



THE UN-HANDBOOK OF SOUNDSCAPES

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Dear Reader,

Welcome to the Un-Handbook on soundscapes about food and migration (— or how to connect with a wider community using the art of sound documenting)!

When four groups of Loughborough University students set out to create soundscapes around the themes of food, community and migration in the autumn of 2020, they embarked on a journey that, unbeknownst to them, would include plenty of introspection, evaluation and reflection not only on the Loughborough community, but on their own creative process and pre-conceptions.

As the student teams have all found out, soundscapes are inherently personal. The same set of sounds will mean one thing to one listener, and something completely different to the next. With soundscapes as with everyday life, we perceive each nugget of information through the filters of our individual context, which includes our personal history, our social and economic position, our age, our culture and more.

The creation of soundscapes is a similarly intricate process, especially when we consider the challenge of doing other peoples' voices justice, of curating their words without altering their original meaning. For this reason, we won't pretend that we can offer an infallible, step-by-step guide to how you can create your own soundscape. We can, however, share with you the collated wisdom



of the groups’ extensive findings and experience from their soundscape processes, with excerpts categorised by topic and with links to the source material.

Allow us to introduce you to what the Un-Handbook is and what it isn’t.

THE UNHANDBOOK IS NOT

- a linear, step-by step guide to creating soundscapes
- the be-all and end-all of the many ways of approaching soundscapes
- a comprehensive guidebook on all things theoretical and practical

THE UNHANDBOOK IS

- a showcase of soundscapes focusing on interculturalism and food within a community
- a set of texts you can refer back to during your own creative process
- a collection of insights and reflections from people with first-hand experience in creating soundscapes
- a resource to gain inspiration from for creating your own soundscapes

KEYWORDS

Below you can find the keywords we used to help you navigate to the topics that are most interesting for you. Just click on the chapter numbers listed next to any keyword to read the correlating section!

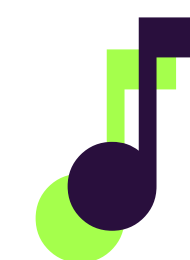
# authenticity	4	5	
# community	2	3	6
# curating sounds	4	5	
# editing	3	5	
# immersion	1	4	
# interculturalism	2	3	6
# migration		3	
# narrative-building	4	5	
# recording	4	5	

SOUNDSCAPE EXAMPLES

The reflections and insights presented in the Un-Handbook are all the results of a creative process, the aim of which was to create soundscapes.

The following soundscapes were all developed in response to the same brief, so their diversity demonstrates a few different approaches that one might like to try when creating a soundscape. As you read on and/or immerse yourself in your own creative process, you might find it helpful to return to these soundscapes for ideas or inspiration.

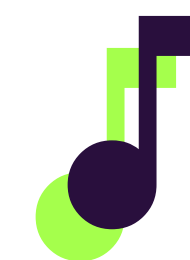
Click on the icons on the right to listen to the corresponding soundscapes.



Meet 'n' Eat student team
Duration: 13 minutes 41 seconds



Evan's Edesia Edibles student team
Duration: 5 minutes 33 seconds



Food 4 Thought student team
Duration: 9 minutes 48 seconds



I Luff Food student team
Duration: 10 minutes 0 seconds



NOTIONS OF BELONGING

How do potential tensions within a town's different social groups affect a soundscape? Can the divide be bridged? Students' reflections in the face of the second Covid lockdown in 2020.

As the second national lockdown came into effect, it was hard to overlook what we can only describe as “student blame culture” or stigmatisation, apparent across the UK and potentially locally in Loughborough, too. Drawing parallels, we began to think of the implications of student blaming for the second spike in Covid-19 cases and whether a sense of resentment existed within Loughborough under normal circumstances, given the mass migration of temporary students that happens every year.

