

The Making of “Ma, I’m Late!” and Its Connection to Geolocation

The mobility of media is something that people often fail to recognize as one of the most important aspects of media immersion to date. It is something that allows us to experience a space -- whether fictional or not -- without physically being in the space. Without the ability to do this, media would not be able to transport us to different locales or even different worlds, probably making the experience far flatter than we are so used to. It is particularly impressive to just look at the role of audio media with this concept in mind, because there is far more to audio that allows you to worldbuild and add details to a scene without actually having to view it. Audio is also arguably more accessible than video, as you are able to experience it without giving it your full attention (for example, listening to music or a podcast on the way to work rather than having to sit in front of a screen to enjoy those things.)

Mobile audio, however, specifically has to do with harping on this “worldbuilding” element, which makes it unique from other audio forms. This is because the project lends itself to a particular space that the listener is supposed to either physically move through, or imagine that they are moving through. For example, an audio tour at a museum is where you are meant to wander through a specific space, and then the audio media enhances your experience by coinciding with the physical space. You could choose to, perhaps, listen to music while you were walking through a museum and argue that it enhances your experience, but that is a situation where you are melding two completely different and unrelated experiences tailored to your preference, aka, there are too many variables. However, if you were to listen to a soundtrack

created specifically for walking around the museum that reflects the mood of exhibits, relays important information, etc. that type of audio would serve to benefit that experience even more because it is tailored with the space of the museum in mind and adds another layer to the walking tour.

My project, “Ma, I’m late!” is a short 3 minute phone call between the main character, and the listener who is assigned a character in the story that we never hear, “Ma.” The listener is referred to as her throughout the call to increase their purpose in the narrative. Events that unfold include the main character realizing they are late upon receiving a phone call from their Ma, and having to rush around their apartment to get ready while also trying to have a meaningful conversation about a quibble Ma had with her mother-in-law. The sound piece is meant to be relatable as there are many recognizable sound effects that indicate where in the apartment the main character is, and it was designed so that the sequence of events that take place make sense if it were to be a real world situation. The interaction with the objects that would normally be in that space also reveal to the listener where the main character is.

This project forms a relationship between sound and space because it follows a map, even though the main character is technically in their apartment the whole time until the very end. They move from the bedroom, indicating that they are “still in bed,” then to the bathroom where we hear the shower, the toilet, and the main character talking while brushing their teeth. Next they move into the kitchen where they make some toast, coffee, and interact with their roommate, which annoys Ma and the main character has to explain “I’m in the kitchen now, other people live here too.” This is

connected to the geolocative elements of mobile media because although the listener is not in the space at the same time they are listening to the audio, yet there are enough details to allow the listener to parse out where they are meant to be at a given moment. Small details like room tone, doors opening/closing, light switches, and footsteps add an even more developed layer to the soundscape because although hearing a toilet flush might be enough to indicate to the listener that the main character is in the bathroom, it is not enough to immerse them and convince them that the main character is actually there. Failing to include these small details would give the listener too much opportunity to break their immersion unconsciously by immediately noticing subtle sounds that should be there but aren't. That is why this project is not merely "referencial" to the space that it is meant to take place in, but it is developed in a way that makes the listener believe that the main character is actually in and moving around that space currently.

In many ways, inspiration was taken from many of the materials presented in class in order to help this project come to fruition. Firstly, it was imperative to understand that definition of "spatial mobility," specifically the mobility of "space itself" as explained by Masao Kakihara and Carsten Sørensen in their piece *Expanding the Mobility Concept*. "In such computer-mediated communication among people, geographical distance no longer remains a fundamental aspect of the interaction -- the boundary between "here" and "there" dissolves." (Kakihara and Sørensen) Technology has become so tightly interwoven with our world, that we are often able to gain very akin experiences about certain spaces through technology versus experiencing it in the real

world. Of course there are layers that make these experiences more believable, but that doesn't necessarily distance a user from knowing everything there is to know about a space: how it sounds, what it looks like, etc. without actually being there.

Secondly, our interdependence on technology can be understood when you look at the history of our relationship to mobile technology and how it has evolved to become more impressive, and have the potential to be more useful to the user than originally.

Michael Bull explains in his piece *Investigating the Culture of Mobile Listening: From Walkman to iPod*, that "relational experience has three dimensions; the cognitive - how the user manages their moods and thoughts to music; the aesthetic - how they construct their relationship to the outside world, and the moral - how users relate to other people." (Bull) He claims that our relationship to music is social because it's a shared experience, however the delivery of the experience can take us even further from reality and can appear much less social than it actually is. With technology increasing the ease at which we are able to escape (having to flip CDs in a Walkman versus being able to surf millions of songs on your iPod) it affects the culture that surrounds mobile listening, and the expectations that people have of it.

Finally, we enter the territory of deliberate mobile media, meaning it is related to a certain space. Jason Farman makes an interesting point in his piece *Storytelling with Mobile Media*, about the difference between "site-specificity" and "geographic fixity." Geographic fixity is the type that we are moving away from, as it implies that you can only consume a certain type of media if you are in the same place as it. (For example, an unphotographed inscription on a wall means you have to physically go to it to look at it.) Site-specificity is more relevant, and the one I used in my project, because it gives all

of the details of a specific space, or is able to share/replicate a certain type of space, without the view having to leave where they are in order to view it. (For example, being able to look at what a restaurant looks like, where it is, and the menu before actually going there, rather than having to go there to find all of that out.) (Farman) This particularly struck me, because in order to make a fictional space believable, you need to be very specific in order to convince the listener. That is the blessing of moving away from geographic fixity, it allows you to create a space entirely, because essentially any space can be mobilized with the right approach.

Overall, the project “Ma, I’m late!” is a good example of mobile media because it takes the listener through a specifically mapped out space, while also lending itself to many of the ideas that make that possible. Thinking of “the iPod” and our reliance on technology, our noticing of the difference between experiencing something through media and experiencing something in actuality has greatly lessened as we have become more and more used to experiencing things through technology. Technology has also “rewarded” us in a sense, by becoming more and more useful over time to help people have these experiences in more realistic ways, which also lessens our ability to cognitively notice the difference. At the end of the day, mobile media has the power to transport listeners onto completely new maps with the proper technique, and technology and our relationship with technology has greatly evolved over time to accommodate this.

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