SONIC DÉRIVE: AN EXPLORATION OF PERSONAL SONIC SPACE

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In

Broadcast and Electronic Communication Arts

by

John William Morin

San Francisco, California

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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read *Sonic Dérive: An Exploration of Personal Sonic Space* by John William Morin, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a written creative work submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree: Master of Arts in Broadcast and Electronic Communication Arts at San Francisco State University.

Nancy Reist, Chair

Professor of Broadcasting

Jeff Jacoby

Professor of Broadcasting

Marie Drennan

Professor of Broadcasting

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John William Morin

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2013

"Although the characteristic of noise is to brutally bring us back to life, the art of noises must not be limited to a mere imitative reproduction. The art of noises will extract its main emotive power from the special acoustic pleasure that the inspired artist will obtain in combining noises." – Luigi Russolo

"Art is anything you can get away with." – Marshall McLuhan

"Sous les pavés, la plage." – Situationist graffiti, Paris 1968

Introduction

Just as common as wearing sunglasses or a wristwatch, people today are sporting the ever-familiar, little, white ear buds plugged into their iPods and subsequently plugged into their heads. This is not a revolutionary act by any stretch of the imagination, as portable music, as we know it today, has been around since 1980 when the Walkman was introduced in Japan and then brought over to the United States and around the globe (Hosokawa 1981). However, in today's 21st century urban environment, portable music is no longer a novelty, it has become ubiquitous within the navigation of everyday life.

While listening to an iPod, the user creates a personalized soundtrack that works in conjunction with the landscape around them (Bull 2007). Whether a user is listening to music or a podcast, the combination of the exterior sensory world and the interior auditory space that is created by the iPod and headphones blends together to form a new semi-mediated, augmented reality. With regard to the mental mapping of the topography

of the landscape that surrounds the user, new locations begin to emerge that are not physical, but that exist in an acoustic space of the user's own creation. A memory or feeling can be created in the present simply by the association between the self-created auditory space and psychical landscape.

With the use of a portable music device, the user creates a Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ) (Bey 1991) that envelops their auditory space and allows them to shape the landscape in which they move through. In keeping with the name of the original product, to walk while listening to a Walkman, or any portable music player for that matter, is to fully appreciate the portability of the device and its power to transform the urban-acoustic environment into a blank canvas onto which the listener can create their own custom auditory experience. By muting the ambient sounds of the city and creating their own sonic reality, the user has the ability to transform the landscape around them and produce a narrative to guide them along and engage with the urban landscape in new ways.

While much research has been done on the isolation that is offered by the reality of the modern urban environment (Augé 1995), it is hardly noted that by directly engaging with this reality along with the mediated sonic environment provided by the portable media player, the user can synthesize a new reality based in both the physical urban landscape and the enclosed auditory TAZ that they have enveloped themselves in.

Keeping with the ideas put forth by the avant garde, revolutionary Situationist International movement, specifically that of the dérive, this project has created a series of audio soundscapes within a locative media experience that will employ the use of a digital media player, combined with the concept of the dérive and that of the Temporary

Autonomous Zone creating a personalized sonic space that explores the opportunities for altered and enhanced perception that result within that space.

Operational Definitions

For the sake of this project, considering that it will be focused on digital media, the term iPod will be used interchangeably with portable mp3 player. The term iPod has become a proprietary eponym for portable mp3 player; much like Kleenex and tissue, and just like Walkman became the proprietary eponym in the days of portable cassette players[1]. According to Bull (2007), the iPod is the first cultural icon of the twenty-first century "representing a sublime marriage between mobility, aesthetics and functionality, of sound and touch – enabling users to possess their auditory world in the palm of their hand." (p. 1). More than any other previous portable audio technology, the iPod has fundamentally changed the way we think about music and sound environments. In particular, urban culture has been greatly influenced by the iPod with regards to mobility and privatization of the individual's sonic environment (Bull 2007). With the privatization and increased control of the individual's sonic environment that the iPod produces, a new, highly mediated auditory space emerges that surrounds an individual with the sonic environment of their choice. Inside of this sonic environment, a user experiences a Temporary Autonomous Zone, in which the nature of their sonic experience is completely dictated by their own choices, free of outside influence.

[1] However, it should be noted that the stand-alone mp3 player is itself becoming a thing

A Temporary Autonomous Zone is a socio-political tactic used by an individual or group of individuals, in order to develop a greater sense of personal creativity and autonomy that is free from hierarchical social relationships and concentrated on cultivating the present moment as a space for these practices to take place (Bey 1991). It is my contention that the use of the iPod within the urban setting amounts to the creation of just such a space. It is within such an autonomous space (in this case, an auditory space created by the iPod) that a user can potentially break away from the constrictive notion of linear time and partially reclaim what can be considered "free time" or "my time" (Bull 2007). In addition, the Temporary Autonomous Zone created through the reclamation of personal sonic space allows the user to potentially understand their relationship within the urban setting in a more critical manner. This notion of the individual's psyche in relation to its surrounding environment is the domain of psychogeography.

Psychogeography is a subfield of geography, as well as psychology, that studies "the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals," according to Debord (1996). It is Debord's contention that any specific urban landscape has direct psychological effects on the individuals who are moving through it. While the "precise laws" put forward by Debord are never clearly stated as such, it is the overall concept that psychogeography proposes that holds its true meanings. It is less a system of weighing and measuring, and more of a framework for the critique of modern urban culture (Wood 2010). Within the framework, concepts and techniques of psychogeography, the idea of the dérive is a particularly effective method for cultivating a position that allows for the

individual to engage in “playfully constructive behavior,” that allows for maximum awareness of the contours of the psychogeographic landscape.

