iPod use: an urban aesthetics of sonic ubiquity

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iPod use: an urban aesthetics of sonic ubiquity

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This paper explores the creation of an urban sonic aesthetic through a critical analysis of Apple iPod use. Based on original ethnographic material, the chapter explores the differing ways in which urban space is mediated through communication technologies like the iPod. It divides the experience of urban space into 'Fordist' and 'Hyper-post-Fordist' aesthetics and strategies. It situates these aesthetic 'moments' within a critical analysis informed by the work of a range of urban and critical theorists.

What people most want from public space is to be alone with their personal network. (Turkle 2011)

It has [the iPod] dramatically changed the way I listen to music. I use my iPod every day, generally for four to six hours a day. I listen to it at work, at home, in my car; on the subway... the iPod has become a necessity. When I leave the house, I now check my pockets for four things: my wallet, my keys, my mobile phone, and my iPod. I never go out without all four on my person. (iPod user)

This paper investigates the aesthetic strategies and tactics undertaken by Apple iPod users as they navigate their way through the city accompanied by the music contained in their iPods. To date, more than 50% of western populations have the ability to create their own privatized sonic bubbles through the use of either dedicated MP3 players, such as the Apple iPod, or through mobile phones with MP3 capability. The present analysis focuses primarily on Apple iPod users and charts the way in which users navigate the spaces of the city.[1]

The age of mechanical reproduction is an age of increasing sonic saturation in which urban space, both public and private, is colonized. Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, we have increasingly moved to music, originally through the provision of Fordist technologies, such as those provided by the Muzac Corporation that created a wide range of sonic uniformity for consumers, to, more recently, the use of what I call the hyper-post-Fordist technologies of iPods and smart phones through which, with the aid of a pair of headphones, users create individualized soundscapes. iPod use represents the culmination of more than a century of media use in which sensory filtering has become second nature to many (Geurts 2002), from early radio users who listened privately through headphones in their living rooms, to users of transistor radios, to those hermetically sealed listeners in automobiles.

In doing so, the analysis moves from a Fordist understanding of urban soundscapes through which citizens experience the urban soundscape as largely given to a hyper-post-Fordist soundscape whereby users actively create their own urban aesthetic experience of the city through privatizing strategies of iPod use. The development of this hyper-post-Fordist analysis of city spaces forces us to reconsider the nature and meaning that urban space and time has for many city inhabitants. Typical of this privatizing experience of the city is the following quote from a New York user:

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> I enjoy having a soundtrack for New York streets. Having my own rhythm. I commute two hours a day. When I'm on the subway people listening to music on headphones often surround me. We each inhabit our own realities. (Karen)

Karen's experience of the city is one of technological mediation – the technology of the iPod and the music contained therein; it is indicative of the experience of many whereby their urban experience has become increasingly mediated by an array of technologies that have both trained and conditioned the human sensorium (Benjamin 1973).

These mediating technologies need not be sophisticated in order to have dramatic effects. Gibson understood the radical transformative possibilities that lay in a relatively simple everyday technological device – the Sony Walkman – when he remarked, 'the Sony Walkman has done more to change human perception than any virtual reality gadget. I can't remember any technological experience since that was quite so wonderful as being able to take music and move it through landscapes and architecture' (1993, 49). Gibson noted the radical transformation that technology can have upon the human sensorium. In essence, the technology empowers the auditory capacity of the user – historically, the ears have been interpreted as both passive and democratic – passive inasmuch as the ears are open to all sounds and also democratic for this same reason. Walkman and subsequent iPod use is neither passive nor democratic, but rather discriminating and distinctive. The passivity of the ears appears to be merely a historical effect, now technologically superseded through the development of earpieces, which empower users so that they can choose what they wish to hear, screening out the urban soundscape in order to create a private auditory universe (Sterne 2003). In doing so, users transform their relationship to the social world in which they live. Gibson has described the experience of sonic immersion whilst Dyson has also recently commented upon the intimate relationship between sound technologies and immersion:

> Sound is the immersive medium par excellence. Three-dimensional, interactive, and synaesthetic, perceived in the here and now of an embodied space, sound returns to the listener the very same qualities that media mediates: that feeling of being here now, of experiencing oneself as engulfed, enveloped, enmeshed, in short, immersed in an environment. Sound surrounds. (2009, 4)

iPod use valorizes the 'here and now'. Sound both colonizes the listener and actively recreates and reconfigures the spaces of experience. Through the power of a privatized sound world, the world becomes intimate, known and possessed. Embedded in this sonic experience is the power of users to aestheticize urban space at will.