More importantly, we began to marvel about the inclusion of this potential divide [the potential resentment that locals harbour towards university students in Loughborough] in our soundscape given the interviews we had collected thus far, how could it materially manifest itself into sound and if we can achieve this narrative, how can we stop the soundscape from being one-sided?

Would we want our audience to be students, locals, both or no one in particular?

Whom are we trying to connect with and who are we potentially alienating?

Do we have a subconscious bias before even beginning since we are students ourselves?

Is our soundscape individual in terms of the solo listening experience but collective in the atmospheric details, in the way in which we build the communal environment of our choice and therefore create a sense of belonging?

What sense of belonging is most common in Loughborough?

Is there a sound to get people to experience a sense of belonging? Alternatively, do we want to alienate the listener?

[...] The difficulty in addressing this issue is avoiding creating forced meaning but allowing it to happen organically with the critical and creative fragmentations of sound. Will we incorporate foreground sounds that draw more attention to themselves by being typically 'loud, unpredictable or persistent' (Davies et al, 2013, p.227) to drive a negative evaluation of our soundscape or will we strive for a harmonious blend?

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE SOUNDS

A soundscape is a narrative. The term 'Positive' perhaps gives the illusion of cohesion, which was our initial response to this question: "What is a positive soundscape? Something that flows and tells a story".

We weren't exactly wrong, but when you think about it, not all stories flow. A disjointed narrative can be just as powerful as a flowing one; the importance of a good, positive soundscape lies in the clarity of your communication of your intended themes and topics and a good integration of the wider context. — *The I Luff Food team*

Have a look at what the research says:

According to participants, soundscapes could be evaluated as negative if foreground sounds required more attention allocation, by being loud, unpredictable or persistent. On the other hand, sounds that "blend together" were harmonious or positive.

— *Davies et al, 2013, p.227*

CONTEXT & AWARENESS

How might a short soundscape treat complex issues sensitively and without oversimplifying them?

Considering one of the first voices in our soundscape is Jamal Ibrahim, a restaurant owner originally from Syria, our work immediately points to the bigger picture of migration. We create the expectation that our narrative may drift to discuss the recent situation in Syria, drawing parallels to Meerzon's (2017) declaration that our world is defined by international migration, but shine focus on localised migration instead. We wanted to show our awareness of the sheer breadth to migration, but purposefully limited it to Loughborough as a microcosm for this. Jamal's introductory moment may have connotations of forced exile, given the refugee crisis and Syrian Civil War that has forced mass

migration. Jamal was not physically affected by this current situation, having migrated decades before, but these connotations are essential to the wider topic of international migration. Although we did not include it in our soundscape, we had a lengthy discussion with Jamal about his personal journey driving back to Syria after his fundraising efforts to help the community in affected areas.

We are not attempting to diminish or neglect the connotations of migration in contemporary society within our soundscape, with its immediate links to media narratives and depictions of the refugee crisis, but we are aware of the restraints a ten minute soundscape has on covering this topic in its entirety. Our soundscape is privileged in its exploration of a localised area (Loughborough), where the migration we depict is voluntary and

largely positive. Our characters are sharing their respective stories on migrating here for the purpose of education, to set up a restaurant business or start a family. Although the inclusion of Jamal and his Syrian background only makes up a fraction of our soundscape, we hoped our allusion to international migration would prompt further discussions as this formed a large part of our team discussions in the creative process. To completely lack an awareness of the wider topic of international migration would do this systemic problem an injustice.

Migration is essential to Loughborough and [...] it is made up of a multitude of individual experiences, that together form the collective. Our soundscape is an attempt to emulate this multitude, introducing a series of voices and individual stories to demonstrate the breadth of culture and identities in Loughborough. You cannot demonstrate migration without showing individual experience.



PRE-PRODUCTION

PRODUCTION

POST-PRODUCTION



FAILURE = POSSIBILITY

Students share their thoughts on learning to see mistakes and failures as opportunities for learning and growth.

