

FROM HEAR TO THERE

Sound and the cognitive construction of world in popular audioplays

TORSTEN WISSMANN and STEFAN ZIMMERMANN

With 8 figures and 2 text boxes

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Summary: Mass media frequently makes use of more than visually. With the exception of music, however, media geographers have largely ignored audio media despite its major impact on shaping and characterizing our experience of the world. We address this lacuna by exploring the world's most successful audioplay series, "The Three Investigators". Our approach is informed by SCHAFER's acoustic ecology, which suggests soundscapes are made legible through keynote, signal and soundmark. We find additional key sound events for the creation of soundscapes in "The Three Investigators" are the storyteller, dialogue and soundframe. Using content analysis and results from an audio-integrated online survey, we examine how the everyday world can be both generated and generalized, and, explore the reception and effectiveness of this popular cultural medium. Due to the audioplay's locus within the detective story genre, five settings or places of action are identified – independent location, headquarters, place of solution, and scene of discovery or consecutive place of discovery. These settings are signified through the presence, absence or synchronicity of specific sound events. We find that the structure of the sounds and noise must be understandable to the listener because it is his ability to associate sounds with certain types of settings that enables him to complete background noise with his imagination. Simplified sounds may even increase auditory legibility if they can be connected to the listener's cognitive structure. Indeed, a drastically reduced representation based on generalized sound events likely facilitates the understanding of narrative content and therefore, the world itself.

Zusammenfassung: Massenmedien kommunizieren ihre Inhalte nicht nur visuell. Daher verwundert es, wenn das raumkonstituierende auditive Potential in der Mediengeographie bislang weitestgehend überhört wird. Der vorliegende Aufsatz schließt diese Lücke mit der Untersuchung des weltweit erfolgreichsten Hörspiels „Die Drei Fragezeichen“. Unser Ansatz basiert auf SCHAFER'S Soundscapestudien der Acoustic Ecology, der Sound in die drei Kategorien von „keynote“, „signal“ und „soundmark“ dekonstruiert. Um die Klanglandschaft des Hörspiels adäquat abbilden zu können, wird die bestehende Klassifikation dabei um drei weitere Bereiche ergänzt: „storyteller“, „dialogue“ und „soundframe“. Mittels Inhaltsanalyse und einer audiointegrierten Online-Umfrage wird gezeigt, inwiefern Alltagswelt sowohl generiert als auch generalisiert werden kann. In Anlehnung an Genrestudien des Detektivromans wird das Hörspiel in fünf generische Handlungsorte rubriziert: „independent location“, „headquarters“, „place of solution“, „scene of discovery“ und „consecutive place of discovery“. Ergänzend zur Darstellungsmöglichkeit in linearen Medien können die Inhalte des Hörspiels synchron projiziert werden oder mittels auditiver Abwesenheit die Hörspielwelt evozieren. Basierend auf seinem soziokulturell kontextuierten Bezugssystem entziffert der Rezipient die mediale Struktur und füllt den zum besseren Verständnis stark reduzierten Klangteppich selbständig auf. Die generalisierte und reduzierte Klangwelt des Hörspiels bietet dabei einen fokussierten und unverstellten Blick auf die Lebenswelt. Gerade der Detektivroman ermöglicht eine verdeutlichende Sicht auf Gesellschaft und Welt.

Keywords: Media geography, popular culture, audioplay, soundscapes

1 Introduction

Mass media plays a major role in our society. By leveraging its understanding of original chorographical and/or chorological research, the field of geography currently focuses on the evolution, construction and reception of media-created spaces and places. Geographic media research endeavors to point out and assist in analyzing global strategies, social hierarchies and the associated possibilities for manipula-

tion as well as to prepare geography's specific core competence of spatial investigation for meeting modern requirements. Up to now, however, attention has been placed on visual mass media. Audio media has largely been overlooked in geography, even though it has a major impact on shaping and characterizing our experience of the world. The audiobook and audioplay genre has become increasingly popular in the past few years due to the ubiquitous availability of digital media. This article investigates the

creation of soundscapes in the audioplay ‘The Three Investigators’, which is arguable the most popular audioplay in the world having sold more than 40 million copies in Germany (ASKINAT 2008; BÄRMANN et al. 2010). Our analysis is content based with an additional audio-integrated online survey completed by approximately 1600 respondents (see text box 1). ‘The Three Investigators’ uses a plot format common in the detective novel genre (KRACAUER 1971; SPÖRL 2004); thus, we use this genre as the basis for our section ‘classification of settings’.

Geographers have been conducting research on mass media for much longer than is commonly presumed; and media geography is far from being an exclusively Anglo-American field of investigation. Mass media’s growing significance in our society leads to recipients having an ever greater dependence on the effect that is generated by a secondary sense of space (ZIMMERMANN 2007). Here, we expressly pursue WATSON’s (1969, 10) recommendation to understand imagination and subjective perception as part of geographic research. Geographic media research has focused largely on the particular significance of representation, primarily from the point of view of visual fundamentals. Another area that requires further attention is that of audioplays and audio-books. Acoustic research offers an in-depth look at the dramaturgical impact and poetic options that are inherent in these media as well as the imaginations responsible for perception. So far, media research has almost exclusively used text-based linear media, audiovisual media and recent new types of media (cf. ADAMS 2009; DÖRING and THIELMANN 2009). Mass

media stores human experiences, knowledge and ideas. It structures knowledge and guarantees the availability of past and present cultural productions. TV, movies, books, newspapers and the increasingly important Internet convey and support how we perceive locations and space and, thus, our everyday geography.

Questions we must ask include: How can we more accurately analyze communication elements? What elements are responsible for perception? What notions exist in media, and what do they look or *sound* like? On what are the notions we have of the world based? Which physical images depend on imagination? For, as WATSON (1969, 10) argues: “Man has the particular aptitude of being able to live by the notion of reality which may be more real than reality itself.”

