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Composing Digital Media

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Soundscape Narrative Reflection

Since my first panic attack at the age of twelve, I have learned to deal with my anxiety in many ways; however, panic attacks are incredibly unpredictable and are difficult for others to understand and process if they have never experienced one. I have tried throughout my life to explain the feeling to others who have never had one, but the words have never fully sufficed. I was therefore inspired to create a piece that enabled the listener to experience the sounds and sensations of a panic attack, to introduce the fear and discomfort associated to those who do not personally understand. I knew going into this project that it could be triggering for myself and others who might relate closely to the experiences, but for the sake of advocating for mental health and anxiety awareness, it felt very important to recreate the sounds as closely as I could from my own experience.

To do so, I attempted to recreate the sounds and feelings I have experienced while having a panic attack in the library. Being a student is anxiety-inducing in general; there are many times that, while working in a high-stress, overly stimulating environment, a panic attack can (and for me, has been) easily triggered. To complete my desired sound in the piece, I used four tracks: two I recorded myself, in the library, to capture the real, physical sounds that have contributed to my overstimulation. Two I found online: heavy breathing and a heartbeat. Each of these tracks I had to edit individually to create my desired audio. The following is how I recorded/found and edited each track (labeled as they are in the Audacity file):

Typing track:

- o I recorded myself typing an assignment, making sure to attend to other sounds around me and the fact that distractions/sounds besides typing could actually enhance the narrative.

- o I Equalized the entire track and Amplified later sections to help increase the volume toward the end of the recording. I also used the Envelope tool to gradually increase the volume across the track.

- o I added a Fade In on the beginning of the track to help create a gradual build-up.

- o I used the Distortion tool on the end, ensuring that the audio would be altered to create an uncomfortable sound that was a bit overwhelming, but not so much that one could no longer decipher the sounds – just so that they would be louder and more stimulating. I then ended the track with a purposeful cut off to help demonstrate that the calm-down of an attack can also be unpredictable.

Heartbeat track:

- o I downloaded the audio from:
  - ▪ Placidplace. *heartbeat* [Pixaby.com]. Retrieved from https://pixabay.com/sound-effects/search/heartbeat/.

- o The original audio clip was a fast heartbeat that gradually slowed down. For my narrative, I desired the opposite effect: a gradually increasing heartbeat. I attempted to use the Audacity reverse effect; however, this distorted the actual sound of the heartbeat. So, I instead cut the clip into slow, medium, and fast sections, then ordered them in Audacity so the clipped sections would sound like an increasing speed heartbeat.

- I also used the Fade In and Envelope tool on this track; once again to have a gradual increase in volume across the entire track so it would sound as though the heartbeat increased in speed and volume.
- I left this track and the breathing track as the only two the listener can hear at the end, adding the Fade Out tool so the volume would again decrease. I wanted the heartbeat and the breathing to be the only remaining end sounds to create the effect that the person is at that point only in touch with what would be their own physical feelings, rather than the external overstimulating sounds.

Breathing track:

- I downloaded the audio from:
  - parkersenk. *Heavy breathing* [Pixaby.com]. Retrieved from https://pixabay.com/sound-effects/search/breath/.
- The audio clip was very short, and I wanted the breathing to take up time and not be fully constant. I zoomed in on the clip and cut one individual breath from it to use three times during the first 1.5(ish) minutes in the following format:
  - First breath: slowed down the clip using the Change Speed effect and used the Envelope tool to decrease the volume and give the impression of one, slow deep breath
  - Second breath: increased the volume a bit using the Envelope tool
  - Third breath: used the Change Speed effect to slow down the speed more that the first, but increased the volume more using the Envelope tool, to make one, loud deep breath

- After the individual breaths, I repeated the near full-length audio clip to have the breathing increase in speed and volume, using the Envelope tool for the entire track and the Amplify and Change Speed tools toward the end of the track.

Hillman talking track:

- I recorded audio on the ground floor of Hillman Library to add distracting background noise. I wanted to have the sounds of people speaking and laughing, keyboards typing, chairs moving, and other background sounds of the library.
- Like other tracks, I added a Fade In at the beginning, and used the Envelope to increase the volume throughout the track.
- I Amplified the volume and added Distortion on the end of the clip for same effect as the Typing track, making the sounds still somewhat decipherable, but louder, more stimulating, and more uncomfortable and overwhelming.

In striving to meet the aspirational criteria, I do realize I am close to falling below some of the requirements, coming in at exactly two minutes and having four tracks rather than five. However, even before seeing the criteria, I considered adding a fifth track (that would also lengthen the project farther into the aspirational time frame). It would have been a narrated introduction somewhere along the lines of "Close your eyes and imagine you are sitting in the library…". I thought it might help to set the scene and introduce the listener to the intention of the project. The more I considered this idea though, the more I felt as though it compromised the narrative rather than enhanced it. I wanted to demonstrate that panic attacks can be unpredictable, frightening, and uncomfortable in a way that doesn't fully make sense. Because of this, even though I am on the lower side of the time/track quantitative scale, I feel as though

the qualitative aspect of my piece speaks for itself in its effect and emotional discomfort. I was really nervous when I started working on this project; the clips would not fall together right, the sounds did not overlap in the proper way. It was disheartening to feel as though in wanting to be a mental health advocate, I might not be able to do the project justice and make the creative point I was striving for. However, upon completing the project and hearing others in class tell me they could relate, that it made sense and was effective – and if nothing else, being able to open up a safe and comfortable conversation about anxiety and mental health – I am genuinely proud of what I have accomplished with this narrative. My goals in this project were to both create an impressive and cohesive project, and also to open a conversation about the importance of understanding mental health, and I am proud to have met these goals.