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Geolocation Technologies: Turning Spaces into Meaningful Places

Geolocation technologies in mobile media allow for unique interactions between physical space and mobile audio. An example of the intersection of technology, location, and audio is a walking audio tour like the one I took at Whitney Plantation in New Orleans earlier this year. Pairing what is seen visually with an audio to listen to permits one to gain a new perspective of the space. In other words, it creates a hybrid space (de Souza e Silva, 2013), or as Farman said, it makes the space a new place (Farman, 2014). Unlike mobile audio which allows you to experience it in any given environment chosen by the listener, other audio content does not always lend itself to such flexibility. For example, listening to audio on the radio, record player, or in a club does not create a hybrid space. Mobile audio has the power to immerse listeners in an environment. The message has been condensed in a medium so that it comes to the listeners rather than the listeners having to physically go elsewhere to retrieve it (Farman, 2014). Because of mobile media, the idea of space has changed. We can experience a completely new space when listening to mobile audio while being physically in another space.

My soundpiece, *Cloud 10*, is a mobile storytelling of a dream I had. It begins in an unknown, unnamed space where all that is shown is a door. After opening the door out of curiosity, the listener is taken to an area that is best described as a fantasy world. It is an ethereal place filled with laughter, chatting, and the most beautiful, calming music. The listener comes to an understanding that they have made it to cloud 10, one cloud higher and a waiting place before experiencing pure happiness on cloud 9. It's

noted that everyone's cloud 9 is a bit different, and to reach it, the listener must jump through a suction portal which will take them down. The listener travels through the portal and is hit with clues along the way giving hints to what will be waiting for them on cloud 9. Just as they come to a realization of what may be awaiting them, they land on the softest, most magical cloud 9. It's filled with what brings them the most joy, which in this case is a bed of bacon. When I have recounted this dream in detail to others, I would find myself using sound effects because the narration alone was not adequately descriptive. The goal was to create a narrative sound piece which puts listeners in the role of the narrator. When the narrator says "I," the listener should put themselves in that position.

Similar to the way the narrative in the *On This Spot* audio project pulled listeners into a historical genre (Farman, 2014), my sound piece endeavors to pull listeners into the imaginary world I've created. Although this is mobile media and can be listened to anywhere, the goal is to have listeners focused in a setting so that they will have a full, immersive experience in this fantasy world. As Farman mentioned, for "mobile narratives, the physical environment serves as the setting of the story, thus leading to a truly immersive experience" (Farman, 2014, p.533). When you are in a world of distractions, your mind has too much opportunity to wander. Environmental factors around us shape our experience, and the combination of content specificity and site specificity has the ability to transform a space into a specific place (Farman, 2014). To get the full experience of *Cloud 10*, it is necessary to be in a still, quiet setting, listening with headphones and preferably with eyes closed.

In terms of audio production, *Cloud 10* uses layered studio-produced sound rather than the natural field recordings on which Seaward's paper is focused. *Cloud 10* is set in a fantastical setting which could best be conveyed by layering different studio-composed sounds on top of one another. As a result there were no sounds taken from the natural environment which could be manipulated. Seaward states that the integral component of authenticity is needed for a successful field recording (Seaward, 2015). While I don't disagree, it was not really relevant because my sound piece does not originate from field recordings. However, I did utilize the information by taking to heart Seaward's statement that "sound processing assists in contextualizing the sound for the audience and that finding the musicality in sounds is a powerful part of getting one's message across" (Seaward, 2015, p.302). With this argument, I came to the conclusion that I wanted to utilize sounds in *Cloud 10* in which a majority were manipulated. Yes, it sounds less realistic, which is exactly what I need for a piece taking place in an unrealistic environment.

To avoid misrepresentation of the locations in *Cloud 10*, the use of numerous sound effects have been incorporated into the sound piece in addition to the narration to create the fanciful world that is in *Cloud 10*. Seaward argues that in radio production, "the choice of sound behind the words will uphold their meaning, and in return, the words will imbue meaning to the sound" (Seaward, 2015, p.301). Although the *Cloud 10* sound piece is not made for radio, the same idea can still apply. Sound is what adds intentionality to a project (Seaward, 2015). Together, sound-effects and voice combine to create a larger picture and deeper meaning. Also, While the setting in which my

soundscape takes place is not real, it is my goal to layer audios on top of one another to create a realistic place in which listeners can imagine themselves when listening to it.

Geolocation technologies change our relationship to a physical space in ways that are geographically specific (de Souza e Silva, 2013). My sound piece can potentially be connected to geolocation elements of mobile media. One way would be to stay in the quiet environment but have the project map in hand to follow along while listening. It could also be made into a more immersive, realistic experience if a simulation of the narrative was created for people to walk through while listening. By pairing a new visual with an audio component, the space in which listeners are will change to a specific place. In other words, where listeners are geographically will develop a deeper meaning.

Mobile media is unique in that it changes how we experience space. When combining the elements of mobile media with stories told about a space, listeners gain a greater understanding of a specific place. As a result, mobile media allows people to experience a new space even when physically in another location.

References

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