The dérive, a French word which roughly translates to “drift”, is a technique used by psychogeographers to explore unseen and underappreciated aspects of an urban landscape. According to Debord (1996), a dérive is “a mode of experimental behavior linked to the conditions of urban society: a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances” (p. 23). The goal of a dérive is to encounter new, raw experiences within the urban setting by allowing oneself to “drift” amongst the landscape. For Debord, the dérive offered an opportunity to escape the monotonous and predictable methods of moving though urban space that have been dictated by the needs of modern capitalism, and replace them with new experiences within a living landscape, transformed by participants of the derive. It is inside of this living, urban landscape that the project I am undertaking will exist in the form of highly manipulated soundscapes within a locative media sound art installation.

Locative media is a form of augmented reality that layers on top of the accepted concrete reality to form a media product that is a hybrid of the two (Hemment 2006). In this form of media art, the entire urban landscape becomes the canvas for the artist to create their work. According to Hemment, “The emergence of locative media signals a convergence of geographical and data space that comes about as soon as computing becomes mobile or ambient, reversing the trend toward the view of digital content as placeless, only encountered in the amorphous and other space of the Internet” (2006).

Schafer (1993) describes a soundscape as our sonic environment or “any acoustic field of study (that) consists of events heard not objects seen,” (p. 3). According to

Schafer, these fields of study can take any type of sonic form. This allows for a broad-reaching concept that spills over into many academic disciplines including music composition, urban studies as well as the humanities. However, for the purposes of this project, a soundscape will simply refer to any and all, naturally occurring or man-made, sounds in a given environment. Within the confines of this project, soundscapes will occur in both the psychical urban environment as well as the digital media environment.

It is in this place where digital media and psychical urbanity meet, where atoms and bits collide, that my project will exist as a means for the user to experience an augmented reality where a mediated auditory soundscape will allow for the user to contemplate new and exciting methods of perception.

Literature Review

Guy Debord and The Situationist International

Beginning in 1957 out of the remnants of two European avant-garde art collectives, The Lettrist International and The International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus, The Situationist International (SI) was formed in the town of Cosio d'Arriscua in northern Italy after French Marxist theorist Guy Debord delivered a position statement entitled *Report on the Construction of Situations and on the Terms of Organization and Action of the International Situationist Tendency*. Here, Debord (2002) outlined what would become the main impetus of the Situationist International movement, beginning with the words, "First, we believe that the world must be changed… We know that such

change is possible by means of pertinent actions" (p. 29). Debord is considered the main theorist and sometimes the defacto singular leader of the SI, although this position has mostly been applied posthumously (Trier 2007).

Clearly, Debord set lofty goals of revolution for the SI from the very start, but the more important aspect of this statement rests with his use of the term *pertinent actions*, which Debord (2002) clarified by saying, "We must try to construct situations, i.e., collective environments, ensembles of impressions determining the quality of the moment." Debord (2002) claimed that constructing these situations would, "multiply poetic objects and subjects" and "organize games of these poetic subjects among these poetic objects" (p. 47). Here Debord is calling not so much for a political revolution[2], but a revolution of everyday life. While still offering a critique of modern capitalism, he is also attempting to distance the Situationists from more traditional Marxism by asserting the values of creativity, desire and autonomy. This focus on personal change and freedom is also indicative of the influence of the Futurists, Dada and Surrealism on the SI by taking initial artistic concerns and expanding them to large-scale critiques on culture and society as a whole, arguing that through societal constraints, modern capitalism represses the very possibility of expressing subjective experience (Plant 1992). In what would become one of the SI's most famous and continually cited concepts, Debord referred to this capitalist process of systematic repression as the spectacle.

The society of the spectacle. Published in 1967, *The Society of the Spectacle* became the defining work for Debord and the SI movement. In this book, which consists of 221 theses, Debord lays out his critique of modern capitalist society and its reliance on

[2] Although this would become part of the SI's platform as they played a large role in the student protests of 1968 in Paris (see Planet 1992).

his concept of spectacle. Debord (1994) contends that "separation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle" (p. 20), and that individuals can only regain a unity among other individuals through the spectrum of the spectacle itself. This notion is similar to the idea that modern capitalism, through materialism and commodity culture sells a person's life back to them by offering products that represent desires and emotions that are negated by the spectacle itself. While going to great lengths to explain what he means by spectacle, Debord never specifically defines the term. The most useful definition provided by Debord (1994) is that the spectacle is "a weltanschauung[3] that has been actualized, translated into the material realm – a worldview transformed into an objective force" (p. 13). Here, Debord is saying that the spectacle is merely a worldview based around consumer/commodity culture that has been actualized into the material world. Debord (1994) describes the spectacle as both a means and an ends to itself. It is all encompassing and essentially never-ending:

> The spectacle manifests itself as an enormous positivity, out of reach and beyond dispute. All it says is: 'Everything that appears is good; whatever is good will appear.' The attitude that it demands in principle is the same passive acceptance that it has already secured by means of its seeming incontrovertibility, and indeed by its monopolization of the realm of appearances (p. 15).

This concept can also be applied to the modern, radical application of free market capitalism as well. According to this view, anything that is beneficial will naturally become successful and things that are not will fail. The old adage of "the cream will

[3] Weltanschauung: German word meaning "worldview"

always rise to the top" comes to mind, however there is also an equally as clever and perhaps more relevant phrase that says, "shit floats."

Debord saw modern consumerist society as a herd, passively observing their own lives through this spectacle of images that dominate the urban landscape, constantly reinforcing its own ideology through its imagery (Barnard 2004). It should be noted, however, that it was not exclusively images or media that Debord was objecting to, but rather the relationships between individuals as mediated by these images. In fact, Debord was no mediaphobe. He was a prolific film maker and produced several, feature length films, including one entitled The Society of the Spectacle that utilized one of the SI's signature techniques called détournement (Trier 2007).

