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Composing Digital Media

17 October 2017

Reflection

For this project, I decided between 3 different written pieces I had done over the past 3 years in various English classes. I decided on “The Structure” because of its concise length, vivid description, and the sense of eeriness it gave off that I wanted to try and capitalize on with the use of sound. With this in mind, I recorded myself reading the piece all the way through twice, once after editing the written piece itself further for clarity. I re-recorded certain parts in a new track and copied and pasted them in where I heard unclear moments in my voice recording. Once I was happy with my voice recording, I mapped how I could incorporate sound into it to enhance certain moments and help listeners step in my elementary school shoes. My goal was to evoke a sense of overall nostalgia, whether it be from one’s elementary school days, going to the park as a child, trying to be cool and break the rules as a child, and just the fact that as children, things seemed much bigger and scarier than they probably were. I had not worked with Audacity prior, but was glad to figure out things much more quickly and without even really needing any tutorials unlike with the visual project. I had fun working on this project and trying new sounds out and overall just fitting pieces together to come up with a decently coherent piece on my first attempt at working with Audacity.

My intention was to evoke a sense of eeriness from the start of my written piece as I’m introducing the origins of the Structure. I found a sound effect called “Wind at the door howling 4” that evoked this sense through an eerie howling of wind through the night. I used this sound as background for the beginning of my piece, at a lower volume to ensure that my words were not drowned out. At the mention of the Structure’s transformation into a jungle gym, at first, I had left the howling sound in. Then I realized I didn’t want to evoke this emotion while this is being said and so I added a portion of the sound of children playing on the swings, again, not too loud as to drown out the sound of my voice. This was done to create a transition of image, and therefore thought, from an eerie pile of wood to an actual playground for children. At the mention of construction workers hammering away at the wood, I decided to include the sound of a hammer hitting something hard. The original sound effect was quite fast, and for the purpose of use, I wanted it to be more drawn out with some space between each knock (I used the Change Speed tool to accomplish this), to signify the continuous sound that seemed like it was never-ending to the children playing during recess. I used the Fade In and Fade Out tools to introduce and end this sound effect. The knocks of the hammer were also softened a bit so that the sounds were not too harsh while coupled with my voice.

Throughout the piece, I knew I wanted to include a constant background track. This was a challenge for me that I worked on last. I wanted the sounds to be a light one, perhaps something with a slight sense of eeriness and curiosity. Of course with my other sound effects, this couldn’t be something complicated that was highly dynamic otherwise it would become too overpowering. I found an excellent option to achieve this goal with the “Telebuda And The Mantis”. This track was one I heavily altered, and was allowed to with the CC-BY-NC license as long as I explained what changes I made and expressed explicitly that they were made by me and not for commercial purposes. I used the Envelope tool, which I had never used before, to lower the sound of the beginning of the background track because I already had the sound of the howling wind that I wanted to be the main sound they heard. I took parts of this sound piece in which there was a long humming-sounding section and copied and pasted it where there was important text being spoken that I didn’t want the constant background sound to distract from. A moment like this was when our principle gathered us and explained why the Structure was unsafe. Throughout this section, I only included a more dynamic section of the background sound, towards the end of her speech, otherwise it was more of a humming-sound in the background.

After this speech by my principle, I mentioned that it was now recess. During this section, I decided to include a portion of the sound of children playing on the swings again to show that everyone playing at recess was occupied and distracted, just like we wanted them to be (muwahahah). This sound piece was coupled with my friend Katie, scanning the playground to ensure that no one was paying attention to us. My next sound piece was the sound of footsteps through dried leaves. The original sound clip was much slower, the sound being that of a walking pace. I wanted to make it the sound of running, and on top of that, show 2 sets of feet running. To accomplish this, I used the Change Speed tool and increased it to sound more like running. Then I copied and pasted the track twice, the second time with a little lag, so that when one started playing followed by the other a second after, it seemed like 2 people running. I used the Fade Out tool to end the running without it being sudden. I was quite proud of myself for this finetuning with alignment because it was a challenge to create this effect by hand. I kept this in mind when I wanted listeners to hear 2 people out of breath when me and Katie reached the Structure. I did this because it put an end to the urgency of the running, and indicated that we had made it without being seen. I used the Change Speed tool to make the breathing seem more heavy after us running, and then copied and pasted the track once below, with a lag. I used the Fade Out tool at the end of both tracks so it wasn’t so sudden.

