CM533 Multimedia Time-based Assets: Assignment 1
Auditory Narratives

Assignment	Date set	Hand-in date/time	Assessment weighting
1 of 2	25 Sep 2006	13 December 2006, 16.00	50%

Dr Paul Vickers
Northumbria University
School of Computing, Engineering, & Information Sciences
Pandon Building, Camden Street
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE2 1XE
<paul.vickers@unn.ac.uk>

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General instructions

This assignment is designed to assess the learning objectives of the module; that a student should be able to:

1. Originate time-based assets using computer technologies;
2. Integrate and synchronise time-based assets within a computer-controlled multimedia setting;
3. Make informed and effective use of time-based assets as a means of communication in a specific context.

The assignment consists of a portfolio of assets, each of which should be accompanied by the requested documentation. Complete all the tasks.

- Sources of material (other than module teaching materials) must be referenced. This includes sound and image assets. References should be included within and additional to the specified written work.
- Multimedia files must be handed in on either a CD or a DVD. Note, Iomega Zip discs are NOT acceptable as staff machines do not have Iomega Zip drives. Your disc should be virus-free and checked to ensure it runs correctly.
- All work on disk (individual folders/files) must be clearly and unambiguously labelled and the disk itself should be marked with your name, student number and module code.
- You must not use pornographic or illegal source materials. This is an individual assignment and you are reminded that the University regulations for copying, collusion and plagiarism will apply. See `http://northumbria.ac.uk/sd/central/stud_serv/ssc/writing/plag/` for guidance on avoiding plagiarism.

Presentation

The written work should be collated into a single, printed document and **must** be presented in line-and-a-half or double line spacing in an 11- or 12-point roman-style font (like this paragraph). Please mark your work for the attention of Dr Paul Vickers.

Background

So far on this module we have been exploring the nature and role of audio in multimedia. We are so used to audio-visual media that often we only experience them at their surface level. Someone once said that they preferred radio to television as the pictures were better. What they were referring to was the ability of radio to create rich environments that are visualised by each individual listener and that the reality created in one's mind is rarely bettered by those realised for film and television. Because we are so used to audio-visual multimedia it is useful to take a step sideways and reconsider our use and understanding of both media separately. The aim of this assignment is to use the communicative devices afforded by audio to present a narrative. The difference between an audio narrative and a soundtrack is that a soundtrack accompanies a visual work; an audio narrative must use sound to convey the whole story. In this assignment you will construct an audio narrative that tells the story of a haiku poem.

Haiku

The haiku is a traditional Japanese form of poetry. It has a 17-syllable verse form comprising three lines of 5, 7, and 5 syllables respectively. Strictly, a haiku should contain either a direct or oblique reference to a season; in Japanese-language haiku this would be through a *kigo*, or season word. A haiku is normally divided into two sections with each section contributing to the understanding of the other; in English-language haiku this is accomplished by ending either the first or the second line with a colon (or a dash, or even an ellipsis). Here's an example of a haiku (though not, necessarily, a particularly good one). It's a haiku for a program sonification system (yes, really — see `www.auralisation.org`):

> Bugs swarm in the dark:
> Music plays, and in its light
> Logic is made clean.
>
> P. Vickers, 1999

The tasks

1. **Creating an audio narrative – [80 marks]**
   One way to really explore how audio can be used as a rich communicative medium is to construct a narrative using sound – what we call a *Designed Sonic Environment* or DSE. You are required to create a single audio piece that communicates the narratives within a haiku. You have until 13 October to inform me by email (to `paul.vickers@unn.ac.uk`) of your chosen haiku. If you cannot find a haiku by 13 October I will assign one to you so that your work is not held back. The piece will use sound to portray the characters, objects, and events of the haiku. The duration of the piece must be between 60 and 90 seconds (marks will be deducted for submissions that stray outside this range).

   #### The Designed Sonic Environment

   The DSE should combine music and other non-speech audio to create a rich and engaging sonic environment that tells the story of the haiku. Whilst the use of literal speech narration to tell the story is **not allowed** you can use snippets of sampled/digitised speech for effect (e.g. single words, crowd sounds, etc.).

   Think about what ideas and events you want to communicate and how you are going to do it. Will you use music (think of film music); auditory icons; sound effects; earcons? Be aware that we do not want your DSE to rely solely on analogic sounds. Instead we want you to focus on metaphorical representations. For instance, if you were representing a walk in the countryside then solely playing back sounds of birds and cows would not be acceptable. You can choose to have some analogic sounds to provide initial context to the piece but beyond that you should be thinking more carefully about the metaphoric representation of mood, objects, and events.

   What atmospheric and ambient sounds are you going to use? Are you going to rely on modified actual sounds or are you going to simulate/synthesise new sounds? (Of course, there is a point at which editing an existing source becomes the synthesis of a new sound). What mood(s) are you trying to convey?

   #### Multi-layered meanings

   A good haiku should suggest more than one interpretation to you. Really successful DSEs will manage to communicate these multiple layers of meaning to the listener. For example, consider

this poem by the haiku master Basho:

> The silence;
> The voice of the cicadas
> Penetrates the rocks.
>
> Basho, trans. Blyth

On the surface the haiku speaks of a pastoral scene in which the only sounds are the cicadas. There is is nothing that directly implies a mood, so one could interpret this as a peaceful scene of relaxation (perhaps an escape from the daily grind of city life) or it could indicate abject loneliness – a yearning for human company and contact. You should choose a haiku in which you can see several layers of narrative as rendering these multiple layers in sound will make for a much richer and more engaging DSE.

You should use Cubasis VST 4.0, Cubase SX 2.0 or Reason to create the DSE; all these packages are available in Pandon Lab B1. Alternatively, if you have your own Apple Macintosh you might want to use GarageBand instead – this is fine, but we do not have any support for this software.

Another great system you might want to investigate using is the **free** SuperCollider 3.0 audio synthesis package[1]. It's available for Win32, Linux and OS X.

When your piece is finished you should then export a stereo 16-bit 44KHz mixdown as one of the approved file types listed in the Summary section below.

2. **Documentation – [10 marks]**
   Produce written documentation for the DSE to include:
   (a) A description of the DSE. State what you were attempting to communicate with each element. Explain what each aspect of the DSE represents, its structure, and what techniques you used to accomplish this (e.g. an auditory icon to convey the shutting of a car door).
   (b) Sources and acknowledgements of all found material.

3. **Modality constraints – [10 marks]**
   How did the limitations of audio affect your design decisions? What difficulties did you have communicating the various parts of the haiku in sound? How did the rhythm and pace of the haiku affect the design of the DSE. Discuss the above issues in 800-1000 words.

General points

You are encouraged to use found material, though you must acknowledge all your sources in the documentation. It is **vital** that you consider the role of narrative in your work. You are describing a scene in which events will occur in a certain order, or in structural relation to other events. You may therefore find it helpful to use storyboarding techniques as a framework for developing your pieces. Consider the story that you're trying to tell.

[1] SuperCollider is downloadable free of charge. See `http:www.audiosynth.com`.

Summary

To summarise, you should hand in:

1. A CD (or DVD) containing:
   (a) A single multimedia file on the **root** of the disc that contains your audio piece. The file MUST be in one of the following formats: .WAV, .MP3, Windows .AVI, or QuickTime .MOV;
   (b) In a sub folder all the supporting individual audio files.
2. Written submissions for task 2.

Assessment

After your work has been marked individual feedback sheets will be made available which will show the mark awarded and comments on each aspect of the work. Your actual work will not be returned as this needs to be retained for later moderation by the external examiners. Make sure you keep a backup copy of your work.