Détournement, which translates roughly to "subversion" in English, is the process by which culture, society and everyday life can be restructured due to a recombination of elements - literature, architecture, film, photography, comics, gestures, words, signs – taken from their original context and recontextualized through a new series of alignments (Sussman 1989). This technique is the reuse of existing elements of the spectacle in new ways, which creates a dialectic that points towards a critique of the spectacle itself. By removing elements directly from the spectacle and placing them into a poetic discourse, the SI felt they could push back by allowing individuals to momentarily find themselves in situations that allowed for a radical negation of the spectacle (Plant 1992). To Debord and the SI, the creation of these situations in which individuals could alter their perception of the world around them was crucial to any kind of social revolution taking place. In addition to the concept of détournement, another technique that the SI used to

allow for the radical negation of spectacle was the walking critique of urban space known as the dérive.

Theory of the dérive. Walking has always been an integral human activity and a means by which a person can interact with their environment. Artists, philosophers, poets, musicians and athletes have all incorporated the practice of walking into their creative endeavors (see Nicholson 2008). In particular, within the urban environment, this notion of walking as an aesthetic practice of exploration can be traced back through the practice of the 19th century flâneur, the Dadaist idea of "event", the city-wide explorations of Walter Benjamin and the déambulations of the Surrealists (Bassett 2004). All of these concepts are directed at an exploration of the urban environment by the practice of walking through it. To Debord (1996) and the SI, the new urbanism of the 19th-century represented the "impoverishment, enslavement and negation of real life," (p. 151). Debord believed the spectacle had infiltrated all aspects of life and culture, including the very architecture and layout of the urban landscape, which had a profound and direct psychogeographical effect on the individuals moving within this landscape. One method of negotiating this effect was through the practice of the dérive.

The tactic of the dérive, allows for "rapid passage through varied ambiences," (Debord 1996) and aims to erase the everyday banality of the city by injecting new possibilities of experience into an individual's life. This idea of "locomotion without a goal" (Plant 1992) creates a situation where the possibilities presented by the landscape are allowed to appear and be confronted by the individual for their own uses and desires. Plant (1992) points out that "to dérive was to notice the way in which certain areas, streets or buildings resonate with states of mind – and to seek out reasons for movement

other than those for which an environment was designed" (p. 59). The urban environment lends itself to orderly passage through carefully laid out streets and sidewalks facilitating the ease of travel of people and commodities. The dérive, on the other hand, is a subversion of the typical urban flow. In his *Theory of the Dérive*, Debord (1996) quotes Marx in relaying why the dérive is so important in the urban setting, "Men can see nothing around them that is not their own image; everything speaks to them of themselves. Their very landscape is alive" (p. 23). Debord goes on to describe specific details regarding the practice of the dérive including influence of weather on dérives, the temporal and spatial limitations of the dérive, as well as the use of taxis to arrive at departure points (Debord 1996). While Debord's specifications sometimes border on the eccentric and oftentimes hilarious, the essence of Situationist theory regarding the demystification of the spectacle is strong in the idea of the dérive. Unlike the flâneur and the Surrealist experimenters before them, the SI saw their dérives as less accustomed to chance or mere strolls through town, because, as Debord (1996) described, urban areas have "constant currents, fixed points and vortexes which strongly discourage entry into and exit from certain zones" (p. 22).

The dérive then, is sort of an *organized coincidence* in which the individual is engaged in a radical rereading of the urban environment by moving through it methodically while at the same time being open to the multitude of possibilities that could be presented. In a world where "leisure is defined in terms of commodified time … and the realm outside work is increasingly to province of alienated relations" (Plant, 1992, p.23), the dérive is both a reclamation and reappropriation of one's life. In a sense, the act of a dérive becomes its own form of détournement, using the existing urban setting as a

canvas and reformulating it in a fashion that creates poetic objects out of so-called ordinary objects and allows for unique and varied experiences. The dérive as a living critique of the spectacle offers the individual new ways of experiencing the world around them:

> The main achievement of contemporary city planning is to have made people blind to the possibility of what we call unitary urbanism, namely a living critique, fueled by all the tensions of daily life, of this manipulation of cities and their inhabitants. Living critique means the setting up of bases for an experimental life, the coming together of those creating their own lives on terrains equipped to their ends. (Kotanyi & Vaneigem, 1961, p. 66)

This "experimental life" is one lived, if even momentarily, outside of the spectacle. Debord (1996) confirms this idea of the experimental life saying, "the most pertinent revolutionary experiments in culture have sought to break the spectator's psychological identification with the hero so as to draw him into activity by provoking his capacities to revolutionize his own life" (p.25).

The idea of the dérive and the reclamation of public space has modern day implications with regard to the practices of Urban Exploration (Garret 2011), Flash Mobs (Kaulingfreks and Warren 2010), skateboarding (Vivoni 2009), Rave dance party culture (Rill 2010) and the bicycle protest movement known as Critical Mass (Furness 2007). All of these activities are radical reappropriations of urban space that challenge the dominant ideology of consumer capitalism by declaring autonomy for the individuals within a defined area. This reclamation of public space has been referred to as a Temporary Autonomous Zone.

Temporary Autonomous Zone

Bey (1991) describes the Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ) as "an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere, before the State can crush it" (p. 38). Within the created space of the TAZ, individuals may find that typical societal norms disappear and relationships between individuals as well as relationships with the environment can change dramatically. It should be noted, however, that the creation of a TAZ is more often than not a momentary occurrence, not a permanent installation of resistance. However, within the boundaries of this situation created with the formation of a TAZ, individuals are offered the opportunity to break from the conditioning of the surrounding environment (Furness 2007).