Distance is collapsing in modern day, thanks in part to technological advances, meaning we can be somewhere without actually being there. Smartphones normalise the instant access we have to another place (e.g. snapchatting someone not in your company, viewing the Instagram story of a celebrity in Bratislava or watching the Icelandic election unfold on the TV). This ease of communication applies whether this is an area 5 minutes away or half-way across the world. We aimed to utilise this encapsulation of time and space within our own soundscape, essentially transporting listeners to the environments we were creating,

from the comfort of their own homes. We constructed the **Pilkington Library Soundscape** with the intention of situating the listener in Loughborough's Pilkington Library, layering laptop typing, the recognisable beep on entering with the inevitable near silence that consumes this place. The realisation of the intricacies involved in transporting a listener to a specific environment triggered a secondary discovery of the practical complexity of creating said place.

When listening back to our initial recordings, we realised we had been trying to capture the entirety of an environment in a single recording, meaning nothing was particularly recognisable or unique to Loughborough. Thus, our soundbank did not feature many individual or distinctive sounds, making it difficult for us to construct our intention for a site-specific environment or



announce what we wanted to say of the world, to the world. [...] So when it came to producing our initial soundmap we took inspiration of what Loughborough means to us and what our day to day life entailed, such as making breakfast, walking to university or being in a lecture, etc. [...] We developed soundmarks for the locations – as when we were in those environments we began to be more aware and noticed the individual sounds that were distinctive to those areas of Loughborough.

For example in our **Athleticism Soundscape**, we tried to convey the athleticism synonymous with Loughborough University through the environment of the basketball courts and recreational rugby pitches. In order to do this, we had to individualise all the sounds we could hear so we could capture them in isolation. This included but was not limited to the bouncing of basketballs, music playing, indecipherable chatter, the campus bus, footsteps and the wind which surrounded us.

The soundmap ultimately inspired our plan for the soundscape, where we plotted the sites of Loughborough we wanted to create for our listener, as well as pushing our consideration of how intricate and complex each site was to emulate. However, putting this at the forefront, we struggled to find moments to embed the voices throughout. Even though we had created a journey of sounds we lacked a narrative and therefore our voices had no drive or reason to be placed within the soundscape. As much as a

soundmap framed and structured our sounds, it presented us with a new challenge which pushed us to find a storyline for our soundscape that would purposefully bring sounds and voices together. In doing this, now we have changed our perspective when viewing a soundmap, playing to our strengths as drama students by viewing and editing a soundscape like we are devising a piece of theatre. Consequently, perceiving our soundmap like a structure of a play, thinking about what makes an engaging piece of art – having characters', a plot with suspense, a climax and a resolution but making it thought provoking for our listeners.

Although we usually perceive mistakes as negative, this failure has been beneficial as it brought a positive outlook when editing the soundscape.

SOUNDMARK, *n.*

Derived from 'landmark', soundmarks are sounds which are unique, or possess qualities which make them specially regarded or noticed by people in a certain community (SFU, 1999).

SOUNDMAP, *n.*

A geographical map that focuses on the audible qualities or representations of locations.





IMPORTANCE OF VOICE

Voices are a powerful medium — often our first point of contact with others. Students reflects on incorporating different voices into their soundscape.

