Soundmarks in Digital Games Soundscapes

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- Abstract

The term *soundmark* is defined by Schafer as " derived from *landmark* and referring to "a sound which is unique or possesses qualities which make it specially regarded or noticed by the people in a community" (Schafer 1994, p. 274). Alongside *sound signals* and *keynote sounds*, soundmarks are the main features to be found in a soundscape.

This paper considers digital games as objects for meaningful acoustic communication, and aims to analyze their sonic output by using the theoretical background of soundscape studies, as discussed primarily by R. Murray Schafer and Barry Truax. The analysis will identify soundmarks in digital games soundscapes, and discuss them by means of comparative analysis.

Common examples of soundmarks "include distinctive bells and the sound of traditional activities" (Wrightson 2000, p. 1). Historical buildings or monuments, such as the Big Ben in London, or religious calls, such as the islamic Muezzin or the catholic bell, are customary of certain soundscapes.

The digital game soundmark is therefore identified in sounds specially regarded by different acoustic communities of digital game players. This paper considers different sonic environments in order to productively analyze different examples of digital games soundmarks. Single games such as "The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past" (Nintendo 1991) are included, considering the different sessions necessary to access the sounds. Game series such as the "Mario" (Nintendo 1985 – 2012) serie are examples of evolving soundmarks. Reworkings of soundmarks such as Aphex Twin's 1992 *Pac-Man EP* are also considered to address the relevance of digital game soundmarks in contemporary popular culture.

- References

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Wrightson, Kendall (2000) *An Introduction to Acoustic Ecology*. Soundscape: The Journal of Acoustic Ecology, Volume 1, Number 1, Spring 2000