Despite the foci of prior research, mass media often makes use of more than visuality (cf. RODAWAY 1994). This fact serves as a basis for the following considerations: the meaning of sound and the resulting cognitive processing as part of complex media perception. Recognizing geography as a visual discipline – in theory and in practice – has become, in the meantime, the embodiment of an entire wave of research and publications (cf. e.g. SUI 2000; LUKINBEAL and ZIMMERMANN 2006; DÖRING and THIELMANN 2009; SCHLOTTMANN and MIGGELBRINK 2009). Mass media encompasses locations of cultural heritage and thus serves as an archive of our existence as well. In doing so, it provides information and patterns of experience that are not readily available through direct personal experience. Analysis outside of the classical fields of geography must be expanded in this con-

Text box 1

Methodology: Online Survey with Integrated Audio Contents

From February 15 to April 14, 2010, an online survey was conducted using a standardized questionnaire. An invitation to participate was posted on the fan websites of ‘The Three Investigators’ at Facebook, StudiVZ and rocky-beach.com.

In addition to being able to reach internet-savvy recipients, an online survey also had the advantage of allowing us to integrate text and audio files from ‘The Three Investigators’ audioplay in the questionnaire. By doing so, we were able to make reference to individual sequences without having to describe them. The incoming data records showed interim results and trends without any delay. Moreover, the data was already available in digital form, thus eliminating the time-consuming task of entering the data.

1681 persons participated in the survey during the allotted two-month period. 1036 questionnaires were filled out completely. The other respondents completed an average of 79% of the questions asked. Technical problems, e.g. involving the playing of audio files, could be filtered out of the relevant data records. We were also able to prevent respondents from completing and submitting multiple questionnaires by polling the user’s IP and implementing other safety measures. With regard to the time-consuming workload of recording the data, the online survey represents a viable and variation-rich alternative to face-to-face interviews.

text as well and adapted to changing fundamental conditions of human communications. Therefore, it is necessary to establish theoretical and practical fundamentals that enable and support such an expansion. For example, in the role an icon or symbol plays for the understanding of visual practices, a singular sound event or audible information that occurs as an acoustic landmark (i.e. soundmark), is essential for auditory perception. It is almost impossible to say whether the icon for ‘Houses of Parliament’ is perceived as being visual or auditory; if the visual icon of the ‘Houses of Parliament’ is *seen* or *heard* as Big Ben tolling. The cognitive sequence is almost identical; the image and sound trigger identical associations when occurring either together or independently.

By using ‘The Three Investigators’ as an example, we aim to show below how a world can be generated acoustically and what prerequisites and underlying conditions are necessary. The following examines how a specific space in California is recreated in acoustic form in an audioplay as well as how the forms of generalization found, and categories developed, can be applied to broaden the intended spatial constructions and therefore used in other audioplays.

2 Audioplays and popular culture

Since 1979, the world’s most successful audioplay ‘The Three Investigators’ has left its auditory mark on Germany. Seventy-eight gold and 29 platinum awards and the high number of copies sold so far substantiate the popular cultural quality and effectiveness of the production (BÄRMANN et al. 2010). To put this in context, the more than 40 million copies sold matches the combined sales of the five best selling music artists worldwide for Germany (The Beatles, Elvis Presley, Michael Jackson, ABBA and Madonna) (Bundesverband Musikindustrie 2010). Up to now, 143 different recordings have been released and the end of production is not yet foreseeable. The youth series is also celebrating great success on the print market with more than 15 million books sold (AKSTINAT 2008).¹⁾

¹⁾ “The basic premise is that three boys, Jupiter Jones (the smart one), and his buddies, Bob Andrews and Pete Cranshaw, set up a detective agency, their secret headquarters is in a house trailer buried in a junkyard belonging to Jupiter’s uncle.” (SMITH n.d.) “Having formed the firm of The Three Investigators, they use their spare time to solve any riddles, enigmas and mysteries that come their way. Their motto is ‘We Investigate Anything’. They live in Rocky Beach,

In addition, an active fan community has evolved over the past few years, which make use of independent adaptations, types of games and listener habits. This impressively illustrates that media represents an integral element of the popular culture and thus possesses social relevance (BURGESS and GOLD 1985).²⁾ As such, media represents an essential element in the process of merging individual and collective experience, because it regulates the relationship between people and locations.

The loyal fans of ‘The Three Investigators’ encompass different age categories (BÄRMANN et al. 2010), which makes the audioplay especially interesting as a research subject. Also, the fact that social networks with global reach bring fans together makes it imperative to look at this former children’s and youth product. Moreover, there are many analogies and cross-media strategies that can be found in the film and games industry and in music sales. Fans also actively pursue different uses. For instance, weddings are held based on ‘The Three Investigators’ (cf. www.rocky-beach.com). The auditory charms of the audioplay can be successfully linked with the listeners’ world and result in a modified perception of the world. These charms and events, as well as their organized formation (music), form exogenous building blocks, which contribute to constructing a space that is based on subjective interpretation.

The sound, or the acoustic appearance, is a result of the interaction between an acoustic event and the characteristic features of the surrounding area (cf. RODAWAY 1994; SCHULZE 2005). As a result, the original geographic place can be assigned sounds in order to perceptually prepare and describe the acoustic architecture of the listening environment.

California, a small [fictitious] municipality on the shore of the Pacific Ocean a few miles from Hollywood.” (SMOLINSKE n.d.)

²⁾ A crystal clear explanation or definition of popular culture does not exist. Since the early 1960’s, social scientists and academics in the US and Great Britain have been dealing with the research subject described as popular culture under the mantle of Cultural Studies (cf. HÜGEL 2003, 1f.). Leading cultural scientists in the field include John Fiske, Stuart Hall and Lawrence Grossberg. A generally accepted theory of popular culture does not really exist nor is there any agreement as to what subjects or cultural activities constitute popular culture and which do not. There is, however, broad agreement with the opinion that a hierarchical order of high cultural and popular culture is incorrect. There is also consensus among the disciplines that focus on popular culture research in addition to Cultural Sciences: Media Sciences, Literature, Sociology, Ethnic Studies, Psychology and Journalism that popular culture involves pleasure and fun (ibid.).