Fordist and hyper-post-Fordist sonic aesthetics

City soundscapes have traditionally been understood as non-synchronous, anarchic and largely uncontrollable. Lefebvre thus described the experience as 'he who walks down the street . . . is immersed in the multiplicity of noises, murmurs, rhythms' (2004, 28). From this perspective, the urban citizen is primarily a 'listening' subject, open, more or less, to the cultural diversity of the city. For Lefebvre, the citizen actively immerses themselves in the sounds of the city, deciphering it in order to make sense of its multiplicity and confusion. The city soundscape is seductive; its chaotic and un-rhythmic nature is brought to order by the attentive ear, enabling the subject 'to separate out, to distinguish the sources, to bring them back together by perceiving interactions' (Lefebvre 2004, 27).

This kaleidoscopic image of sensory richness exists in earlier observations of city centres of Paris (Benjamin 1973; de Certeau 1984), Berlin (Simmel 1997), New York (Sennett 1990) and Vienna (Musil 1995). It is the epistemology of the city centre that has captured the imagination of urban and cultural theorists in their accounts of how the urban citizen

experiences, copes and manages city life. However, technologies of sound reproduction could be placed and experienced virtually anywhere – making any space potentially an urban space (Lefebvre 1991). For example, the placing of a sound system in the jungles of Guyana by the Reverend Jim Jones in the 1970s meant that all the inhabitants of the sect could listen exclusively to the interminable ramblings of Jim Jones 24 h a day (Naipaul 1980).

To illustrate this point of the stretching of the urban, during a visit to the ancient Buddhist sanctuary of Koyasan in Japan, I experienced the following sonic transformation of the site. The centre is perched high up the mountains near to the city of Osaka, engulfed in ancient forests. Late one afternoon, I took a walk through the old and rambling Okuno-in cemetery in the heart of the Koyasan complex with nothing but the sound of my feet and the birds to accompany my reveries. At 7.00 pm on the dot, my thoughts were interrupted by the all-encompassing sounds of what appeared to me to be celestial 'shopping music' emanating from a concealed system of speakers attached to the trees throughout the graveyard. The serene and peaceful surroundings of the graveyard were suddenly transformed into a scene reminiscent to one in 'Twin Peaks', a suspense/horror television series. This small personal anecdote illustrates the power of music in the transformation of our sense of place and space. It is a tale of Fordist 'colonization', a Muzac-type moment to which I responded. The sound cannot be ignored – all people walking through that space will hear the same imposed sounds to which they nevertheless respond individually. My media history helped to construct an audio-visual aesthetic in providing the grounding for my experience of Okuno-in cemetery in its resemblance to an episode of 'Twin Peaks'.

If indeed my sonic experience of Koyasan was essentially Fordist in nature, then the privatizing aesthetic of the use of mobile technologies like the iPod represents a hyper-post-Fordist moment of urban culture in which the city is individually consumed and recreated. In the modernist urban world of the city, it was the subject who was traditionally embedded in the electronic lights and billboards of the city, the subject becoming colonized by the enticements of the city, interiorizing the utopian dreams fabricated by the image. The representational spaces of the city were perceived as engulfing subjectivity:

> Illuminated words glide on the rooftops, and already one is banished from one's own emptiness into the alien advertisement. One's body takes root in the asphalt, and, together with the enlightening revelations of the illuminations, one's spirit – which is no longer one's own – roams ceaselessly out of the night and into the night. (Kracauer 1995, 332)

Kracauer's understanding of the urban colonization of the subject is essentially Fordist in which the dominating rhythms of the city create the cadences within which all citizens walk. Urban experience becomes mediated through the advertising technologies of commodity culture and the empowered dreams associated with the very act of movement itself. iPod use reverses these phenomena. The user is rather saturated with the privatized sounds of the iPod – the cultural imperative, fully commoditized, lies in the contents of the iPod itself, not in the city street. The world is drawn into the user's 'individual' narrative rather than the street drawing the user into its realm.