Of course, the problem presented by the notion of the TAZ is that it is, as its name suggests, temporary. The potential for real revolutionary change seems limited within a framework that is so loosely defined and materializes so infrequently. While it would appear to be a hindrance, the very fact that the TAZ is so difficult to define and pin down is also its greatest strength. Bey (1991) comments that, "as soon as the TAZ is named (represented, mediated), it must vanish, it will vanish, leaving behind it an empty husk, only to spring up again somewhere else, once again invisible; unidentifiable in terms of the Spectacle" (p. 101). Here Bey is directly connecting with Debord and his notion of spectacle, arguing that because the TAZ is unnamable, it is one of the only effective methods of bypassing the far-reaching grasp of the society of the spectacle. Bey sees the TAZ as not so much a sustained political force, but rather as a temporary shift in cultural

significance that offers a potential for new communicative, perceptual and experiential moments that can permanently alter an individual.

Like the examples of Critical Mass, rave dance parties and flashmobs listed previously, the dérive, Debord (1996) insists, functions best as a group activity. He claims, "the most fruitful numerical arrangement consists of several small groups of two or three people who have reached the same awakening of consciousness" (p. 23). While this may be true in terms of group decision-making, powerful experiences can also be felt when a person is moving alone through a space, with the ability to focus on their own emotional and perceptual responses without having to account for additional individuals. With the examples of a defined TAZ above, (Critical Mass, flash mobs etc.) the participants are engaging in a demonstration, or what could be seen as its own form of spectacle. With the dérive, however, there is a much more personal experience that does not rely on outward signs of resistance but allows for a much more personal experience within a public space. With the addition of a personal audio device, this process becomes an even more private and personalized form of resistance to the spectacle.

The Personalization of Public Space

Released in the spring on 1980, the Sony Walkman was a giant leap in the evolution of personal audio devices. While personal stereo systems had previously existed with varying degrees of success from personal transistor radios to ghetto boom-boxes (see Bull 2007), it was the Walkman that revolutionized personal audio consumption by removing external speakers and directly associating headphones with its product (Hosokawa 1981). By relying strictly on the use of headphones to experience the

Walkman, it created an effect of a new aural urban landscape that could be shaped by the user, or what Hosokawa (1981) refers to as "autonomy-of-the-walking-self" (p. 166). This sense of sonic personalization has only increased with the advent of the iPod, which allows users to carry virtually their entire music library along with them. With such unfettered access to a personalized sonic environment, users are able to exercise aesthetic control of their environment as move through it (Bull 2007).

While, to some degree, the autonomy offered by a portable audio device could be seen as a method of isolation, it is a *chosen mediated isolation* that the individual engages with. Unlike the bombardment of advertising and broadcast media that may have the effect of isolating an individual, the ability of the user to control the content of their soundscape is crucial. Debord (1994) saw the media as an extension of the capitalist culture that served only to isolate individuals by means of the spectacle and weaken the bonds that exist between urban citizens. Referring to the previous studies of Riesman (1950), he claimed that, "from the automobile to television, all the goods selected by the spectacular system are also its weapons for a constant reinforcement of the conditions of isolation of 'lonely crowds'" (p. 26). Here, Debord contradicts himself as the SI relied heavily on the technique of détournement to reveal new characteristics of objects within the spectacle. If, by placing media objects in a different context, a new perspective can be gained that pokes a hole in the spectacle, then it would stand to reason that objects used by the spectacle are not in and of themselves isolating, but it is in the manner in which they are used and the agency of the user that creates the isolation.

Here the user-generated soundscape of the portable audio device may become a tool of agency within the predetermined design and layout of the urban landscape. The

user "transforms these presuppositions, their knowledge, and, in consequence, his own self in a dynamic transaction with the environment: dynamic, because – he himself does not confront the environment, but virtually and/or actually is a part of it" (Hosokawa 1981 p. 172). By engaging with chosen mediated isolation, the user is creating an autonomous *head space* that moves towards a new awareness of reality that functions as a personalized TAZ.

While mostly the TAZ functions as a place for groups of individuals to come together and share in the autonomous experience, chosen mediated isolation is a form of TAZ that allows a user to customize the space around them to their liking. This differs from what Debord considered the main tactic of the spectacle, which is one of isolation. However, when engaging in chosen mediated isolation, the user is actively asserting their agency to shape their environment and experience in the world.

This project serves as an exploration of the concepts of chosen mediated isolation, the dérive and the TAZ by creating a series soundscapes that users will engage with via a portable mp3 player and headphones while moving through an urban environment.

Methods and Limitations

This creative project was conceived as a means of exploring the potential that exists within the sound bubble created by a user when they slip on a pair of headphones and temporarily seize control of their sonic surroundings. In this project, I combine the natural soundscapes of the psychical environment within the location of the audio dérive with additional soundscapes created through recorded and repurposed audio.

By manipulating this personal sonic environment with an audio soundscape of my creation, it is my intention that the user will experience the psychical landscape around them in a new way that allows for a richer perceptual experience. The following sections will explore the methods by which this project was created, as well as explore some of the limitations that were encountered throughout that process.

Project Phases

There were three main phases of this project, and although at times they overlapped in their implementation, each phase certainly existed as distinct in its role within the process. The first stage of the project was the research or "listening" phase, the second, the recording or "gathering" phase and finally, the editing or "manipulating" phase. The final production will be presented during an exhibition at the Carville Annex gallery in San Francisco during the month of May, 2013. In addition to the three phases this project consisted of, I will also discuss the GeoTour smartphone app, which the project uses as a backbone in order to present the audio dérive to the user. In addition, I will describe the seven soundscapes that this project consists of and the possible implications of each.