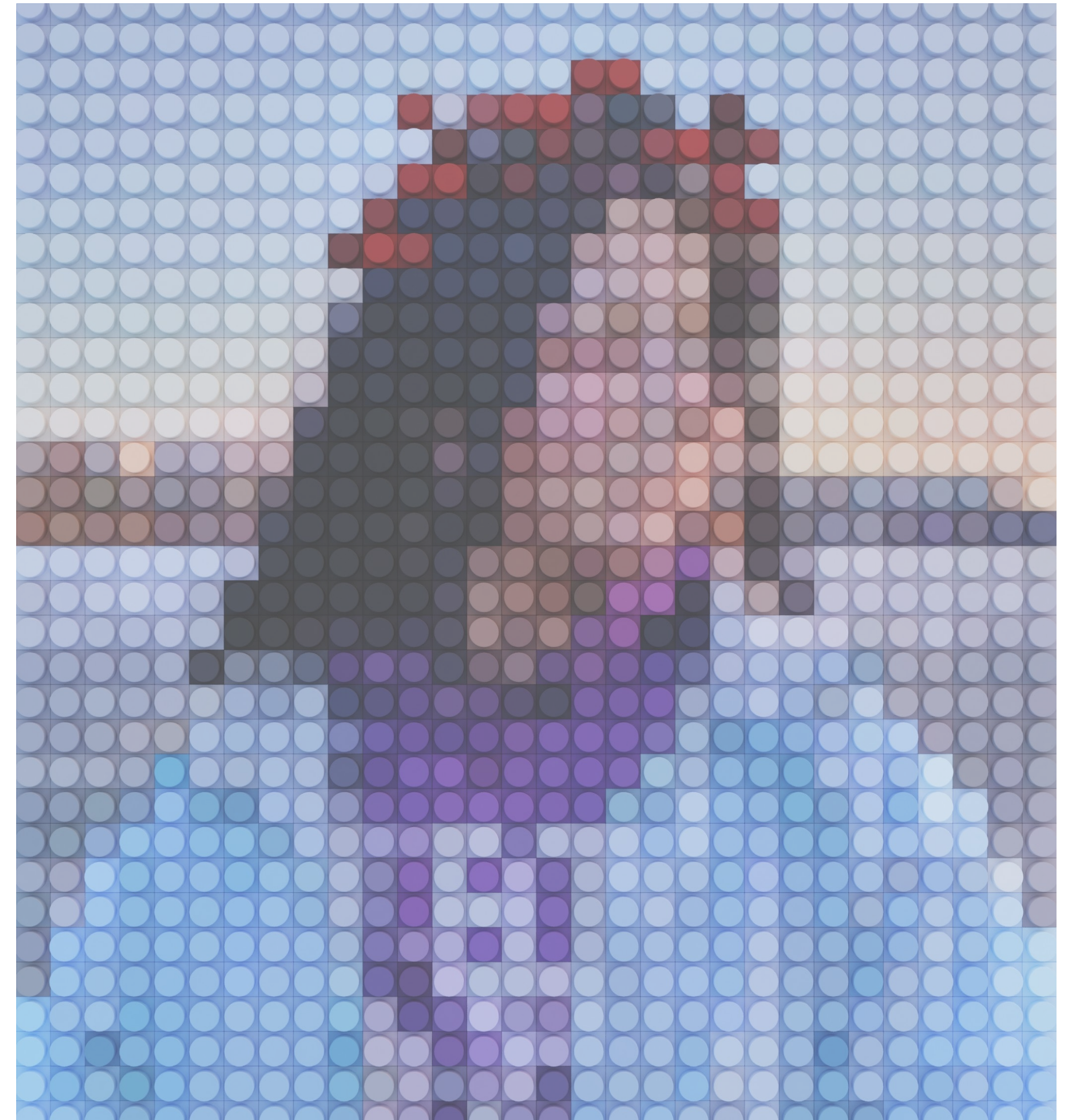
Voice is a unique and essential component to individual identities, it is our body's instrument, integral to how we interact and communicate with others and our relationship with the outside world. A soundscape, by definition, denies the listeners the visuals we would usually be provided with in day-to-day interactions, as well as theatre and other art forms. This challenged us as sound editors to communicate an idea of what is missing and who these people may be. Our listeners are encouraged to think deeply and make these discoveries for themselves: their interpretations are beyond our control.

We grant listeners the freedom to form their own judgements, prompted by explicit identity markers we utilise throughout (e.g. introducing names, inferring student or local labels). For our “character” Faye, for instance, in her discussion of the student lifestyle, she asserts that she ‘wants to live her life’. By drowning out her voice with the sound of music, we are manipulating and creating a sense of self for this character by placing her in a student-specific environment.[...]