Every story narrated with media encompasses the seeds of an entire ‘world’, in other words a description of a state of structural regularities. This world is usually not visible on the surface but, rather, only becomes noticeable through analysis. The soundscape of an audioplay describes the acoustic transformation of a text that has clear social associations and which must be read or listened to accordingly.

Even though the audioplay represents one form of audiobooks, many authors refrain from placing audiobooks on the same level as audioplays and consider the latter an independent genre (cf. RÜHR 2004). Audioplays incorporate staged elements and are thus acoustic narrations that go beyond spoken texts or words read aloud. In audiobooks, sounds, music and noises are not dominant; rather, the narrated text serves to convey the scenery or backdrop creating a certain image for listeners. While the audioplay also produces this imagination, it is complimented or increased by a soundscape of different sound events. The separate means of acoustic generalization used are especially suited for closer observation.

The auditive adaptation of the detective novel in particular takes advantage of the narration possibilities of the audioplay that facilitate the generation of temporal dimensions in contrast to print media. After all, an inherent characteristic of acoustic elements is that they are never static, but rather, evolve dynamically through a process. Thus, it is actually possible to present processes simultaneously that are occurring at the same time. In addition, the speed and rhythm of the music determines the images presented regarding the action taking place, whereby models with cultural connotations are simulated. This process can be described as mental mickey-mousing (cf. SCHULZE 2005), a term deriving from film terminology and which describes the inclusion of musical sound to reinforce (visible) action. Ensuring that the events that come to pass in the audioplay sound as realistic as possible (like in a movie) requires that sound designers possess acute sensitivity and creativity in order to successfully translate visual images into sound (BLESSER and SALTER 2007, 17). The particular form of narration that is inherent to a detective novel enables the representation of a special view of society and contemporary perspectives such that it is no accident that the critic KRACAUER (1971, 22) came to the conclusion that by using generalized and simplified characters, places and situations, the novel provides society a clearer picture of itself than it would be perceived through their every-day experiences.

3 Staging sound

Contrary to the world of the audioplay in which sound constitutes the ‘body that is ever present’ (WALDENFELS 2000, 31), the auditory moment cannot be negated even when perceiving everyday life. Similar to how the world of an audioplay is developed as a result of acoustic attributes, non-auditory stimuli are frequently linked in general with audible sounds. The ringing of bicycle bells, the tolling of church bells or the sound of waves breaking are not perceived exclusively, but rather always conjure the respective known sensory impressions of images, odors, etc. While sound in the audioplay forms the outcome of perception, acoustics play a rather secondary role in day-to-day life and in popular cultural media such as film (HENNECKA 2002) (reference has already been made to the significance of visual factors).

Nevertheless, since at least the 1970s, sound has increasingly become the subject of scientific investigation. Founded in the late 1960s, the Canadian, MURRAY SCHAFER’s, World Soundscape Project analyzed sound from the perspective of acoustic ecology. The relationships between humans and the environment were portrayed from an auditory perspective. This perspective called attention to sound and did not view it solely as an auxiliary part of one’s experience of the surroundings (SCHAFER 1971). Besides sound tours, audio excursions and sound walks (WESTERKAMP 1974), compositions of recordings were prepared in order to acoustically transform the special characteristics of certain locations with the aid of acoustically assembled collages (McCARTNEY 2000; TRUAX 2002). The disassembly of an underlying event of audibly perceived elements that were necessary for these audio excursions and collages forms the approach for this study’s analysis of audioplays (see chapter 4). KRAUSE (2002) discussed the significance of sound especially for perceiving the surrounding environment, by contrasting an ever-changing soundscape of wooded areas before and after a clearing. Consequently, sound research joined the globalization debate. For example, MEIER-DALLACH claimed he could locate specific ‘tones of globalization’ (2007). Thus, the geographically relevant context was touched upon, even though sound research has essentially ignored the subject until now – at least as far as media geography is concerned. In other geographical areas such as urban planning sound is mostly tainted with a negative connotation, i.e. noise. Instead of being analyzed empirically, it is reduced to a statistical number of decibel values (in-

ter alias SCHÄFER 2006). Nonetheless, sound is slowly finding its way into the field of geography didactics (WISSMANN 2008a; WISSMANN 2008b), whereby the advantages of the medium sound does not replace but enhances existing teaching.

Sound research in media geography continues to rely primarily on its interdisciplinary evolutionary potential. Apart from a few geographical works (e.g. SMITH 1994; MATLESS 2005; PINKERTON and DODDS 2009) where acoustic ‘spatial speculations’ and effects of structural constructions are discussed (KLEILEIN 2008; RICHOUX et al. 2010), the dynamics of soundscapes are either a topic in information technology (KOBAYASHI and SCHMANDT 1997); or, the phenomenology of the ‘acoustic image’ becomes the subject of analysis (FILIMOWICZ and STOCKHOLM 2010). As already mentioned, SCHÄFER’s acoustic ecology informs our approach to the audioplay genre. Our research on audioplays marks a shift in focus within geographic sound media research.

Contrary to the audiovisual film equivalent, a reduction to sound takes place whenever spaces and landscapes are conjured up solely acoustically. The boom in the popular culture’s reception of audiobooks and audioplays over the past few years emphasizes the significance of the impact of sound (cf. chapter 2) and in turn makes media geography’s focus on the subject necessary. The audioplay, in particular has gained singular importance when, just like a picture that says more than a thousand words, multiple sound tracks are assembled over one another at the same time in order to stand out from the mono-medial narrated text of audiobooks. The sound of an audioplay is thus capable of not only stimulating the imagination of the listener but also of inspiring his ability to visualize – thanks to the multimedia coupling of text and sound.

4 Events of a soundscape

The audioplay is its own literary genre. The artistic realization of this genre is based predominantly on the technical specifics of radio and geared *exclusively* for reception by listening. The performance of an audioplay differs considerably from that of an audiobook. Unlike an audiobook, in an audioplay noise, sound and music have an equal footing, are not subordinate, to human voices. Therefore, they are critical to the evolution and unfolding of events. While the monologue or dialogue voice is also leveraged as a means of expressing actions and conditions, it is precisely the noises and sounds,

apart from the voices in the ‘dialogue’, that distinguish the audioplay. They create moods, present simultaneously occurring events, and substantiate receptive attention to intended focal points. The extended world of the audioplay can be both described and classified.

