The Footprints of Sounds

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Abstract: *This short article accompanies a soundscape exploration of Dublin City, Ireland, capturing the auditory experiences of three distinct locations: public transport, city streets, and the national library. Here, we consider the rationale for undertaking this particular project, the process employed to produce the soundscape, and the scope and limitations of this particular project. Overall, the soundscape aims to challenge conventional perceptions of everyday sounds by examining how different environments contribute to the urban soundscape. Field recordings emphasise the contrast between the bustling street environment and the quietude of closed spaces, echoing John Cage's concept of silence as an auditory experience. The methodology details the recording and editing processes, using Adobe Audition for advanced mixing and ambience effect enhancement. The audio reveals how the library's relative silence offers a counterpoint to the city's noise, underscoring the idea that silence can be a form of sound. Technical limitations, such as unintended noise, are discussed, and future research is encouraged to further explore the concept of silence as a form of sound.*

Keywords: *Soundscape, sound walk, silence, field recording, Dublin City, auditory perception*

Introduction

The accompanying piece is a soundwalk production of Dublin City, recorded with a Zoom H5 microphone. The aim was to investigate different sounds present in everyday moments, which might go unnoticed in most circumstances (Drever, 2009). This was achieved by recording in three different locations: the LUAS transport system, a coffee shop, and the National Library in Dublin. Especially focusing on everyday activities, the author intended to explore sounds that are associated with places people often visit but rarely pay attention to aurally.

Rationale

The exercise consisted of recording background and specific sounds at three different locations, recorded over the period of a few days and edited together. Although no narration was used, the intention was to make keynotes and sound marks so identifiable it would be an effortless process to relate the sounds to the represented location (Wrightson, 2000). The aim was to make the narrative as clear as possible, allowing the listener to follow the story effortlessly but highlighting hidden sounds.

These locations were selected to portray a routine day, perhaps looking for comfort and quietness. Public transportation represents the movement, and the coffee shop is an in-between for the first and last locations. Both are a routine part of many people's lives, and the soundwalk was a way of capturing hidden sounds they might not notice in their routine, presenting a glimpse of the invisible (Drever, 2009). The aim was, then, to create the experience of presence, transporting the listener there mentally (Chattopadhyay, 2017).

Finally, the library recording was a mention to John Cage's "4'33" piece, in which he explored the concept of silence (Fetterman, 1996). The study of an audience's reaction to quietness and hidden sounds in places they consider soundless pushed the author to choose a library as a means of representing the quiet in modern society. In there, often people are making a conscious effort not to make any loud noises, and yet a lot can be captured in a recording. This also enhances the experience because it forces the listeners to enter a mindset in which they have to identify small sounds in a vast, usually quiet space. The intention was to best capture such small noises with the best equipment

possible and force the listener to question whether complete silence is tangible or merely an abstract concept created.

Methodology
The recording was done using a Zoom H5 microphone, with the aid of windshields and accessories either to record background noise or more targeted sounds. This mostly consisted of visiting the different locations in a span of a few days, planning which sounds might be more interesting to record and making a list beforehand.

In the location, it was imperative to find a static spot to place the microphone, ideally a flat surface to catch the least interference possible. The levels were then adjusted in accordance with what the author intended to capture. In the library, levels remained between 50-60dB to make the ambience more suitable for a quiet room (Gallagher, 2009). In the other locations, in contrast, those could go up to 70dB depending on which sounds were intended to be recorded.

When all was recorded, editing involved using Adobe Audition to mix the tracks. Starting with the transport recordings, then following with the coffee shop and library to create a flow between the audios. Mostly, this was done by merging one audio into the other using fade-in and out transitions and layering. Several tracks were created in order to separate audio files, making it easier to isolate one from the others.

Effects such as noise reduction were often used to isolate footsteps or the sound of doors opening, as those were challenging to record without the interference of wind or other unwanted noise. Amplify and pitch correction effects were used in small portions of verbal phrases to make the sound clearer but still seem as if it were in the background. Finally, an echo effect was applied to the last part of the library scenarios to make the sounds blend better and make the space seem bigger. Special care was taken with the dynamics in the book page flipping and chair pulling sounds as those were recorded separately, as to make them blend better with the ambience (Gallagher, 2009).

Finally, the introduction was recorded and added to the beginning of the project, finalising the end with a long fade-out transition.

Limitations
The limitations of this process were many. Firstly, because of the nature of the library exercise, it was especially difficult to manoeuvre the microphone and capture sounds in such a quiet space where any little movement would be recorded. Because of this, in editing, some unwanted noise had to be removed to make the piece clearer. This meant that the last third of the audio was the most time-consuming to edit, as many sounds had to be recorded separately and put over the library ambience as to not disturb it. More takes of the library ambience might've led to a different, clearer result.

