

The Acousmatic Situation in Digital Games

Luca Spiteri Monsigneur

University of Malta
Institute of Digital Games
Msida, MSD2080
lucaspiteri1993@gmail.com

Costantino Oliva

University of Malta
Institute of Digital Games
Msida, MSD2080
Malta
costantino.oliva@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper explores acousmatic experiences in digital games. Understood by Schaeffer as “a sound that one hears without seeing what causes it” (1966), the acousmatic has been analyzed in relations to a number of different cases (Kane, 2014), but remains understudied in digital game studies.

Thanks to the extensive use of spatialized mixing techniques, the virtual environments of digital games are a contemporary venue for acousmatic situations. Sound designers consistently use “3D audio [...] to localize the sound behind the player, [allowing] to focus simultaneously on the fore and aft perspective” (Miller, 1999), thus generating potential for acousmatic listening experiences.

This paper addresses the localization of sound in a virtual acoustic space experienced in a virtual environment through a discussion of acousmatic situations and modes of listening (Collins, 2013). Examples of digital games with acousmate sound, defined as “sound that one imagines hearing” (Kane, 2014), are also introduced.

This paper is contextualized within the Schaefferian tradition and the writings of Film theorist Michel Chion. Acousmatic situations are presented as a frequent occurrence in player’s experiences, providing an original theoretical perspective to the study of sounds in virtual environments.

AUTHORS BIO

Luca Spiteri Monsigneur is a Masters student at the Institute of Digital Games, University of Malta. His research interests include immersion through sound, acoustic environments in games and audio production techniques.

Costantino Oliva is an Assistant Lecturer at the Institute of Digital Games, University of Malta, where he teaches digital game analysis and design. His research interests include musicology of digital games, soundscape studies, and media studies, with a focus on the musical performances of digital game players. He has published about these subjects in conferences such as Philosophy of Computer Games, Ludomusicology, Replaying Japan, and the Society for Cinema & Media Studies Conference.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Chion, M. (2009) *Guide To Sound Objects*. Pierre Schaeffer and Musical Research (Dack, J. and North, C., Trans.). EARS
- Chion, M., and Gorbman, C. (2008). *The voice in cinema*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Chion, M., and Schaeffer, P. (1997). *Guide des objets sonores: Pierre Schaeffer et la recherche musicale*. Paris: Buchet/Chastel.
- Chion, M., Gorbman, C., and Murch, W. (1994). *Audio-vision: Sound on screen*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Collins, K. (2008). *Game sound: An introduction to the history, theory, and practice of video game music and sound design*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
- Collins, K. (2013). *Playing with Sound: A Theory of Interacting with Sound and Music in Video Games*. The MIT Press.
- Ermi, L and Myra, F. (2005). *Fundamental Components of the Gameplay Experience: Analysing Immersion..* Worlds in Play: Int. Perspectives on Digital Games Research.
- Grimshaw, M. (2010). *The Acoustic Ecology of the First-Person Shooter: The player experience of sound in the first-person shooter computer game*. Saarbrcken: VDM Verlag.
- Gurney, D. (2016) *Considerations and Practice of Creating and Implementing Effective Game Sound Design*
- Hurin, D. (2002) *Listening Styles and Listening Strategies*. Presented at the Society for Music Theory 2002 Conference, Ohio
- Jones, M. (2005) *Composing Space: Cinema and Computer Gaming - The Macro-Mise en Scene and Spatial Composition*. Paper presented at the

Imaginary Worlds Symposium, Sydney

- Kane, B (2014). *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice*. Oup Usa.
- Miller, M. (1999) *3D Audio*. Gamasutra:
<https://web.archive.org/web/20080227220758/www.gamasutra.com/features/19991102/gameaudiosupp/3daudio.htm>. Accessed on Sept 2nd, 2018.
- Murray, J. (2017). *Hamlet on the holodeck: The future of narrative in cyberspace*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Schaeffer, P (1966). *Trait des Objets Musicaux*. Paris: ditions Du Seuil.