

AudioTagger: Wireless Phonography in Urban Space

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Abstract

audioTagger is a mobile-phone-urban-intervention-sound-art-project. *audioTagger* is wireless phonography, exploring sound in urban space with recordings made with the mobile phone. A momentary event is captured as sonic snapshots of urban life, using out most ubiquitous networked tool at present, in a seamless computing environment, between mobile phone and the Internet. Google Maps are used to visualize the location of the recording.

Keywords

Mobile technology, Intervention, Sound Art, Mobility, Performance, Experimentation, Experience of place, Collaboration.

Introduction

audioTagger is a sound application for mobile phones. *audioTagger* is using the sound recorder in the mobile phone to capture a sonic moment in urban space, mail the audio file to *audioTagger*, and view the result on a Google Map. *audioTagger* is part of research in sonic applications of wireless devices in a mobility context. In this application the mobile phone, being the most ubiquitous device at present, is used to explore hybrid mediated space. *audioTagger* can be defined as wireless phonography (sound writing) bridged with network mapping. Urban life is the subject for investigation, where a momentary event is captured as a sonic expression. The analogy to snap shots in photography can be made. Geo-coordinates are derived from Google Maps and Yahoo Maps, to visualize the location of the audio tags, and for audio playback.

<http://www.moolab.net/mobile/audioTagger.shtml>

How it Works

Anybody with a GPRS enabled mobile phone can participate in the exploration of the environment, and contribute to *audioTagger*, using the mobile phone as a field recorder.

The participant signs up to *audioTagger* environment, using the mobile phone at, <http://moolab.net/mobile/index.html>

The participant will receive instruction on their mobile phone on how to proceed.

The participant records a sound file and emails it to *audioTagger*, with the title and street address in the body of the email.

They will then receive a text message when the file has been added to the database.

A java player, can be downloaded from the website to listen to all the sounds added to *audioTagger*, <http://moolab.net/player/audioTagger.jar>

The sound files can also be viewed, and listened to on *audioTagger's* Google Map.

Internet SPAM is avoided, by only accepting emails from mobile phone providers. Sending sound files from a regular web server does not work.

The Wireless Field Recording

Field recording have been used for various purposes, scientists collecting bird songs, musicologists recording music, or recordings made as sound effects for film, radio, and television. Field recording generally means it has to be planned ahead, to bring the recorder, microphones and batteries to a location outside of the recording studio. Using the mobile phone, already sitting in a pocket or bag has different set of characteristics from regular field recording. It can be used instantly, and might capture something quite different than a planned field trip with a high quality audio recorder.

Hybrid Spaces

Are there any new ways of looking at our place in the world? The application *audioTagger* is examining one way for the physical space of everyday presence to be integrated into the wireless data space. "Network mapping focuses our attention on the reciprocity between digital and physical-social worlds". [1] Urban space is the subject for exploration and is also the platform where communication is taking place. What does mobility mean to the user? How does it affect the field recording? What is the experience of place in this context?

Related Work

The artistic context of *audioTagger* can be found in various areas as location-based art, sound art, participatory art or art specifically oriented towards mobility. Location-based work can be found in different areas such as field recordings, in the work of art groups such as the Dadaists, Surrealists and the Situationists, urban gaming, urban tagging, mail art and telephone art.

The sound aspect of *audioTagger* is in the context of Russolo's sonic ideas, with sounds of cracks, buzzings and whispers [2] and Pierre Schaeffer's ideas with *Musique Concrete* [3], the use of recorded sounds, as well as field recording for scientific or musical purposes, including sound effects for radio and film.

The everyday poetic and artistic experience of urban space, realized in new methods for developing human relationships, by art groups such as the Dadaist and the Surrealist, was embraced by Letterist International, Constant Nieuwenhuys, and later the Situationists to form new practices, to create new forms of communication, participation, and subjective experience. [4] An early use of wireless communication technologies, in the late 1950s by Constant and associates in their practice to create new situations, to link spatially separated spaces together, were practiced in Amsterdam. [5]

Telephone art, such as Vito Acconci's mapping piece, *Points, Blanks, June 13, 1969*. [6] The artist called into Paula Cooper gallery from public telephones located around Manhattan. The locations of Acconci's phone calls were marked on a map of Manhattan. This is an example of an early telephone artwork related to today's location-based application and tagging projects. An early urban game based on location is *Botfighters*, created by Tom Söderlund in 2000 for the game designer group It's Alive [7] In *Botfighters*, mobile positioning [8] was used to find the location of the participant's mobile phones. Sms and WAP were used to create, locate and destroy the Bots moving around in Stockholm, Sweden.

Visualization

One part of *audioTagger* is the audioTags, markers on a Google Map. The markers are provided to make a visual and sonic representation of the participant's contributions to *audioTagger*. The user sends a message from their mobile phone containing a title of the sound file, and a street address. From the information based on a street address, the location is calculated by software parsing methods, in perl, php, and xml, extracting the geo-coordinates, longitude and latitude, from Google Maps API, and Yahoo maps API. Geo-coordinates only work in real time at this moment in the US, UK, Canada, and Western Europe.

Conclusion and Future Developments

During development of *audioTagger*, there has been a focus on the sonic exploration of urban space, the mobility of sound recording process itself, the characteristics of sounds collected, and to build up a data bank of mobile phonographic work. The mobility of the application's administrative services has been implemented, as signing into the application, participating, and updating the wireless network communication. However, there are interoperability problems between countries, systems and mobile providers. There are also economical issues to consider, in many cases. The costs for adding data service to the mobile phone service plan, is considered too high. These issues cannot be overlooked, since *audioTagger* is a global application, and will be examined further, as more locations are added. *audioTagger* is meant

to work with upcoming technology in mind, with a faster connection to Internet using 16-bit audio, with processing power enough, for making real-time audio processing possible.

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References

- [1] van Welden, Dirk, *Else/Where: Mapping*, University of Minnesota Design Institute, Minnesota: 2006, p.29, Abrams, Janet and Hall, Peter, Eds
- [2] http://www.ubu.com/historical/gb/russolo_noise.pdf
- [3] http://www.cicv.fr/association/shaeffer_interview.html
- [4] Plant, Sadie, *The Most Radical Gesture*, Routledge, London: 1992
- [5] <http://www.notbored.org/lefebvre-interview.html>
- [6] Collection of Rove Schachter, London
- [7] <http://www.differentgame.org/tom.soderlund/portfolio/botfighters.html>
- [8] Triangulation was used. The calculation of a location based on 3 wireless signals.