In addition, it was very challenging to record transitions between closed and open spaces, especially when entering and leaving the coffee shop. This is because wind noise was especially easy to capture wrongly while opening the door. Due to this, the author had to often resort to noise reduction effects that could potentially have lost minor details that could've been interesting in the final version. In the future, it might be beneficial to record over a longer period of time to try and capture a day with little to no wind.

References
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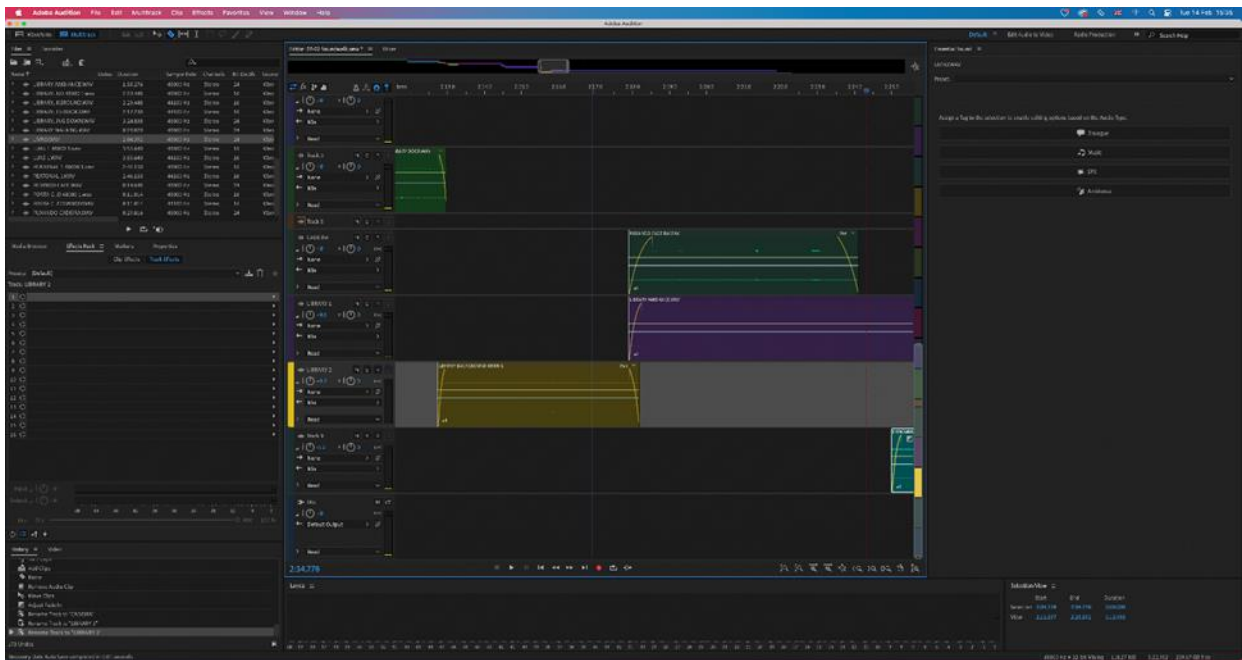