As mentioned earlier, in order to disassemble the multitude of sound beyond speech, acoustic ecology offers a basis upon which a media geographic analysis can be built. The Canadian school associated with SCHÄFER (1971) provides an empirical approach for the discernability of a soundscape. The soundscape, which SCHÄFER modeled in terms of landscape, describes “[t]he sonic environment. Technically, any portion of the sonic environment was regarded as a field worthy of study. The term sonic environment may refer to actual environment, or to abstract constructions such as musical compositions and tape montages, particularly when considered as an environment” (SCHÄFER 1994, 274). In German the term soundscape translates as ‘Klanglandschaft’ or ‘Klangraum’, whereas sound or ‘Klang’ represents the totality of tones, noises and auditory sensations (WINKLER 2006, 10). The individual acoustic elements, the events, are audible during disassembly.

In general, it is possible to distinguish between three different types of events (keynote, signal and soundmark), the classification of which also includes the social impact in addition to acoustics (WESTERKAMP 1988, 3). The ‘keynote’ forms the basis of a soundscape. The term comes from the field of music and describes the basic tone or the predominant pitch of a composition. In the context of soundscape, the keynote describes the audible background that is not overbearing but always present. Keynote sounds can be traced to the existing flora and fauna, topographical, climatic and man-made conditions. Wind, water, birds’ chirping or the uniform hum of passing cars create this underlying tapestry of sounds. Unlike keynote sounds, ‘signals’ occur for limited periods of time and can be heard frequently in the foreground of the soundscape such as police, fire department and ambulance sirens. In such cases, these acoustic events can only be adequately recognized when the relevant symbolism is understood. For, “[t]he analysis of every symbolic form depends on historic facts” (CASSIRER 1990, 185) and personal experience. Signals are an inherent part of a cultural code, where knowledge thereof is crucial for conjuring up any associations or correct associations (cf. WERNER 2006, 104). ‘Soundmark’ designates the third class of events.

The term itself is based on the term ‘landmark’. A soundmark describes an event that is unique and assumes a higher-level role for a certain society, segment of population or a part of a town. Based on the extension of sound, the soundmark is highly localized, “soundmarks make the acoustic life of the community unique” (SCHAFER 1994, 10). Unlike a signal, a soundmark must not only be viewed in its symbolism but must also influence the formation of a community’s identity or the uniqueness of a region where specific (acoustic) spaces can be clearly defined and distinguished from one another (WALDENFELS 1999, 22). London’s Big Ben was already mentioned above in this regard.

5 Additional events for audioplays

The given three-way breakdown of a soundscape is insufficient to cover the events of an audioplay. Unlike a recording or sound composition (cf. WESTERKAMP 1988) in or from an everyday environment, the produced soundscape of an audioplay comprises three other elements (Fig. 1). In addition to keynote, signal and soundmark, which narrate the storyline of an audioplay, there are three additional distinct elements: storyteller, dialogue and soundframe.

The storyteller appears as the all-knowing narrator to present the story (cf. COBLEY 2001). He implies a change in the places of action (e.g. e66/a/t07:25-a/t07:55), a summary including a recapping

or preview of events (e.g. e6/b/t00:55-b/t01:11), a leap in time (e.g. e22/a/t02:43-a/t02:56), or an accentuation of narration; thus, interrupting action where the storyline is picked up subsequently at the same spot (e.g. e1/b/t20:44-b/t21:04).³⁾ In the case of ‘The Three Investigators’, Alfred Hitchcock assumed the role of the narrator of the first episodes, one who was also capable of actively stepping in and effecting events (e.g. e11/a/t00:47-a/t01:51). As a result, he does not perfectly fit in the category of ‘storyteller’, since he actively participates in the ‘dialogue’. The storyteller also lends a hand in creating the life world by verbally describing the places of action with the included elements:

“The waiting room was an extremely uncomfortable, bleak room with plaster peeling off some parts of the walls.” (e120/4/t01:53-4/t02:01)

Language is frequently used to describe the world of the audioplay in the following event category.

The ‘dialogue’ provides references to the environment of the persons in the story. In such case, the descriptions focus primarily on elements that cannot be acoustically transformed with the aid of keynotes, signals and soundmarks:

Pete: “Come on, we’re going to the saloon.” – Bob: “Ok. Look at that. Even the shelves here are full. There are glasses. They are only half full.” – Pete: “There are playing cards laying on that table.” (e2/b/t01:30-b/t01:48)

The dialogue also outlines the characters’ actions in addition to the setting of the audioplay. In this meta-description the dialogue is separated from the narrated story, whereas there are often intertwining elements:

Jupiter: “Hey, look at the board here. [...] It leads from this ramp to a ledge on the wall, where a large stone thrower is mounted.” (e70/a/t04:45-a/t04:53)

Thus, the textual description of the audioplay’s setting is incorporated in the conversation taking place between the characters.

A ‘soundframe’ is implemented to underline

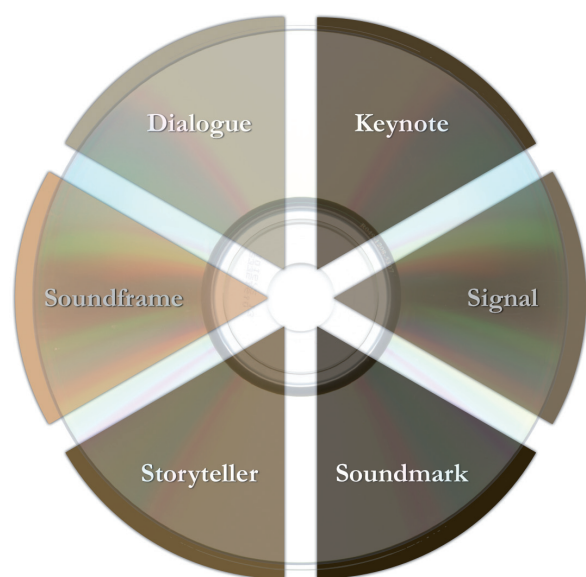


Fig. 1: ‘The Three Investigators’ audiobook events

³⁾ Transcripts are translated from the German original. The quoted passages of the audioplay are cited as follows. The number behind the letter ‘e’ refers to the audioplay episode (‘e11’ = episode 11). The separator ‘/’ with a number following, e.g. ‘/4’, indicates the track of the episode, whereas a small letter, e.g. ‘/a’, relates to older episodes that were recorded on 2 sides of a cassette or an LP (‘a’ or ‘b’). The first time code ‘t’ designates the start of a quoted sequence in minutes and seconds. The second time code relates to the end of the cited passage. In other words, the above reference ‘e11/a/t00:47-a/t01:51’ refers to an audio sequence from episode 11 that starts at 47 seconds on side a and ends at 1 minute and 51 seconds on side a.

