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DRA3905 Theatrical Machines

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Professor Antje Budde

The Sound of Machines

I. *Project anticipated duration*

I anticipate my project performance, not including the lecture, lasting a little over five minutes.

II. *Project rationale/WHY*

The rationale for the content of my project is largely drawn from Alan Turing's drawings of flowers and nature. In doing course readings about Turing, I found myself asking the same question over and over: what really is a machine? While we typically think of them as object descriptors, "machine-like" or "mechanical" can also be applied to a great deal of living things. As can be seen from Alan Turing's drawings, featured in Dennis Dollen's "Alan Turing's Drawings, Autopoiesis and Can Buildings Think?," the living and the mechanical are not as opposite as many would think. Turing drew mathematical representations of plants that "computationally reiterate questions people have asked of nature, pattern and rhythm for thousands of years" (Dollens 251). The drawings display mathematical patterns that conjure thoughts of the digital, particularly in how flowers display the Fibonnaci sequence; Turing detailed lines and dots over his flower creations in ways that look like spaced-out pixels, and it made me question how mechanical natural processes really are. My project would allow both myself and others to confront our preexisting ideas of the mechanical, bringing the machine, the digital, and the natural together. In staying true to Turing's biomechanical drawings, my song will have more typical mechanical sounds played alongside sounds of living creatures and processes.

The form of this project was inspired by the work of Romanska, who utilized the acting technique of Meyerhold to explore how a living being can internalize and rely upon mechanical processes. Romanska's work considers the togetherness and community that can be formed by living beings becoming mechanical. She places puppets and Meyerhold's biomechanics acting style within the context of the Soviet Union's "...gradual mechanization of the everyday life" which "cultivated the conditions in which the anonymity and alienation of individual life has become increasingly problematic" (Romanska 2). This conjures ideas of each person, each living being, as a small piece in the larger machine of the community; each person is responsible for being an efficient and productive piece of this machine. In order to explore how small pieces of both the mechanical and the living can come together to make up

a machine, I will be creating a soundscape that incorporates sounds, music, and noises that evoke the natural feeling of the mechanical as well as the machine-like feeling of the living. My goal is to incorporate small chunks of repetitive sounds together into a mechanic song that evokes togetherness through the sounds of living creatures and machine processes side by side. As the final project will be a song, I do not anticipate it being much longer than five minutes; I hope to make it long enough to make the audience think but not so long that it becomes exhausting to listen to.

I want audience members to feel overwhelmed in a way that forces them to confront their ideas of what classifies as a machine and why. This desire is inspired by discussions of the cyborg, namely how "everyday use of the phone to offload memories, communicate with others, and navigate through the physical world" makes one into a "fabricated [hybrid] of machine and organism," a creature that is living but has technology at its fingertips (Wagman and Parks 101:6). In creating my mechanical song, I hope to utilize a speaker system where different sounds may play out of different speakers in order for the audience to feel surrounded on all sides by machines of all types; the goal would be for the surrounding sound to make listeners feel as though they are a part of the machine process by virtue of the technology inviting them into the mechanical community.

III. *Project methods/HOW*

I will be creating a soundscape of noises from different machines on Garageband, utilizing sound effects, music, sound bites from online videos, and text-to-speech renditions of Copilot comments (likely Copilot responses to quotes from the readings that inspired my project) to construct an experience that makes the listener feel they are being overwhelmed by the song made of many different kinds of machines. The song will then be played on speakers situated around the audience in a circular shape so the audience feels they are at the center of the community of my own design, cyborgs through association with the machine.

IV. *Project agency/participation plan*

There will not be any active viewer participation for my project.

V. *Skills necessary*

My project will require the skill to utilize Garageband to its fullest potential, including adding sound effects, music, and sound bites pulled from videos, and it will require aural collage skills for me to best determine which sound can be layered together to create the

communal machine experience. I am hoping that my soundscape will be able to have certain pieces of it play out of one specific speaker, as opposed to all pieces playing out of all speakers, in order to create a more evocative auditory experience; for this, I will need the skills to properly utilize output settings both on Garageband and within my computer's system preferences.

VI. *Project materials*

At this time, I do not anticipate utilizing any materials other than the required technology.

VII. *Technical requirements/equipment*

The project will require a laptop with Garageband, and for this I can utilize my own; I am familiar with my computer's set up, and its up-to-date version of Garageband. I will also need some kind of speaker system, though what kind I am not yet sure. I will need access to Copilot and a text-to-speech system, as I plan on integrating spoken word responses from Copilot into my machine soundscape. I will need a laptop charger, an HDMI port (if necessary for the speaker system), and a projector to show Garageband and other visual materials for the lecture part of my presentation.

VIII. *References*

Dollens, Dennis. "Alan Turing's Drawings, Autopoiesis and Can Buildings Think?" *Leonardo*, vol. 47, no. 3, June 2014, pp. 249–253, https://doi.org/10.1162/leon_a_00766.

Romanska, Magda. "Body as a Machine: Meyerhold Between Politics and Theory." *Journal of Theatre Criticism and Dramaturgy*, vol. 0, no. 37, 2023, pp. 1-12.

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