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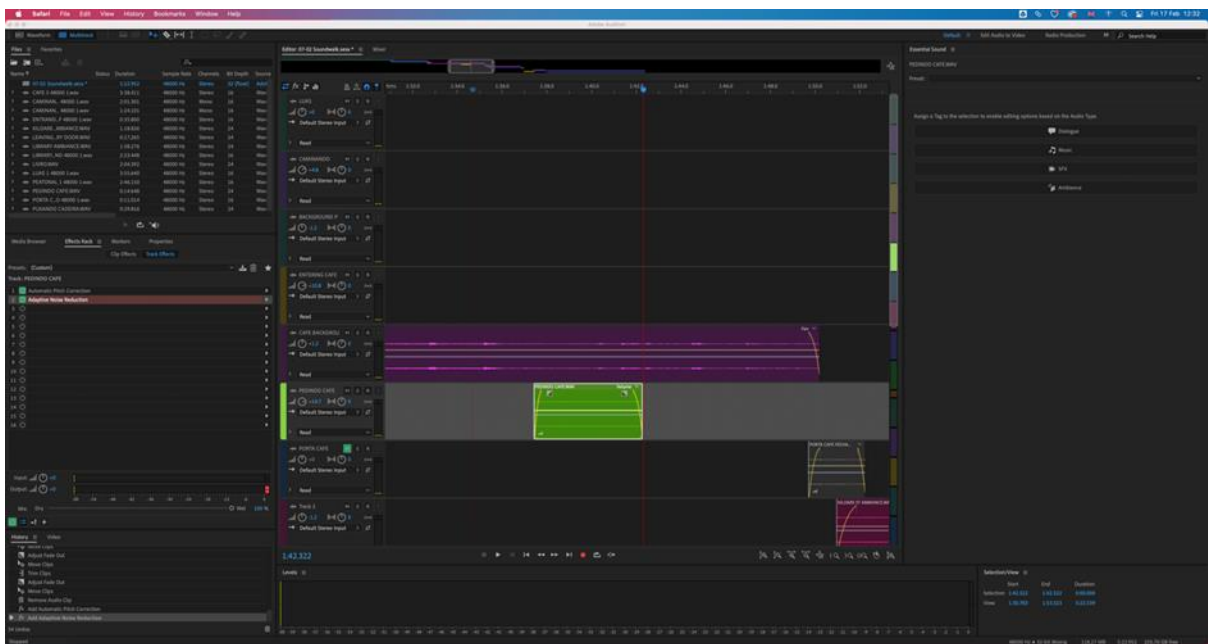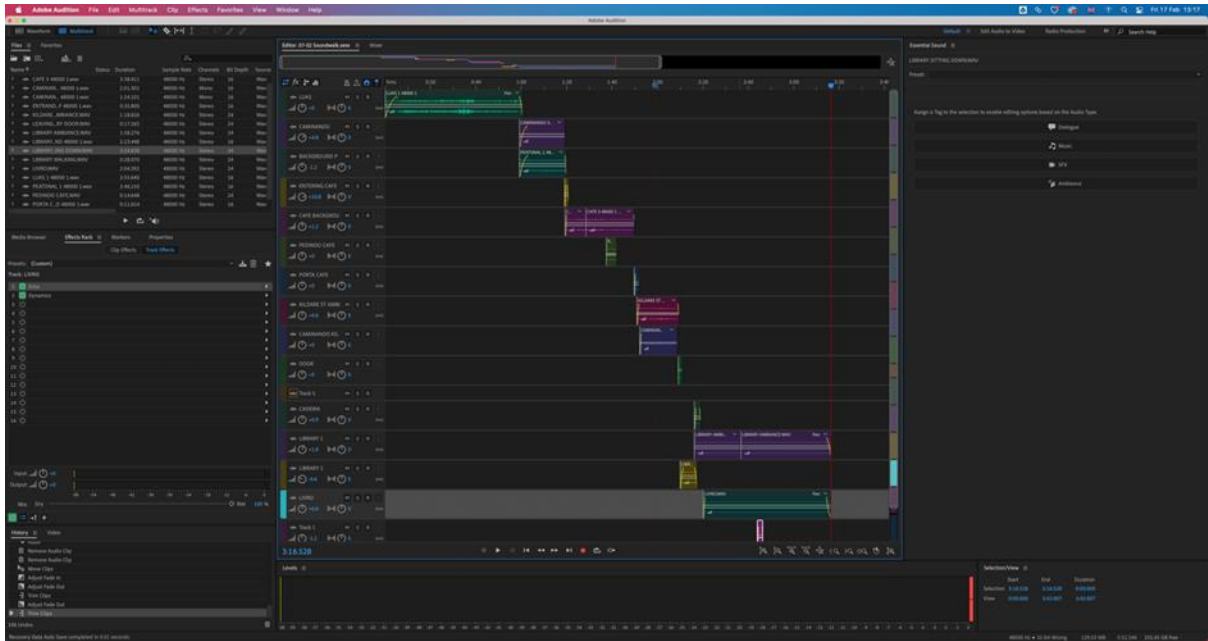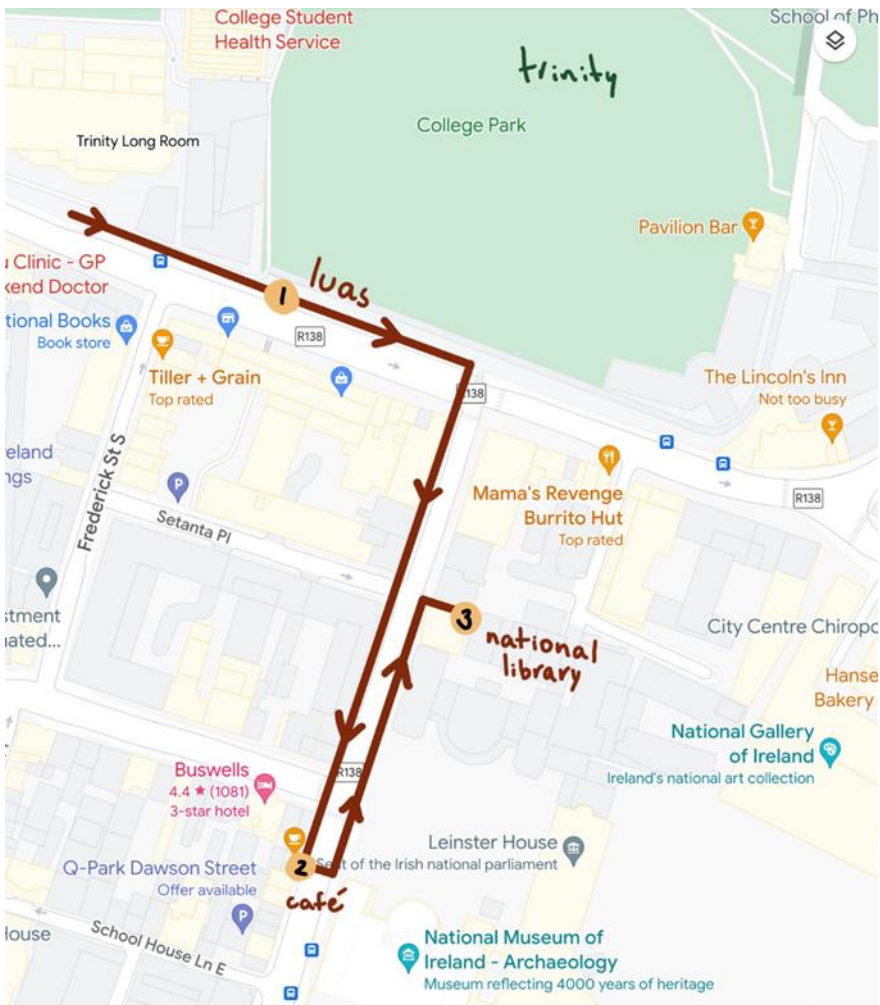
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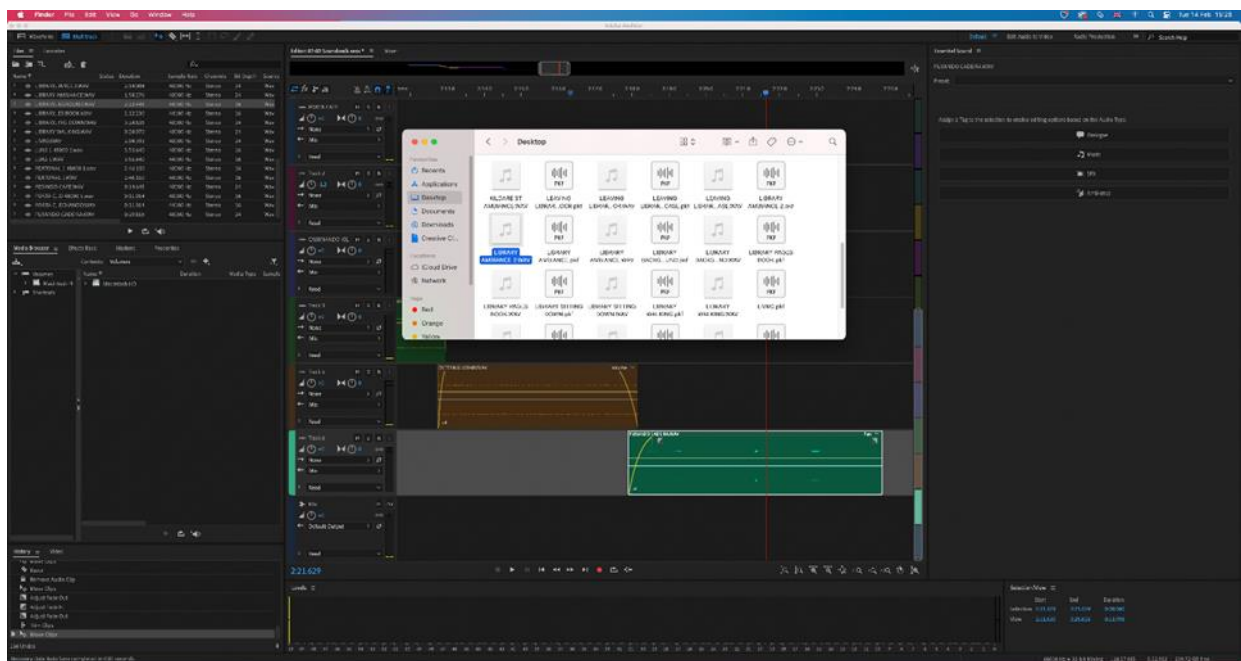
Screenshot 1

Screenshot 2

Screenshot 3

Screenshot 4

Map 1