the events or the change in timeframe or place of action (e.g. e74/b/t03:43-b/t04:08 or e26/a/t12:51-a/t13:16). Unlike the background music that accompanies the narration, these musical inserts distinguish themselves from the storyline and include the introductions and epilogues. In the early episodes of ‘The Three Investigators’, which were not yet produced for digital media, but for LPs or audiocassettes, ‘soundframes’ were also used to counteract the interruption caused by the end of the side of the LP or cassette. Thus, the soundframe is an event that has an influence on the atmosphere of the audioplay but no direct impact on the creation of the world of the audioplay. If music occurs during the narration to reinforce the atmosphere, it falls within the category of keynote sounds.

6 Classification of settings

It should be noted that the audio play ‘The Three Investigators’ is a popular cultural medium that strives to reach its audience on the basis of the detective story genre, therefore, with thrilling storylines. Priority is placed on the investigative plot. To achieve that, almost each story takes place at different locations. Taking apart the description of the places of action shows just how important those locations are for the underlying setting in addition to the detective story. While the presentation of the setting often fades into the background, there are times when it cannot be ignored. In ‘The Three

Investigators’ there are five types of places of action or ‘settings’ that can be distinguished (Fig. 2).

The ‘independent location’ represents a special case, since it is not related to the detective story as single setting. In this setting, the world of the audioplay is described particularly intensively. The setting’s importance is reflected by a dense tapestry of sounds that can stand on its own without the original ‘audiobook events’ from the storyteller, soundframe and dialogue (cf. e18/b/t04:46-b/t05:03).

The ‘headquarters’ represents the exact opposite of the independent location both in an acoustic sense and in a detective-story sense. In their headquarters, the three detectives discuss and review their investigations and lay out plans for future steps to be taken. Usually the headquarters is an old trailer that is located at Jupiter’s Uncle Titus’ salvage yard, the backseat of the Rolls Royce that is made available to the boys, or, even a hotel room is used for this type of setting when investigations are far away from Rocky Beach. In the audioplay, the headquarters is frequently characterized by the absence of acoustic events like the keynote and remains almost exclusively limited to dialogue. The headquarters located at the salvage yard, which is used frequently throughout the entire audioplay series, is acoustically marked by the soundmark of a parrot’s squawk as the sole addition to the dialogue (e.g. e10/a/t17:05-a/t18:43).

Like the headquarters, the ‘place of solution’ occupies a position of extraordinary importance

