

THE SOUNDSCAPE OF CYBERPUNK IN VIDEO GAMES. SOCIOMUSICOLOGICAL FIELDWORK IN VIRTUAL DISTOPIAN SCIENCE FICTION HETEROTOPIAS.

Game worlds in video games are unlike other traditional fictional worlds as in movies, comic books or literature. They are designed for playing games (Klevjer 2007) and structured for the participation of the player. Regarded not as being mere copies of reality, video game worlds have their own set of rules which define them as such (Juul 2005a). They can, at least in certain contexts, also be seen as worlds within worlds, mirroring what is outside and therefore be called heterotopias (Foucault 1984). Visual and auditory channels work together in supporting the gameplay which is the primary feature of communication in video games. There are several ways in which video game sounds work to create an identification of self and experience of presence by the player through interaction and embodiment. At the same time, the world we live in becomes increasingly abstracted and virtualized - the real and the virtual are converging as never before. This has significant implications for conceptions of self and conceptions of presence in virtual and real spaces.

Cyberpunk is – as a genre – in its broadest sense a form of a dystopian science fiction, where science and technology meets society and where mega-corporations and private security forces stand against a poor urban society. With origins in literature in the 1980's it is still a very popular genre in movies and especially in video games. Key elements of cyberpunk are cyberspace, a widely connected and society controlling digital network, mental integration into the data stream, drugs and cybernetic enhancements to the body. Protagonists tend to be outsiders and anti-heroes with a subversive kind of nature.

This research focuses on three subjects in cyberpunk video games: soundscapes (Schafer 1977), game worlds and its interfaces. This study aims to investigate the perception of and the interaction with sound through ethnomusicological fieldwork. By treating the game world in a similar way as any sonic and social field in the "real" world, the goal is, on one hand, to provide a map of keynote sounds specific to different cyberpunk game worlds, and on the other hand, to gain insights on how to adapt ethnomusicological fieldwork methodically to game worlds. This leads to a further understanding about the very nature of game worlds and what makes them unique, how a player interacts with this virtual space and its rule system.

Research questions include:

- How is cyberpunk perceived in video games through soundscapes?
- How can ethnomusicological fieldwork methods be adapted to video game worlds?
- How do players locate and identify themselves diegetically, i.e being partially implemented in the environment of the fictional universe or the extended space of the game through sound in virtual spaces and game worlds?
- How are virtual reality spaces created, manipulated and experienced through sound?

Alongside the fieldwork in specific case studies by the researcher, the examination – framed in theoretical perspectives from, among others, media studies, anthropology and ethnomusicology – will also include the production side through qualitative interviews with game designer. The evaluation of the fieldwork will be oriented on grounded theory (Glaser 1967).

A deeper understanding on the sonic nature of virtual reality game spaces provides not just powerful tools in crafting game worlds and spaces, but has also an impact outside of video games, as understanding how the perception of space, presence and self can be influenced, controlled and manipulated.