Research "Listening" Phase. The initial phase of the project was conducted within the psychical landscape in which the audio dérive takes place. During the Research phase, I spent time walking in the general area in which the audio dérive is located. This was an exploration of the chosen area in which the dérive takes place and allowed for me to choose the best locations for placing soundscapes. The derive is located in San Francisco's Outer Sunset neighborhood, centered at 46th Avenue and

Judah Street. This location was chosen for its dynamic variety of architecture, unique style, as well as its accessibility to both the Pacific Ocean, which is a constant source of inspiration in my work. By combining all of these elements, the options available for creating a unique and entertaining audio dérive were numerous.

While walking through the designated locations, I listened to the ambient sounds that exist in these locations and took notes on what I was hearing and compiled lists of sounds that corresponded with various locations throughout the designated area. Once this documentation process was complete, I went about deciding what kinds of sounds would work to either replace or compliment the existing soundscape.

In addition to listening to the ambient sounds of the general area, I also kept close track of the particular locations throughout the landscape that I thought might connect well with a specially designed soundscape. Using the GPS tracking system on my smartphone, I noted the GPS coordinates of these locations with the intention of using these exact coordinates to place particular sounds in precise locations. I also took photographs of each of these locations in order to guide my creative construction of the soundscapes. The choice of which sounds were incorporated into the final design was ultimately the result of this listening phase process.

Since this project, in a sense, has a visual component to it, being that the user will be moving through the physical world and engaging with it both visually and sonically, the soundscapes that I designed function as a type of real-world sound design piece. I composed my piece based on the visual environment that I encountered during the listening phase and used it as the canvas onto which I arranged my soundscapes. With this in mind, I used audio for video design techniques such as combining both literal and

non-literal sounds in addition to playing with the concept of source-connected and source-disconnected sounds (Zettl 2011). There was a lot of room for experimentation with what Zettle refers to as the outer and inner orientation of sound (Zettl 2011) in this project due to fact that the created soundscapes provides complimentary, as well as oppositional, visual cues regardless of what the user is actually experiencing visually. By manipulating the notions of time, space and environment with various sounds that may or may not correspond with what the user is seeing, there is the possibility for interesting interactions between aural and visual connections. However, it should be noted that the physical environment in which this project will take place, is constantly changing and that no two dérives will truly be the same.

Once the listening phase was complete, I had a complete list of sounds that needed to be recorded, as well as the corresponding locations in which they would be placed during the course of the dérive. The next phase of the project consisted of actually recording both the existing soundscape in geographic locations indicated, as well as seeking out and recording any additional sounds that I would be using in the final audio dérive.

Recording "Gathering" Phase. The second phase of the project consisted of capturing field recordings in both the psychical landscape of the proposed locations as well as in other environments. In addition to field recordings, I also gathered sound through reappropriating audio in the détournement method practiced by the Situationist International.

Field recordings. In order to capture field recordings of the environments that the audio dérive passes through, I used a variety of audio recording equipment including

multiple microphones, monitoring headphones and a digital audio recorder. The predominant microphone used in this project was an Audio-Technica AT825 Cardioid Stereo Condenser microphone, which I used to capture ambient sounds in the environment. I also employed an Audio-Technica AT8035 Shotgun Condenser microphone, which was used for more specific, directional recordings. I recorded these sounds to a Marantz PMD690 digital audio recorder as Waveform Audio (WAV) files at a bit depth of 16 bits and a sample rate of 44.1 khz.

Détournement. In addition to the field recordings that I gathered, I also acquired additional audio through various websites that offer content for free. These sites include: UbuWeb (http://www.ubuweb.com), FreeSound (http://www.freesound.org) and The Internet Archive (http://www.archive.org). It is my contention that Fair Use protects any and all audio used in this project, in that it is being used in both a research and scholarship context. Keeping with the technique of détournement (Trier 2007), I reappropriated and manipulated these audio samples, which consist of voice, sound effects and ambient sound.

Field recordings and reappropriated sounds were then mixed together to create specialized soundscapes tied to various geographic locations in the Manipulating phase.

Editing "Manipulating" Phase. The final phase of the project consisted of editing the captured and collected audio samples and arranging them. In order to edit the audio, I used Avid's *ProTools 10* audio editing software running on an Apple *iMac* computer and a Mackie *Onyx 820i* analog mixer with a Firewire connection.

The editing process itself is fairly intuitive for me, consisting largely of an addition and subtraction method of editing. While not entirely by experimentation, as I do

have the lists that I produced during the "listening" phase, my work is mostly put together in this trial and error process. In fact, several of the pieces were recorded initially as an improvised live recording and then edited, constructed and manipulated after. Using this process of having multiple input sound sources at the same time allows for the multiple layers that my recordings tend to have.

The final product of this editing process were seven WAV files, each with a bit depth of 16 bits and a sample rate of 44.1 kHz. However, due to the limitations presented by the mobile phone software being used, they were compressed into mp3 sound files able to be played on any portable mp3 device. For the purposes of this project, however, the mp3 files will be accessed via the GeoTour mobile smartphone application created by Geovative Solutions.

GeoTour Smartphone App. The backbone of this project is a website and mobile smartphone application created by Geovative Solutions, a Kansas City-based company focusing on GPS technology. Through the Geovative Solutions website, I created the basis of what would become the Sonic Dérive. Using the audio tour creation interface provided by the website, I was able to map out the exact locations of where I wanted to place each soundscape. After determining the precise locations using GPS tracking information, I uploaded each mp3 file to the Geovative Solutions website and attached it to the specific location. The interface allows for the adjustment of several aspects of the audio tour including the proximity of the user to the precise location. By adjusting this value, measured in feet, the user can approach the desired location from different directions without altering the triggering of the audio. Once all of the

soundscape mp3s were placed in their specific locations, the audio tour was available to be accessed via the companion mobile smart phone app, GeoTour.