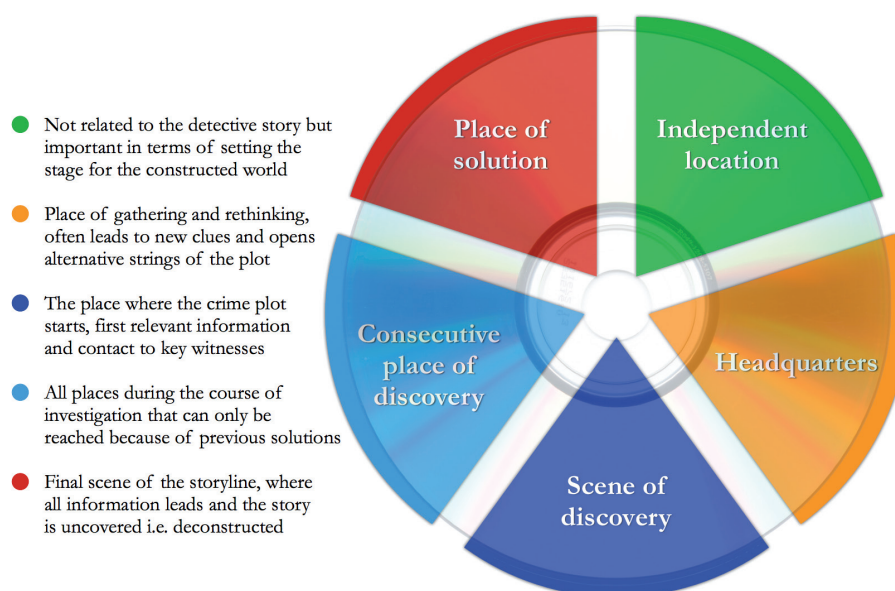


Fig. 2: ‘The Three Investigators’ types of settings

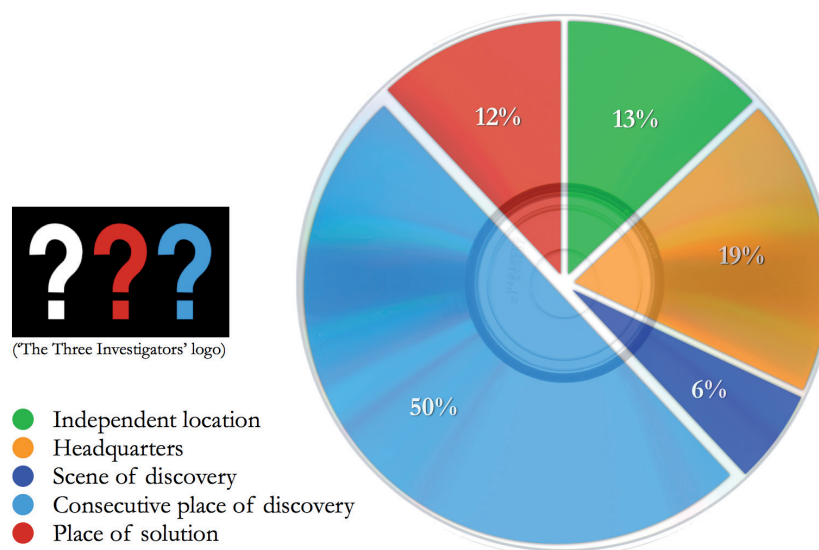


Fig. 3: 'The Three Investigators' percentage of settings

for the detective novel. At the location where the storyline unfolds, attention is also not placed on the acoustic transformation of the audioplay's world. The 'place of solution' and 'headquarters' combined account for about one third (31%) of the audioplay (see Fig. 3). Another 13% accounts for the independent location, which is irrelevant to the plot and is not sufficient for forming an acoustic image of the world of 'The Three Investigators', unlike the last two settings.

During the course of investigations, at the 'scene of discovery' or the 'consecutive places of discovery' events are increasingly incorporated to ensure that listeners can audibly perceive the places of action. Although driving through the city, researching in the library or sitting together in an ice cream parlor are essential locations for solving the mystery, they

are represented primarily by the detailed employment of background sounds that are not relevant to the storyline. When, however, investigations begin at the 'scene of discovery' or there is a new turn of events at different 'consecutive places of discovery', the auditory world of 'The Three Investigators' is enhanced even further in addition to the detective story. Places of discovery amount to over half of the audioplay (56%) wherein both the storyline and the acoustic transformation of the world are especially significant. Furthermore, the individual categories do vary considerably during the course of the episodes (see Fig. 4). Besides the main storyline, this variability can be explained mainly by the smooth transitions between the mystery and background story, from which the headquarters and places of investigation are not exempt.

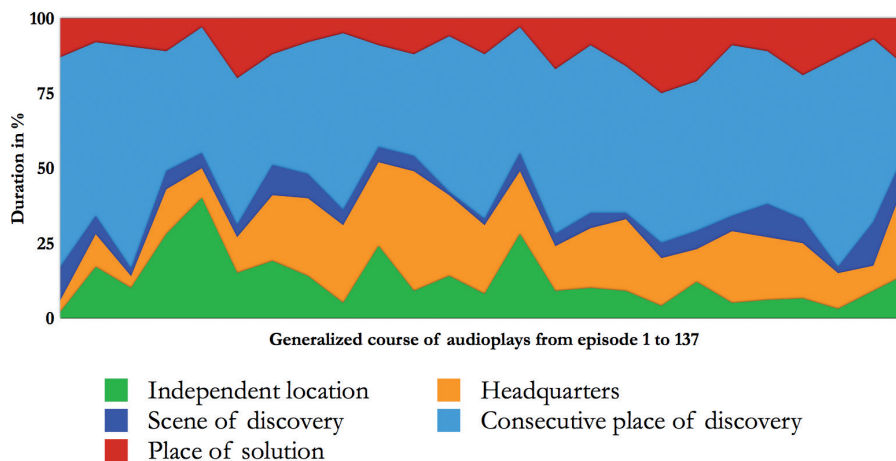


Fig. 4: Percentage of settings over episodes

7 Simplified soundscapes

Besides explaining ‘special cases at particular locations’ and their general presence within an episode, the settings mostly outline part of the world of ‘The Three Investigators’. While a particular individual auditory aspect is attached to the setting types of keynote, signal, soundmark and soundframe, the narrative prerequisites are far less specific in these than during the storyteller’s performances or in the dialogue. During the audioplay, the listener’s imagination is both inspired and actively engaged simultaneously by the range of acoustic signals and information provided in addition to language. Therefore, the structure of the sounds and noise must be understandable to the listeners. The listener’s individual experience forms the basis for his ability to perceive auditory elements (cf. HUSSERL 1999, 194). Since the listener’s own individual imaginative power influences the arrange-

ment of the audioplay’s world, the production of the audioplay must be acoustically viable in order to function intersubjectively. It does not matter whether real sounds can be accurately reproduced but rather if they can be connected with existing cognitive structures.

A close look at the ‘Ferry Example’ from episode 70 illustrates the points discussed above. Besides the classification of settings based on percentages (Fig. 5a), figure 5b highlights the above-mentioned relation of settings during the course of the audioplay. The individual categories merge together and cannot be separated by the physical place of action but rather by elements that are relevant to the plot. The singled-out ‘consecutive place of discovery’ describes the investigating activities of the ‘Three Investigators’ on the ferry (for the sequence of events, see text box 2). The world is translated into audio by way of a total of ten sound tracks that partially overlap (Fig. 6). Rarely do five tracks or more occur at the same time, which

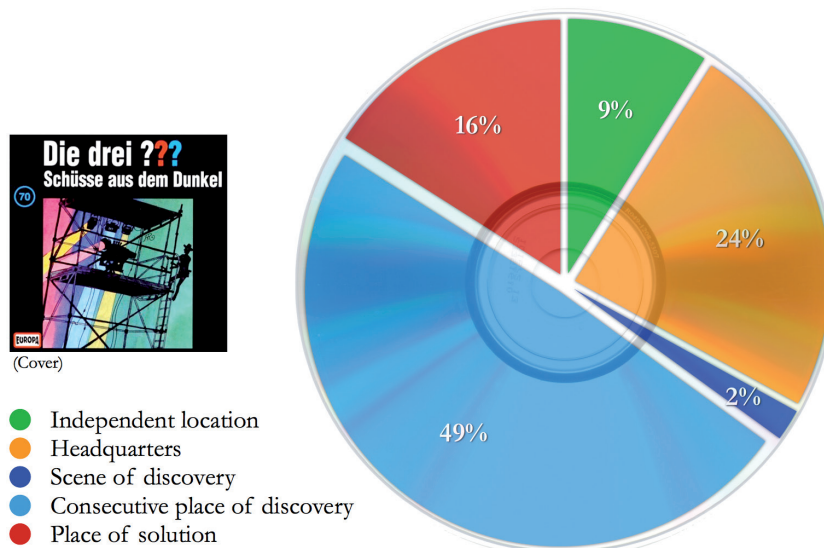


Fig. 5a: Percentage of settings ‘The Three Investigators’ #70: ‘Shots In The Dark’ (specific episode)