The mouth is a powerful tool that allows expression, it unsettles and questions the difference between our inner-self and expression with the outside world. It is our primary communicator with the outside world, and the vital link for a depth of self expression within the environment that surrounds us. The variety of voices we include encourages emotional engagement.

Faye's strong Northern accent, for instance, reveals very quickly her geographic origins and may trigger the listeners to make subconscious assumptions. These initial identity markers serve as first impressions as shown in **Character Introductions**, and as editors, it was our responsibility to utilise their voice to build characterisation and narrative. Jamal's middle-eastern accent and announcement he is originally from Syria introduces his culture and through the prominence and progression of his vocal contribution, listeners learn his passion for Syrian food, and his desire to share this with the community of Loughborough. Over the course of the soundscape, we communicate his sense of self for listeners to experience, through his largely positive outlook and pride in the business he has created with his family.

It is crucial to be aware of how the voice may be manipulated in everyday life and in the context of our soundscape. There are multiple levels at play when we consider this, the first of which may be the way we subconsciously alter our voice in everyday life. We may manipulate our pacing, pitch or even accent (or dilute its strength), so we can be perceived differently depending on whom we are talking to. For example, in our interviews (upon reflection) we had subconsciously altered our voices to appear more professional – with noticeable changes in pace, clarity and pronunciation.



Such manipulation of voice can also happen on a conscious level, to present ourselves in the way we wish to be perceived. Our interviewees, especially in a business setting, may have consciously wanted to express themselves (as an extension of their business) in a good light.

Voice, in collaboration with body language, is an integral component in how we can change perceptions of ourselves.

Whilst we can never be certain if such intentional manipulation or embellishing occurred, it is important to be aware of its potential. For the purpose of our soundscape, manipulation of voice was a conscious editing decision. We were choosing and fragmenting an array of voices from a wider conversation to construct what we wanted to say to the world. Positioning these voices in relation to other voices, and also in relation to sounds and environments, allowed us to manipulate the meanings and implications of these words through conscious editing decisions. For example in **Manipulating Meaning**, by placing Faye's voice when she announces 'obviously it means a lot to me' under a Queen's park setting, a listener is prompted to think of the association between the two and why it has been layered with

quieter and more calming sounds instead of the later dramatic intensity.

We have also made conscious edits as to where there are breaks in the voices, allowing the environment to come to the forefront of the listening experience. By manufacturing these pauses, we have allowed moments for dramatic tension and suspense instead of a continuous flowing narrative.

Upon reflection of our consideration of the voice, we were still left with complex questions and discussions on the implications of the absented body and whether the physicality of the sound we use is bringing the body into play. It helped our process to consider the voice as something like a body, that can be dangerous, that can reach out, grab and even bite you.



THE NOTION OF TRUTH

Can someone's words and opinion be relayed truthfully or authentically through a messenger?

Upon reflecting on **Notions of Belonging** later in the creative process, we realised that it is necessary to identify and unpack the fact that we are reconstructing this chosen narrative. These preliminary thoughts were extremely useful in developing our creative intention but perhaps naive in their assumption of what it means to construct a story as artists. Our focus in the beginning was overly concerned with what it means to be authentic to the stories we collect; the difficult balance between sharing the “truth” and creating an insightful soundscape.

What we neglected, however, was what it means to be truthful or authentic and whether such definitions can or should exist in the realm of artistic creation.

The only voices used in the context of our verbatim soundscape are extracted exactly as they were in our interviews. A proclamation heard in our soundscape saying ‘we get a lot of student employees’ is exactly what was uttered, but we have nonetheless forced our own connotations of how such examples may help to ease or disperse the student/local divide. Another instance of authenticity and genuine opinions was other interviewees stating what they think of Loughborough (and whether it offers enough for everyone) — still,

by fragmenting the audio recording and placing differing opinions side by side, we inferred a new meaning. This possible alteration of meaning may not be defined as absolute truth.