The GeoTour smartphone app uses GPS technology to locate the smartphone user's position and access any audio tours that have been created via the Geovative Solutions website. When the user accesses the Sonic Dérive audio tour, the app will download all of the relevant media (the soundscapes) that correspond with that tour. The information totals less than 50MB and takes about two minutes to download. (It should be noted that the GeoTour app is available in both the Apple and Android App Stores, as well as linked to by my website www.RadioEyes.org) Once downloaded, the tour can then be accessed on the user's smartphone via the app. By selecting the "map" option in the app, the user can view the placement of all of the soundscapes in relation to their current position. The user's location is indicated by a flashing blue dot and each placed soundscape by a purple pin. When the user approaches the location of a placed soundscape, it will begin playing automatically and will continue until the piece has finished or until the user enters the range of another placed sound. This allows for the user to move along with the soundscape, or stand in one place and allow the piece to fully engulf their position in space. The distance between the placed sounds has been carefully laid out to allow for enough time to experience the full length of each piece. The user is also encouraged to listen to the soundscape that is naturally occurring around them throughout the duration of their Sonic Dérive.

It is important to note that there is no designated route for the user to follow. All of the placed sounds exist independently on the map and can be visited in any order the user wishes. This allows for a clearer connection to the SI's notion of the dérive and its

locomotion without a goal. Without a fixed route, the Sonic Dérive can take as long or as little time as the user wishes. Perhaps only two soundscapes are heard during one experience and several more during another.

It should be noted, however, that each soundscape can be experienced independently of its location. In this sense, the user has the ability to alter the placed sound by choosing to experience the soundscapes in whatever sequence they choose. While in one sense, this could be seen as a loss of control for the artist, it could also be seen as a creative way for the user to remix the soundscapes and offer more potential for varying experiences.

Despite this ability for the user to alter the location in which they experience each soundscape, the seven sound pieces created for this project were designed with specific geographic locations in mind, and were manipulated to explore the user's relationship to this specific location with regard to time and place. I will explain the creative decisions that went into each of the soundscapes and discuss the potential ramifications that each of the seven soundscapes may have on the user.

Soundscapes. The seven soundscapes created for this project were the result of each of the three phases presented above and are experienced by the user via the GeoTour smartphone app. It was my intention that each of the soundscapes be experienced by the user in the geographic location in which I have placed them, however, given the technological limitations presented by the GeoTour app this may not be the case.

Concrete has no sympathy. This soundscape, which centers around urbanity and city life, is designed to give the user a feeling of experiencing the hustle and bustle of a crowded city. Its location within the dérive occurs just as the user is entering into the

piece on the often-crowded Judah Street. It provides an introduction to the dérive in the form of voices on the street, trolley cars, traffic and city ambience. Combining with the location in which the soundscape is placed, the piece offers either a direct connection to the urban landscape in which it is contained or an additional sonic layer on top of it, perhaps in opposition. Depending on whether the street outside is busy or quiet (it can be both in this location) the user can experience differing perceptions of the space around them.

There is constant sense of movement to the piece as voices and traffic arrive from all angles, making the user reassess their position in space. In addition, due to the temporal cues in the piece such as clocks chiming, the rush hour commute and the "Tuesday-at-noon siren" the soundscape also offers a distorted sense of time.

Spelunker. The *Spelunker* soundscape is a fantasy narrative played out in the real world. The location of this piece places it within a series of low over-hanging trees, which resembles a dark cave. Once inside the trees (and the cave!) the user is transported to an alternate location where fierce winds rip across the landscape. Seeking shelter, a large rock is pushed aside allowing entrance to a dark cave. Away from the howling winds, new sounds emerge from the new cavernous environment. Echoing drips of water and strange groans can be heard from deep within the cave. Venturing further, animalistic noises call out from all sides. As the sounds become more frequent and frightening, the only choice left is to turn around and return to harsh conditions outside.

This soundscape plays with the user's sense of space within the environment by taking advantage of the closed-in, claustrophobic feeling of the trees and shrubbery. The piece also contains a story arc that addresses the user's emotions by attempting to cause

fear, hesitation and perhaps even panic. But don't worry; it's all in your head (or your ears!).

The secrets of the sea. Playing off of the large mural of a Gray whale, as well as the proximity to the ocean, this piece imagines a deep sea diver exploring the ocean depths. This soundscape contains a miniature narrative that takes the user from a boat, floating peacefully on the surface of the water, down to the depths of the sea where they encounter whales, dolphins and other mysterious sea creatures. This piece seems to perform the vital bodily functions of both breathing and listening for the user as they descend into the dark water, where sense of sight is of no use. The underwater landscape is a highly sonic one, with sounds traveling hundreds of miles using the water as a conduit. This sonic environment is recreated by this piece and allows the user to experience the ocean depths without getting their feet wet.

Time is short by the sea. Located near the Ocean Beach sand dunes, this piece reflects on the nature of time and the individual's relationship of it. The vast expanse of the ocean, the curvature of the Earth and the endless, repetitive motion of the waves all call to mind the user's position in space and time. The ticking clocks imitate this endless procession of time, like the ocean waves, forever forward. Chimes of different clocks striking the hour are heard at different intervals and pitches to remind the user of the futility of time keeping – as if one could ever *keep* time. Alarms and chimes remind us of events occurring in other places at specific times, alienating us from our present temporal existence. This soundscape hopes to make the user stop and reflect on their position in the stream of time.

Glossolalia. The phenomenon of glossolalia is something that I have been fascinated with for some time. As a purely auditory phenomenon stretching back to biblical times, it stands as perhaps one of the original forms of sound art. A distinct form of prayer for Pentecostal Christians, speaking in tongues is even considered a form of linguistic resistance to more dominant language (Holm 2011). Attempting to dislodge the phenomenon from a strictly religious conversation, this piece simply considers the sonic qualities of glossolalia. By combining samples of this phenomenon of speaking in tongues with other highly affected manners of using speech, this soundscape attempts to wrap the user in language. However, within the piece, language becomes less a manner of communicating meaning through words and more of a way to express emotion. By combining the Pentecostal tradition of glossolalia with other forms of rhythmic speech, a pattern emerges that is both hypnotic and illuminating. The geographic location of this piece, a church, of course considers the religious nature of this phenomenon but also allows it to exist outside the confines of a religious establishment. Perhaps by giving glossolalia a more secular setting, it can stand on its own as an auditory phenomenon with specific sonic qualities and characteristics.

