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Podcast Assignment 1

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In approaching this podcast assignment, the theme that I chose was “A Day in the Life.” I was particularly interested in conveying a sense of the passage of time in this podcast. Ultimately, the sounds compiled as an entire piece are designed and arranged to walk the listener through my own personal day at UVM. While this is a listening and hearing assignment, in class we have discussed the listener’s *perceptions* of sounds. Hearing, in certain circumstances can spark within the listener a visual image in their minds, which was my goal. In this case, these sounds give an extremely detailed and personal look into an individual day at UVM for me personally.

  The first sound is my alarm clock. It is a loud, abrupt beginning to the set of sounds that follow. This mirrors the loud, abrupt start to my day. Following the sound of the alarm, I have included the sounds of my own personal rituals of  beginning my day, such as brushing my teeth. This might seem mundane but it is intended to walk the listener through my daily steps as well as to make it relatable. Many people within the UVM community (and far beyond) take part in these same simple rituals. This universal participation in banal routines leads to universal understandings and complete sensory awareness while listening to this podcast, because they too have experienced these sounds associated with the very same tasks.

  The sounds following my early morning routine reflect the most prevalent sounds within my morning. These include the door slamming, (an extreme annoyance for fellow Harris residents due to the heavy doors lacking springs) and coffee stirring, a sound I am sure most college students know all too well. After my morning coffee, my classes and studies begin. The next sounds are furious typing and pages flipping. These frantic and yet soothing sounds of studying are universal and have come to reflect the core of my UVM experience.

  Next, another daily ritual of mine is one that relates to Barthes’ idea of grain. I listen to music while running. Included is one of my favorite songs by Andrew Bird. He is the perfect example of my personal grain. This grain, or soulful feeling that I get when I listen to music is exemplified in Bird’s song Tenuousness. As Barthes says, “The significance it opens cannot be better defined, indeed, then by the very friction between the music and something else…” (Barthes 185).

This quote struck me as crucial to the ideas presented within our class. The “something else” that Barthes refers to is a soulful feeling when one listens to music. Listening is not just about the physical act of sound entering the ear canal and being processed in the brain, as Hudspeth describes in “The Energetic Ear”. Instead, sounds can often be heard and move us on an almost spiritual and emotional level. This idea, the psychology and perception of sound, is crucial when discussing sonic studies.

  After this song, I included the sounds of my daily run and shower. Both are simple and yet necessary rituals for my well-being. I have become accustomed to the sounds of my own feet and the background sounds of busy students on campus that can be heard in the track. I intentionally closed the piece much like I opened it, to show the cyclical nature of  my day.

Meditation is a daily ritual of mine. I listen to guided medications that range anywhere from

vocal instructions or guidance to simple chimes. These tapes have the “grain” that Barthes so deeply appreciates, although they are not complex or structured songs. I have an appreciation for the way simple sounds like these can have a calming effect. However, through mindfulness and careful listening, human beings can be relaxed by sounds just as easily as they can be stressed by them. Hence, a dilemma of perception arises, looking at the alarm versus the meditation chime. This perception of sounds, and what we consider to be pleasant versus unpleasant is what truly spoke to me while reading Schwartz. He writes in his piece “Making Noise” that “the soothing sounds people hear may change, and their reactions to those sounds do change…” (Schwartz 21).

The concept of desired and undesired sounds fascinated me, and this is why I included two “bell” sounds, if you will, in the beginning and ending of my podcast. I liked the idea of taking similar sounds that both start and end my day. The first sound, though, gives me the chills. This is because I associate it with a disturbance of rest, and an interruption of peace. The final sound, though, I associate with meditation and peace. In class, we have discussed the social placements of sounds, and how our perceptions can change over time.  Our perceptions can also change depending on the context of a sound heard.  Schwartz touches on this in the above quote, and most people can relate to these concepts in every day life.

With these sounds, I describe my day through a time lapse. The goal was to welcome the listener into a 12-hour period of my life at UVM. Tying all of these sounds together, I wanted to target the listener’s perception of time through the progression of sounds.

Bibliography

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