AudioTagger:
Urban Space and Wireless Phonography

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Abstract

audioTagger is wireless phonography, exploring sounds in urban space with recordings made with the mobile phone. A momentary event is captured as sonic snapshots of urban life, using the most ubiquitous networked tool at present, in a seamless computing environment, between a mobile phone and the Internet. audioTags are used to trace the location of the recording on an Internet Google map.

Introduction

audioTagger is a sound application for mobile phones. It uses the sound recorder in the mobile phone to capture a sonic moment in urban space, mails the audio file to *audioTagger*, and allows the user to view the result on a Google Map. *audioTagger* is part of research in sonic applications using 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 snapshots in photography can be made.
http://www.moolab.net/mobile/audioTagger.shtml

How it works

Anybody with a GPRS enabled mobile phone can participate in the exploration of sounds in urban space, and contribute to *audioTagger*, using the mobile phone as a field recorder. The participant signs up to *audioTagger*, using the mobile phone at URL, http://moolab.net/mobile/index.html.

The participant will receive instructions 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 location of the sound file can be viewed and listened to on *audioTagger* as audioTags (See figure 1).

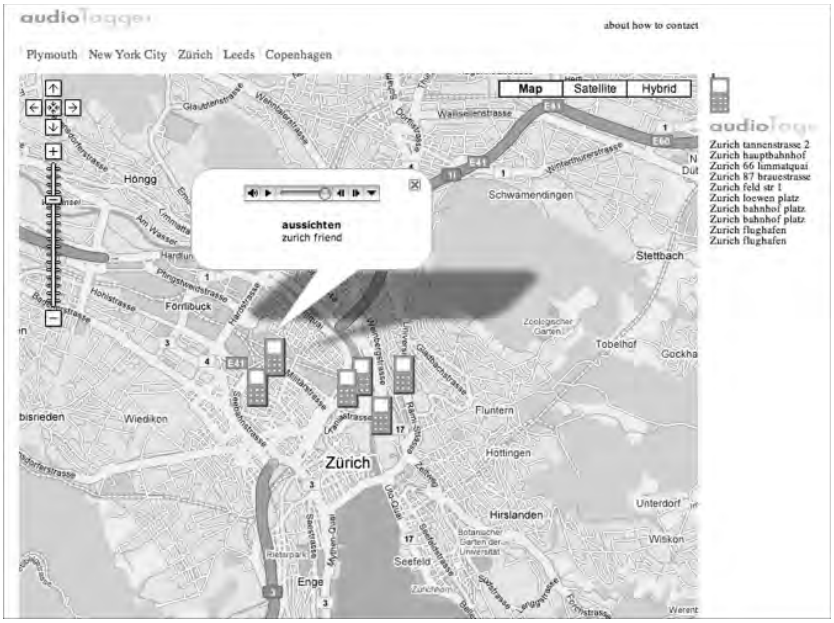

Figure 1: audioTags in Zürich

The wireless field recording

Field recording have been used for various purposes, for example, 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 has a 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

The application *audioTagger* examines physical space of everyday presence to be integrated into 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 where communication is taking place. What does urban mobility mean to the user? How does it affect the field recording? What is the experience of sonic situations 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 tagging, mail art and telephone art.

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.[2] 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.[3]

Telephone art, such as Vito Acconci's mapping piece, *Points, Blanks, June 13, 1969*[4] is an early example of telephone art. 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 work is closely related to today's location-based application and tagging projects.

audioTags

One part of *audioTagger* are the audioTags, which are markers on a Google Map. The audioTags are traces of events of the participant's activities in urban space. 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. The participant is exploring the sound in the city, collecting events and instances of situations as sonic snapshots, in the form of audioTags.

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1 van Welden, Dirk. 2006. *Else/Where: Mapping*,edited by Abrams, Janet and Hall, Peter, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Design Institute, p.29.

2 Plant, Sadie. 1992. *The Most Radical Gesture*, London: Routledge

3 http://www.notbored.org/lefebvre-interview.html

4 In the Collection of Rove Schachter, London