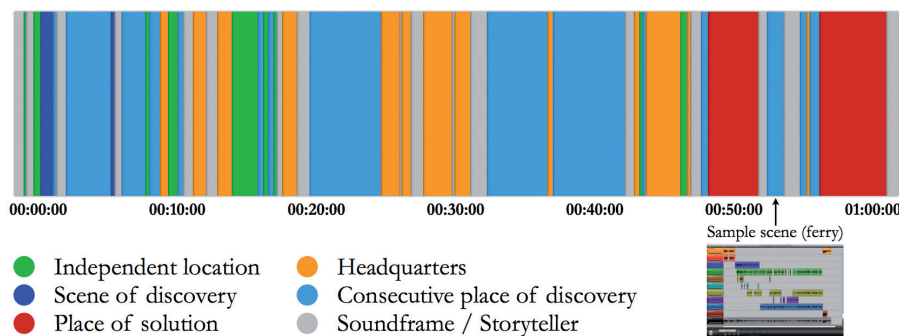


Fig. 5b: Change of setting in consecutive order ‘The Three Investigators’ #70: ‘Shots In The Dark’ (In minutes, total: 01:01:15)

Text box 2

'The Three Investigators' #70: 'Shots In The Dark' – 'dialogue' of CPD sequence 'Ferry' (b/t21:45-b/t23:00)

Soundframe

Narrator: Alan and the three investigators arrived just in time for the ferry. They just stepped on the deck when Peter stops as if rooted to the spot.

Pete: Guys, get down! Behind the lifeboat.

Bob: What's wrong, Peter?

Pete: Mr. Washington is standing on the deck there.

Jupiter: What do you know. Our Mr. Washington is en route to Sophie Samson. He's not giving up.

Bob: Well, this is going to be a nice trip if we have to hide the whole time.

Jupiter: There's nothing else we can do. The ferry is too small. And we don't want him to find us.

Alan: Guys, we might as well get comfortable. Luckily, I have a newspaper here. Fashion and entertainment for me. Who wants the section on Politics?

Bob: Er, I do.

Pete: Sports for me.

Alan: That leaves the Business pages. Jupiter, do you want them?

Jupiter: Hand them over. Oh boy. Here is a short article about Sally Samson AG. The negative headlines have sent the share prices tumbling.

Pete: Does it really say tumbling?

*Jupiter: In the last two days, share prices have plummeted from \$185 to \$150. *whew* Now I understand.*

Soundframe from: http://www.rocky-beach.com/hoerspiel/skript/skript_070.pdf (2.9.2010)

can be attributed to the listeners' audibility. Besides soundframe and storyteller, which form the underlying framework for the sequence, a sound track is provided for the background music, while another track is generally used for the text passages of all speakers in the dialogue (in this case: Jupiter, Pete, Bob and Alan). Specific locational information is not acoustically transformed separately with other events but rather exclusively through the dialogue.

Pete: "Guys, get down! Behind the lifeboat." (e70/b/t21:45-b/t21:48) or Pete: "Mr. Washington is standing on the deck there." (e70/b/t21:50-b/t21:52)

The only clue that the boys are currently on a ferry is provided by the storyteller alone (cf. text box 2). The sounds associated with ambient equipment and nature are greatly minimized compared to the soundscape of an actual ferry in service. There are only two clear signals occurring: the cries of seagulls, which should signify the sea, and the signal horn of the ferry at the end of the sequence. Not even the sound of water is required to indicate that the current setting is at sea. In fact, the keynote is only formed using the engine noise of the ferry and the voices of other passengers in the background. In a different auditory context, both sounds could easily provide a different description. The rustling of a newspaper in the second part of the sequence no longer refers, content-wise, to the place of action but rather to the ongoing investigations. Acoustically speaking, the place of action, the ferry, is thus reduced to five events in addition to the dialogue, storyteller and soundframe, whereas the seagulls and the ferry's horn represent the clearest signs pointing to the ferry.

With the cited ten sound tracks, the entire sequence ranks among the acoustically dense descriptions found in the world of "The Three Investigators"; a world which can be transformed sufficiently into sound with a single parrot, if need be. The reduced soundscape is compensated for by the listener's ability to associate sounds with certain types of settings and, thus, who automatically completes the background noise with his or her imagination. For this to occur, given events must possess a distinct and simplified character, in other words, a character that can be connected intersubjectively.

The online survey conducted among listeners of "The Three Investigators" yielded interesting information regarding the impact that simplified sounds have on the imagination. In response to the question: "Foreign characters are frequently indicated by corresponding accents in audioplays. What effect does that have on you?" the majority (36%) stated that accents inspired their imagination (Fig. 7). Besides the oversimplification and the reduced occurrence of events, available advancements in technology are not used to realistically portray the world of "The Three Investigators" audioplay nor improve the quality of audio production. In other words, Dolby Surround Sound Technology and stereophony are not leveraged to evoke the impression of different directions of movement or varying locations. Newer audioplays, however, for instance 'Gabriel Burns' have opted for a different approach: 'Every scene has its own individually created atmosphere. No one would ever consider using a similar sound track of a previous production. After all, the professed goal is to constantly sound different than before.' (BRUSS o.J.) The results of the on-