Once we had reached the structure, I wanted to evoke a sense of awe from looking at the beams of light shining through the holes of the Structure. I was able to find “cine background 8”, a cinematic background sound clip that accomplished this and so used the Fade In and Fade Out tools along with copy and paste, to include a portion of the sound I liked. This coupled with my continuous background track (“Telebuda And The Mantis”) because at the moment the cinematic background sound fades in, a more dynamic section of the continuous background sound ends and is more of just a humming-sound. In this way, the focus of listeners is on the awe-inspiring sound and my voice mostly. I used a Fade In and Fade Out tool on a small section of my continuous background sound after I Faded Out of “cine background 8” during the part Katie yells “C’mon Japps”. This was to put an emphasis on her calling out to me, as well as interrupt the awe-inspiring trance I was in while watching the beams of light. Lastly, I used the “cine background 8” track again to accompany my voice talking about the skeletons of dried leaves on the rock wall, another awesome sight that children would probably not take the time to notice while playing on a jungle gym. This “cine background 8”, my voice, and my continuous background track are the last 3 tracks playing in my piece which spans just under 4 minutes and 10 seconds. Because I end with an exclamation from one of the teachers discovering us on the Structure, I want it to be sudden and unexpected so right before your hear “GIRLS!”, I begin an abrupt Fade Out of both the “cine background 8” and the “Telebuda And The Mantis” tracks. This creates an emphasis on that last surprise.

I included the specifics of all my sound sources below:

Sound Sources

Title: Wind at door howling 4

Creator: Bosk1

Date Uploaded: February 3rd, 2014

URL: <https://freesound.org/people/Bosk1/sounds/217186/>

License: CC BY – used this as background music, I cut the end of the track because it was too long for how much I needed, the licensor doesn’t endorse me in any way

Title: The hammer

Creator: olliehahn12

Date Uploaded: January 20th, 2015

URL: <https://freesound.org/people/olliehahn12/sounds/262000/>

License: CC0

Title: swings

Creator: Corsica\_s

Date Uploaded: February 2nd, 2006

URL: <http://freesound.org/people/Corsica_S/sounds/15356/>

License: CC-BY – used this as background music, I cut the end of the track because it was too long for how much I needed, the licensor doesn’t endorse me in any way, I faded in and out at the beginning and end of the section I used

Title: Footsteps, Dry Leaves, G

Creator: InspectorJ

Date Uploaded: June 16th, 2016

URL: <http://freesound.org/people/InspectorJ/sounds/347850/>

License: CC-BY – used this as background music, I increased the speed of the running and faded in and out of it, I also created 2 copies of the increased speed section and pasted it in a new track with a little lag to give the impression of 2 people running, me and my friend

Title: cine background8

Creator: Hoerspielswerkstatt\_HEF

Date Uploaded: April 17th, 2015

URL: <http://freesound.org/people/Hoerspielwerkstatt_HEF/sounds/270899/>

License: CC-BY – used a section of the piece, lowered the volume

Title: woman breathing heavily horror stress sex

Creator: bulbastre

Date Uploaded: August 30th, 2010

URL: <http://freesound.org/people/bulbastre/sounds/103991/>

License: CC-BY – cut out a section of the sound, increased its speed, and used it twice, the 2nd time with a little lag to give the impression of 2 people breathing heavily

Title: Telebuda And The Mantis

Creator: Speck

URL: <http://dig.ccmixter.org/files/speck/54901>

License: CC-BY-NC – I cut sections of the piece, copying and pasting quieter sections when I needed them, one after another