DCM180 Reflection Rutger Hooftman

This is my reflection on the course Sound of Smart things (DCM180). I started this course with very little knowledge about sounds. I do listen to a lot of music, to different genres, and have played instruments in the past, such as drums. However, I have never particularly focused on sound in my design (process), let alone exploring different approaches to apply sounds. So, I was exposed to a new area of aesthetics. Aside from sound, the course also provided me with a valuable understanding of how the design intelligent systems of the future.

In the first week of this course, I discovered to listen differently. During the audiocumentary I reflected on the sounds in my direct environment and explored what kind of sounds exist in my daily live space. These sounds gave me insights into the interaction and the environment of my daily living space. I quickly realized that it was not merely about the kind of sound, the synthesis, but also taking into account that sound exists over space, and reflect in the environment. Therefore, I had to learn to understand how the source of sound in the everyday world and their corresponding characteristics are analyzed. In order to do so, I learned to make a distinction between acoustics, psycho-acoustics and how these are related to auditory events, acoustic structure, and perception. This helped me to map out sounds and to establish sounds as a representational system.

However, during the decentralized soundtrack assignment, where I was introduced to how rules and interactions in a system can emerge patterns and behavior I became very aware of the complexity of applying sound in a particular moment of time and place. Because I realized that it has a great effect on what the smart system actually wants to communicate. This started to make even more sense throughout the Synchronisation assignment, where I used elements from music composition, such as rhythm and desync to convey a synchronization process of ‘’cutely’’. During this process, I was intrigued that the subtlety of our sound made the synchronization clear and calm. However, I also experienced that this is not always the case and that sound needs to contain enough information to be understood. This became very clear during my improvisation assignment (Wizard of Oz), where I create a sound that happen to be too subtle and therefore too vague, which caused the participant to keep being navigated in the wrong direction.

These insights definitely helped me to think critically about sound and to apply this knowledge within the context of decentralized sound systems, which I did during my final assignment. This assignment required me to dissect a complex system in detail. I have explored how a redesign of an object and its related objects can become smart. In addition, I have learned to create a complex system that incorporates meaning and intelligence. I am glad that I have been introduced to designing complex systems and a variety of concepts, methods, and approaches to sound. Furthermore, I am eager to incorporate this knowledge into my future projects. For example, I would like to see how physco-acoustics could play a beneficial role in designing soundscapes within the context of public spaces.

All in all, although I was not familiar with sound and system design before this course I am happy with what I have achieved and that I was able to grasp the theory and apply, learn and iterate on this knowledge and progress as well. As a final note, I like to thank the lecturers for the course and their enthusiasm.