

Media Art Lab Audio (Visual) Postcard

Even people who can't define what they mean by an "audio postcard" seem to recognize one when they hear it. That doesn't mean there's any sort of template you have to follow. Some postcards are just 60 seconds long, while others go on for four or five minutes. Some use actualities, and some only include natural sound. There are postcards that rely on extensive voice tracks and others that get by with just a few words at the top and the bottom. So there's no formula for creating an audio postcard. Yet successful postcards do seem to have a few things in common...They project a strong sense of place...An effective postcard often envelopes the listener in sound...

—Jonathern Kern, NPR

Over the next two weeks, you will create an audio (visual) postcard—a one to four minute dispatch from a particular (though not necessarily real) place that transports to the listener to that place using only sound. Your piece should include both field recordings and studio recordings, but it does not necessarily have to include narrative elements. If you choose to include visual elements, the visuals should be subservient to the sound [e.g. obscured, static, etc.]

Week I

1. Learn about audio postcards and the use of sound to provide a sense of place. (e.g. NPR Audio Postcards, NY Society for Acoustic Ecology's "Giant Ear]]]" show on free103point9, Soundwalk and other experimental audio tours)
2. Spend a few hours listening to and in the place where you may wish to set your audio postcard. What are the characteristic sounds of the place? What do they tell you about the architecture and physical space? How do the sounds change over the course of the day? Create a 'sound journal' describing your listening exercises and inventorying the sounds you want to use in your project.
3. Create a list of sounds you plan to record on-site and ones you will fabricate in the studio. Bring this list to class to help focus the demos on March 9.

Week II

1. Record the sounds of your place, both those you identified last week and those that you find spontaneously.
2. Record the studio sounds, either voiceover or other.
3. Capture images, if using; make sure they are oblique, indistinct, or somewhat separate from the sounds.
4. Edit/mix the sounds and export as an aiff file at 44.1khz OR a Quicktime H264 movie file.

II AUDIO POSTCARD BASIC ELEMENTS

According to NPR Website:

Length

- > 60 seconds to 5 minutes (usually 3 minutes)

Strong sense of place

- > puts listener in a place right away, and keep them there
- > a postcard is from *one* place, not several

Heavy on the Audio

- > envelopes the listener in sound
- > sound should somehow be remarkable
- > audio equivalent of a four-color photo

Should stand out from the rest of the program

- > may lack any narration
- > may be a personal narrative (first person postcard--like you are writing the postcard)
- > may use more sound than actualities
- > probably lacks a news peg
(but still needs some peg- if it is part of a radio program)
- > adds texture, changes pace (stands on its own)
- > gives the listener an experience