

“Gotta Write This Paper”: Descending Into Madness Alongside the Protagonist.

The way technology has evolved has allowed us to do so much more than we thought possible. Specifically how it has become “mobile” over the years, referring to personal devices like smartphones, tablets, and laptops. Having technology on our person at all times has blurred the line of experiencing certain media or locations without having to be in a specific location in order to get the full experience. Without the ability to do this, our media experience would end up being far flatter than we are used to. One of the most unique ways to experience this mobility is through audio. It’s more accessible than video, because video requires our full attention or to be still in front of a screen to get the full experience. Audio allows the listener to have different experiences based on what they're doing, i.e. sitting, walking, multitasking, etc. For example, you can listen to music or a podcast while going about your daily tasks, whereas you would have to sit in front of a TV in order to watch a show or a movie.

Moving into the territory of “mobile” audio, by its definition, has more of a “worldbuilding” element to it. That is because the technology in which we experience the media is not the only thing that is mobile, but the audio itself has a mobile aspect to it that provides details about a space that the listener is not currently in. Adding more details makes the audio experience more immersive. This is known as “spatial mobility,” 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, 2001). This

is different from an audio that is meant to accompany a certain space, which many may be familiar with. For example, listening to your favorite music while walking through a museum enhances the experience of the art pieces because the audio is an accompaniment to that experience. However, this is a situation where you are melding two completely different and unrelated experiences tailored to your personal preference, and there are too many variables for it to be considered a mobile audio experience. Conversely, if you were to listen to a soundtrack created by the exhibit that reflects the moods of certain exhibits and displays, that type of audio would serve to benefit only your experience of viewing the art. The audio is tailored to the space, and therefore adds another dimension to the walking tour.

One of the reasons this type of media works so well is because technology has become so tightly interwoven with our world, that we are often able to gain very similar experiences about certain spaces through technology versus experiencing it in the real world. There are layers that make these experiences more believable, but that doesn't necessarily distance the listener from knowing everything there is to know about a space: how it sounds, what it looks like, etc. without actually being there. This is very closely related to the quality of the media we experience; higher quality meaning more "realistic," and the more realistic something is, the more it evokes a sense of "presence," or an unconscious reaction to stimuli based on our brains inability to instantly identify whether or not the media is "real." To break this into a simpler metaphor, imagine a dog barking at the mailman because it thinks there's an intruder, but the dog is you, the barking is your unconscious reaction to stimuli, and the mailman is your device. The definition of "presence" has been widely debated over the years.

However, in the context of today's technology, they're all conveying the same sentiment: presence refers to our immersion in non-real worlds by taking a closer look at our reactions to these non-real worlds. Media is a "mediated" experience, meaning that there is something that stands between us and the experience, a "medium" (computer, phone, television, etc.). As this medium becomes more realistic, our presence increases because the illusion of having a "non-mediated" experience intensifies. (Lombard & Jones, 2008)

This is also closely related to how we are able to bond through shared media experiences, although we technically have these experiences completely privately. 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.

My project, "Gotta Write This Paper," is a major upgrade from the first audio project I made for this class. This first one I made, "Ma, I'm Late!," was a short, three minute phone call between the main character, and the listener who is supposed to be the character "Ma." By making the listener an actual character in the story, it increases

their purpose in the narrative, thus evoking a certain presence. In this project, the physical space that is being represented is based on a very normal and recognizable space: an apartment. The listener is taken through very familiar spaces through very familiar sounds from rooms they've certainly been in before, like a bedroom, a bathroom, and a kitchen. It was designed to be relatable in terms of the actual space, and the sequence of events that take place make sense if it were to be a real world situation. In the new project, "Gotta Write This Paper," it is meant to be relatable in terms of the subject matter: a frantic student trying to finish a project as the deadline quickly approaches. However, the bulk of the project takes the listener through an unfamiliar space that is completely made up and only makes sense if they had seen the map before listening to the project, or listen to all of the details that describe the space mentioned. The protagonist is sitting at their desk at first, and then falls asleep and is transported into a dreamworld where their consciousness guides them through a hallway filled with silly songs and embarrassing stories, and then out down a rabbit hole, back to the desk where they first began. The details of the space were more subjective and based on what a dreamworld space might sound like, rather than taking factual details from an existing dreamscape. Success in this project would be determined by the listeners ability to follow the space they are being taken through, as they wouldn't necessarily be able to pull from prior experiences to envision what the space being described would look like.

The reason why a project like this can even work in the first place is because of the inherent difference between "site-specificity" and "geographic fixity." Geographic fixity is the type 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, not being able to look at what a restaurant looks like, where it is, and the menu before actually going there because only the elements of that restaurant only exist physically, not digitally.) Site-specificity is more relevant, because it gives all of the details of a specific space, or is able to share/replicate a certain type of space, without the listener having to leave where they are in order to view it. In my first project, I was replicating an existing space, and in my final project, I am merely sharing a space of my own design, yet it works in both ways. (Farman, 2014) 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 from scratch, because essentially any space can be mobilized with the right approach.

Overall, "Gotta Write This Paper" is an example of mobile media because it allows the listener to take a journey through a mapped out space without moving at all. It also lends itself to many of the ideas that make that possible. Thinking of it in terms of our reliance on technology and how that bond only grows stronger, 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. The ability to make a completely made up space and make it sound real is only possible because of the advancements that technology has made over the recent years.

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