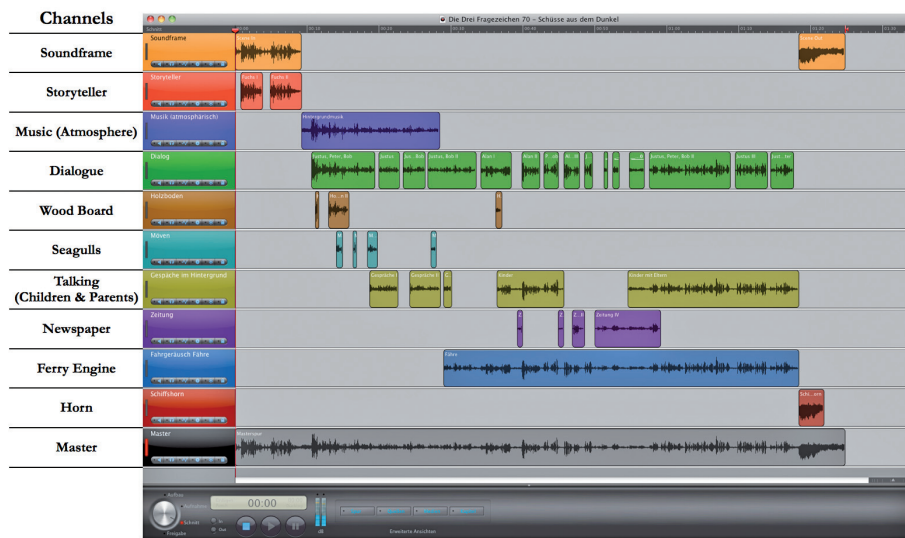


Fig. 6: ‘The Three Investigators’ #70: ‘Shots In The Dark’ – CPD sequence tracks ‘Ferry’ (b/t21:45-b/23:00)

line survey provide a basis for discussion on whether the ‘Burns decision’ is suitable for the acoustic transformation of the world in an audioplay or leads to the bewilderment of the listeners.

Results for another question concerning the impact of dialogue clearly indicates the necessity for simplification. Sixty-five percent of the respondents were of the opinion that it is necessary to have a character occurring in the audioplay speak with a strong accent in order to be able to classify that character as a person of foreign descent. Only one quarter of the respondents did not share that opinion. Ten percent had ‘no idea’. This

result reflects the viability of acoustically transforming the world of an audioplay with the aid of minimal generalized audio methods. ‘The Three Investigators’ audioplays are distinguished by the decision to do without ever-increasing new acoustics and thus avoid a sound tapestry that bewilders listeners. Precedence is still given to focusing on eternal recurrence over leveraging state-of-the-art technology. This choice is not without success in popular culture, considering the series’ sales figures and the energetic fan culture of the audioplay (cf. AKSTINAT 2008).

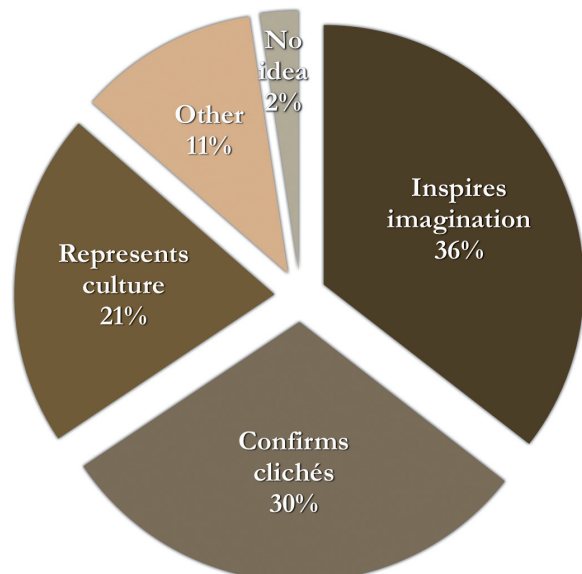


Fig. 7: Online survey: ‘Foreign characters are frequently indicated by corresponding accents in audioplays. What effect does that have on you?’ (n=1681)

8 Conclusion

Every society has a set of specific sounds. Listening is influenced in a social context by preferences and current fashions. Based on that, the ear assumes an individual stance to listening and receives its environment in its own particular way (WERNER 2006, 14). It is well known what we should listen to, whereas unfamiliar acoustic moments evoke perceptual dissonance. Once a person has adapted to the unfamiliar, a large number of correlates with visual elements became evident (cf. LISSA 1965, 61). It is astonishing that these correlates have yet to be included in geographic media research. We know that assignment to the existing pool of visual experiences is indispensable for understanding complex soundscapes. In other words, a sound’s lack of materiality makes simple everyday sounds unrecognizable without additional explanation (cf. BULLERJAHN 1997, 26).

A drastically reduced representation based on generalized sound events facilitates the understanding of narrative contents or their recognition would not

be possible in the first place. Such simplifications of acoustic representation that are essential for listeners are thus a part of understanding media geographies. This form of generalization, in particular, enables production and repeated perceptibility of specific locations and standard genre-inspired locations that possess a high recall value on account of their reduced representation.

The in-depth analysis and classification of places of action, types of settings, and their acoustic arrangement demonstrates the significance they have for the organization of acoustic narration. The resulting topology of the imagined acoustic space illustrates the importance of specific topoi and their acoustic generalization for the staged arrangement of audioplays. In addition, the standard locations of an audioplay develop their own impact in the life world of the listeners. As far as their acoustic arrangement is concerned, the generalized auditory experiences received by popular culture border stereotypically on familiar everyday scenarios. Thus, the listener develops a 'sense of place' that faces criticism of an overly simplified world view.

The effort described above to inspire one's imagination by stereotyping foreign characters holds a potential social risk that must not be ignored. The generalization of sound and the plainness of the overall soundscape is deemed necessarily audible when considering the quality of the simultaneity of multiple sound events, even though that is problematic outside of an audioplay. The coexistence and synchronicity of acoustic events is based on a relatively fixed and established repertoire of sounds that have cultural connotations in order to be acoustically viable for listeners. The representation of a physical equivalent that entails an auditory stimulus illustrates why sound may not assume a subordinate role in the formation of a setting. There are not only pictures that are worth more than a thousand words but also sounds that call for imagination in order to open up a specific sense of space or place. A world that is compared with our own unfolds during the course of an audioplay. Sound manifests itself in the recipient's images of everyday life and comes from 'hear to there'.

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Authors

Dr. Torsten Wißmann
 Dr. Stefan Zimmermann
 Department of Geography
 University of Mainz
 55099 Mainz
 t.wissmann@geo.uni-mainz.de
 s.zimmermann@geo.uni-mainz.de