A student's blunt 'it's absolute rubbish' juxtaposed with a local's 'you don't need really to go out of Loughborough' forces a potential new message for the listener and highlights a noticeable divide. The idea of 'absolute truth' appears to disregard our role as artists to reconstruct the voices and stories in order to say what we want to about the world we live in. It is empowering to view everything that surrounds us as a construction and manipulate it to express a new perception.

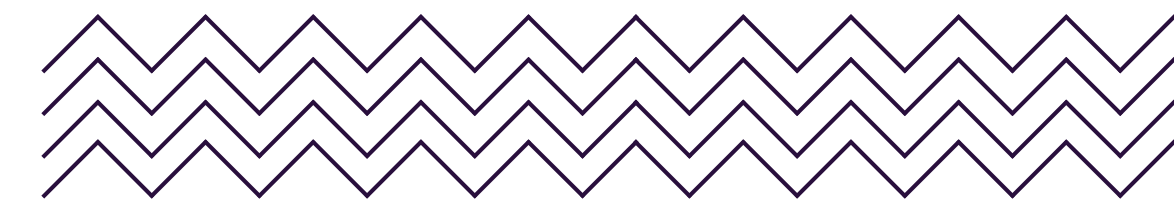
Our own soundscape encompasses multiple levels of construction. On one level, the voices we include are answering questions through the prism of their own subconscious bias, agenda or memory. Then on another level we listen and edit these together (deciding what to utilise and what to disregard) through the lens of our own opinion and construction of what we consider important or relevant — [...] we are reconstructing our audio recording to form and enforce our new meaning.

What seems clearer now is our responsibility as artists to show an awareness of this reconstruction and what we want to say to the world (admittedly through the lens of our own perception). If we consider the world as a construction, does this give us less freedom

as we are being told how to perceive it or can we then reconstruct it once more if we know we are able to do so? In our own soundscape, we have been able to engineer the stories and voices to construct a narrative about Loughborough and problematic experiences with migration.

The soundscape format acts as a privileged medium to address truth as a construct, it is arguably much easier to materially fragment and construct a story through one sense (sound) then it is in absorbing information through a bombardment of senses. Sound gives us a strictly confined format to construct and deconstruct our own version of truth or reality, if such a thing exists.

We are manipulating our version of a story through this soundscape medium, proving the idea that we can manipulate or deconstruct the world that surrounds us to present our own version of it.





FURTHER READING

You might also enjoy reading about soundscapes from an academic perspective. If you're so inclined, the following books or articles would make a great starting point for your research.

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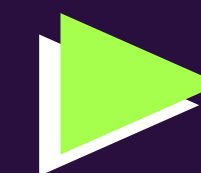
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SOUNDSCAPES IN THE CONTEXT OF DIGITAL STORYTELLING

In addition to being a narrative device by themselves, soundscapes form a crucial element in digital stories.

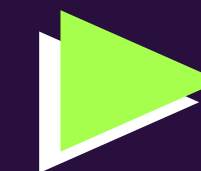
Click the play buttons below to see how a soundscape matched with visuals creates a digital story.



**Local Rap Artist Didactic MK
and her Local Reservoir**



The Creative Reservoir



Edgbaston Art

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The Un-Handbook was made possible by the work and reflections of former students of Loughborough University. The excerpts were taken from the blog of the Food 4 Thought student team — visit their site to find the full versions of their blog posts, as well as further reflections on their soundscape project.

Food 4 Thought student blog

Other student blogs that contributed to the making of this Un-Handbook can be found below:

I Luff Food student blog

Meet 'n' Eat student blog

Evan's Edesia Edibles student blog

Referenced in the Un-Handbook are the below materials:

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