McLuhan's rearview mirror. This soundscape explores the concept of time and human technological progress from an imagined future state when humans exist as one with machines. The ever-evolving and increasingly more complex symbiotic relationship between humans and machines may point towards a future where our everyday existence becomes more digital than analog. McLuhan (1967) saw this future as being in the present, and argues that we simply lack the ability to see the current media environment for what it is and the effects it has on us. He claims, "When faced with a totally new

situation, we tend always to attach ourselves to the objects, to the flavor of the most recent past. We look at the present through a rear-view mirror. We march backwards into the future" (p. 74). Addressing this concept of looking into the future through the lens of the past, unable to see the current environment, this soundscape attempts to observe the current digital media environment for what it is; an abstract of bits and bytes colliding and combining into more and more complex structures. The human voice merges with the machine to become another part of the digital media environment; warped, electronic and distant, lacking the warmth and familiarity of human speech and barely heard over the din of electronic circuitry.

Bury me in analog. Acting in conversation with the previous soundscape that focused on digital media, this piece addresses our analog past and the pieces of it we leave behind. Created through the use of *found sound*, this soundscape consists of remnants of answering machine tapes that were gathered at thrift stores, flea markets and yard sales. The piece imagines the cacophony of conversation that exists in the celluloid past of our old technology. As our communication technology progresses, we leave the old machines behind without the thought that they contain personal information. We currently discard our old computers and cellphones to trade in for the newest models, sometimes without regard for the amount of personal data we leave behind. Vast amounts of time are compressed into these devices: days, weeks, months and whole years of intimate moments from our lives. This soundscape invites the user to look up at the tangle of telephone wires above and consider the humanity that exists within.

Project Limitations

There were many limitations and variations that arose while this project was being put together that should be addressed. Among them were variations within the environment, variation in the user's experience and limitations based on technological availability.

Variation within the environment. During the course of the listening phase, the variation of the environment was something that had to be taken into consideration. Factors such as time of day and current weather conditions will greatly affect the user's experience of the audio dérive, so these factors were taken into consideration during the listening phase. While listening and researching the various sounds that exist in the psychical environment, I also noted to what extent they could be altered by environmental factors and attempted to adjust my expectations based on that. For example, certain locations were found to have a distinct sound created by the dense fog that is oftentimes present in the Outer Sunset neighborhood. I constructed the audio dérive in such a way to minimize these sorts of variations within the environment, but of course there is no way to completely control this issue. If anything, the variation in the environment can be looked at as an added bonus of the project in that a user could potentially have a completely varied experience walking the same route twice based on these environmental factors.

Variation in user's experience. In addition to the various differences that occur within the environment, another limitation is the variances that may occur with each user. With any kind of experience that is so personal and unique to the individual, there is bound to be differences in the way in which each person experiences the event. This

could take the form of emotional reactions to specific sounds or locations, the pace at which the user travels along the designated route, as well as any kind of unforeseen intervention by elements outside of my control (i.e. other people sharing the space, vehicles, etc.). While the emotional response of the user is certainly something that I took into consideration while constructing this project, there is only so much that an artist can do before they give their work over to the public. I attempted to shape the user's emotional response by crafting the audio dérive in such a way that it hopefully elicits the intended reaction, but the final result is as much a product of the user's response as it is the artist's creation.

Another issue within the realm of user experience is the problem of the user's safety while participating in the audio dérive. Of course, I do not expect this to be a major issue, however, it should be noted that issues involving hearing loss (Portnuff, Fligor, Arehart 2010), and pedestrian/vehicular accidents (Neider, McCarley, Crowell 2009) have been associated with the use of portable music devices. Taking these issues into consideration, I worked to minimize risk to the user by selecting locations that avoided dangerous traffic situations, avoided sudden increases in volume throughout the dérive and encourage users to employ open-ear headphones that allow for the user to both hear the created soundscape as well as the environment around them.

Another consideration with regard to limitations is the availability of this project to potential users that may suffer from hearing loss or other audiological disabilities. Given that this project is centered around created soundscapes, there are not many concessions that can be made in this regard. However, it could be possible for a person with a hearing disability to experience the piece with the accompanying map on the

smartphone app. This user, detached from both the natural sound environment as well as the created soundscapes could discover a completely new experience. If a situation arises in which a user with an audiological disability wished to partake in the Sonic Dérive, I would certainly make any and all accommodations possible to allow for this.

It should also be noted that the intended audience of this project is broad enough to include a wide variety of users, but is also limited to those individuals who possess a smartphone and the ability to utilize the GeoTour app. Any individuals with an interest in sound, urban design and art in general would be a target audience for this project. However, I do believe that the nature of the project allows for many different types of people to take part in it.

Limitations based on technological availability. There were some limitations placed on this project based on technical aspects, mostly having to do with the GeoTour app, which the project uses as a backbone. Given that it is third-party software, the ability to alter it were no available to me and lacking any kind of programming skills I was not able to create my own smartphone app. The GeoTour app, while powerful, does not provide a step-by-step GPS tracking option and is only accurate to about 50 feet, which limited my ability to incorporate more geographically precise sounds (footsteps to match the user's steps for example). In addition, the maximum amount of data that can be uploaded to the GeoTour app is 50 megabytes, which limited not only the amount of soundscapes that I could produce but also the size and sound quality of these files as well. The original soundscapes were created as lossless WAV files, and a certain amount of fidelity is lost when the files are compressed into mp3s.

