cringing at the sound of my own voice. I did a lot of enveloping, noise reduction, and deleting to achieve something I don’t even like, but probably sounds decent to other people. I was tempted to turn off the heating and all the lights and do the recording over again tonight and decided it was not worth it, and that the noise reduction effects were decent enough.

I felt it was important for me to speak really close to the listener, if that makes sense. The genre calls for an intimacy between creator and consumer, which, however uncomfortable that may be for an artificial assignment like this, I did feel responsible for. It’s interesting to me how uncomfortable this process was—not because I had to do new things, but because I had to speak the things I had written and then listen to them over and over. I am generally uncomfortable sharing work in a non-workshop setting, so sharing audio work is even scarier. As I’ve mentioned before, my previous experience with Audacity was completely negative, so I found it really reassuring that I had both the time and the resources to make it work this time around.

I hope that my changes were significant enough. My outside elements didn’t need much editing other than enveloping and trimming, as I was using literal sounds most of the time. As I mentioned before, most of my cleaning took place on my actual audio recording—that was a challenge I’m glad I tried to tackle. In the tutorial, the guy says that you begin to recognize the wave forms for certain letters. Some of my s sounds were so long and drawn out, I knew before I even pressed play what I had to do. Editing sound was overall a really positive new experience. I think I’m hitting all the baseline criteria; as for aspirational criteria, I’m most confident that I’ve made use of (sometimes by purposefully ignoring) the conventions of a genre and conveyed a story to a particular audience. I think my piece does a decent job of emphasizing the distinct feeling of each scene without sacrificing smooth transitions. I’m still not sure about the volume balance, as I don’t have nice big speakers to test it on, but I did make an effort to balance both for headphones and my laptop speaker.

Car driving:

"Driving ambience".

deleted\_user\_7146007.

Published 10 March 2017.

https://freesound.org/people/deleted\_user\_7146007/sounds/383453/

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Car starting:

"Getting Into Car and Starting It".

mhtaylor67.

Published 5 August 2011.

https://freesound.org/people/mhtaylor67/sounds/126042/

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Snow crunch 1:

"Snow crunch 01.WAV".

luminadii.

Published 17 February 2016.

https://freesound.org/people/luminadii/sounds/336765/

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snow crunch 2:

"Snow crunch 02.WAV".

luminadii.

Published 17 February 2016.

https://freesound.org/people/luminadii/sounds/336763/

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Time to go home:

"Time to go home".

Anonymous 420.

Published 8 October 2017.

http://freemusicarchive.org/music/Anonymous420/THIS\_IS\_NOT\_YOU/Anonymous420\_-\_THIS\_IS\_NOT\_YOU\_-\_08\_Time\_to\_go\_home

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