Another technical limitation, although perhaps somewhat obvious, is mechanical failure. There always exists the possibility that the smartphone could fail for a variety of reasons, none of which could be anticipated. Of course, battery charging is a main concern but certainly something that I could control. Other mechanical failures, software issues or headphone problems, on the other hand, are not predictable. However, I will take all necessary steps to ensure that the equipment being used is in good working order before being presented to the user.

Despite these limitations, I believe this project is successful with regard to what I initially proposed, which was to create a temporary autonomous space for the individual by utilizing a portable mp3 player and headphones, which will then lead the user on a guided audio dérive that will allow for an enhanced perceptual experience based on the soundscape that has been created.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project, as stated previously, was to offer the user a new perspective on their environment based on the seven soundscapes that were created within the context of the Sonic Dérive. Of course, the experience of each user will be completely unique despite hearing the same soundscapes based on environmental, emotional and temporal differences. That being said, as with any kind of art, the artist creates the work in an attempt to evoke very specific emotions from the audience and this project is no different. The seven soundscapes all attempt to exploit different types of emotions in the user and allow for deeper perceptual experiences within the Sonic Dérive landscape.

The narrative-based soundscapes with somewhat rudimentary story arcs attempt to carry the user into the sound story that they are listening to. These soundscapes, when tied to environmental locations that mirror the narrative of the sound piece, result in a more visual experience of a sonic environment. I feel that these soundscapes, *Spelunker* and *The Secrets of the Sea*, were particularly effective in their efforts. Combining the visual element with these two sound stories offers an interesting augmented reality narrative, which I think is particularly effective in both pieces.

The other five soundscapes: *Concrete Has No Sympathy, Time is Short by the Sea, Glossolalia, McLuhan's Rearview Mirror* and *Bury Me in Analog* are much more abstract and do not necessarily contain a linear narrative. These soundscapes were designed with the intention of evoking emotion in the user rather than telling a story. Each sound piece contains specific sonic elements that connect to physical elements in the landscape, much like the narrative pieces, but also remain fluid and open in their interpretation. It was much more difficult to connect these abstract pieces to the landscape, however, I actually feel that these pieces were more successful in what I originally set out to do, which was to enhance the perceptual experience of the user.

Overall, as a series of sound art pieces, I feel that this project was very successful. In addition, I feel that my creative approach to constructing my work has been altered during the course of this project. Paying attention to environmental factors and attempting to tailor my work to these aspects was quite challenging, but also very informative to my process. The majority of my work to this point has been improvisational in style, which creates a very particular aesthetic due to the artistic processes involved. Being able to take the time to carefully craft each soundscape to a

particular location gave me the opportunity to work in a new style that was much more loose than my past work. The addition and subtraction of sonic elements in each soundscape was based much more on intuition and emotion than purely timing, of which it was in my past work. I believe that these changes in my process resulted in the success of this project from a creative standpoint. However, on a more theoretical basis, the results of this project were a bit more ambiguous.

Throughout the course of the project, one theoretical issue has continued to appear concerning the conception, implementation and lasting effects of the Sonic Dérive. Although this issue is far larger than the scholastic and artistic attempts of this project, however, I hope the Sonic Dérive could perhaps, at the very least, shine a light on it.

The issue is that of the *chosen mediated isolation*, described previously. The problem with this concept is that the portable media player and headphones seem to offer both a greater sense of agency for the user, in that they can exert greater control over their sonic environment, but also a sense of alienation as they cut themselves off from their psychical environment. Debord might see this contradiction of freedom through media isolation as incompatible with the revolutionary concepts of the SI, I, however, would disagree.

This concept holds within it an inherent contradiction that seems to exist throughout the entire digital media landscape that we now find ourselves surrounded by. These digital technologies are, without a doubt, allowing for a greater sense of connectivity and perhaps even freedom with their ability to compress time and space, which allows the user to do more. However, despite this ability to multi-task and accomplish more and more, we seem to be more distracted than ever. It seems counter-

intuitive to assume that by employing digital media devices to free up our time, it has only made us more distracted, but this seems to be the case. Do any of us feel that having an email account, smart phone or Facebook page has freed up more of our time? I would assume the answer is a resounding "no!"

We have outsourced so much of our cognitive processes to digital technology, only to then fill in the free space with alternate forms of that same digital media. The search for the next-best-thing or the newest update dominates our society, leaving us in an anxiety-filled state which Rushkoff (2013) calls *present shock*. In the constant attempt to live "in-the now" with 24-hour news cycles and never-ending Twitter updates, we are completely missing "the now" – the present. Our movement within the asynchronous time of digital media is less a flow of moment to moment and more of a movement from choice to choice; never-ending and always changing. There will always be another hyperlink to click, another podcast to download and another status update to like.

And so Debord's idea of spectacle becomes more and more prevalent as we move deeper into the digital media environment. Could there be anything more spectacular than the Facebook notion of friendship? An electronic connection via a computer network between two individuals who may or may not have ever met each other, which in turn generates revenue for a gigantic corporation based on advertisements which are then sold back to those friends – this is outrageously spectacular!

This does not have to be the way that our relationships within the digital media environment exist, however. We can make technology work *for* us as opposed to working *on* us. I believe that this project has been a step in that direction. By using digital media to create a TAZ and a personalized sonic space, I believe that the user can seize the

present moment, instead of squandering it by jumping from hyperlink to hyperlink. If one person that experiences this project finds themselves transfixed in the moment; shocked, surprised or enlightened by a sound that they heard or finds themself stopping to consider a new perspective on a familiar landscape that they have never noticed before, breaking a hole in the spectacle that has become our post-modern/post-future existence, I will consider the Sonic Dérive a success. I hope you're one of them.

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