> It's as though I can part the seas like Moses. It gives me and what's around me a literal rhythm, I feel literally in my own world, as an observer. It helps to regulate my space so I can feel how I want to feel, without external causes changing that. (Susanna)

The experiences of the city described by Kracauer and those of the iPod users remain deeply mediated and commoditized. Both sets of descriptions are filmic in character; Kracauer's urban stroller lives in the polyrhythmic audio-visual world of the street, which presents itself to him as a spectacle in which the street becomes a commodified dream. iPod users, in contrast to this, construct a monorhythmic aesthetic narrative to the street,

deciphered from the sounds of the culture industry emanating from the iPod. There is a hyper-post-Fordist street of potentially multiple audio-visual scenarios – with each iPod user constructing there own singular mediated dream world simultaneously. Whereas Kracauer's subject is diminished, made smaller by the enormity of the street and its illuminated signs, iPod users like Sophie, a marketing manager from London, describes her iPod experience as

> making the world look smaller – I am much bigger and powerful listening to music. The world is generally a better place, or at the very least it is sympathetic to my mood . . . you become part of the music and can take on a different persona.

iPod users might be seen as uniquely individualizing social space creating their own unique and unrepeatable audio-visual aesthetic of the city. Each journey is unique yet personal. Public space is made up of parallel individualizing trajectories as each user is absorbed in their own sound world.

From Fordist to hyper-post-Fordist aesthetics

For many theorists, from Augé to Sennett, this denuded and privatized social space is thought to reside in the streets we walk through, the buildings we pass by, the modern shopping centres we are inevitably drawn to, the anonymous spaces of airports, train stations, parking lots and the endless motorways that many of us progressively live in as we shuttle backwards and forwards in our cars, on public transport. Augé (1995), in his analysis of urban space, used the term 'non-space' to describe an urban culture of semiologically denuded spaces, of shopping centres, airports, motorways and the like. He thought of these spaces as if they had been dropped onto the urban landscape at random. These spaces were invariably characterized as architecturally bland with one shopping centre resembling all other urban shopping centres. Urban spaces from this perspective increasingly functioned as the endless transit zones of urban culture – emblems of the increasing mobile nature of urban culture.

iPod use, however, transforms any urban space into a non-space. The defining feature of the users' relationship to urban space is not necessarily how culturally situated they might be. For iPod users, urban 'non-space' is not dependent upon the anthropological nature of the space itself, but increasingly upon the technologically empowered subjective response to that space or, indeed, the prior negation of that space through the cognitive predilections of the subject. Just as the placing of earphones over the ears empowers the ear, the urban subject is free to recreate the city in their own image through the power of sound, as the following iPod user so aptly describes: "When I plug in and turn on, my iPod does a 'ctrl + alt + delete' on my surroundings and allows me to 'be' somewhere else" (Wes). iPod use permits users to control and manage their urban experience. In doing so, time becomes subjectivized and speed is brought into the rhythm of the user.

> I view people more like choices when I'm wearing my iPod. Instead of being forced to interact with them, I get to decide. It's almost liberating to realize you don't have to be polite or smile or do anything. I get to move through time and space at my speed [and] my pace. (Andrea)

iPod use potentially furthers the existing isolation of urban citizens which are articulated in and embedded in a range of technologies that enables urban citizens to carry out many traditionally public tasks with little or no interpersonal contact, which furthers the architecture of isolation articulated in the work of Sennett (1994). Exchanges are increasingly taking place between subjects and machines in urban culture, making

interpersonal exchange obsolete. Cognitively, consumers often expect, feel comfortable with and desire no direct interpersonal communication whilst out in public.

The construction of privatized sonic landscapes permits users to control the terms and condition of whatever interaction might take place, producing a web of asymmetrical urban relations in which users strive to control.

Retreat has become a dominant urban metaphor to describe strategies whereby citizens attempt to maintain a sense of 'self' through the progressive creation of distancing mechanisms from the urban 'other'. Sennett describes urban space as 'a bland environment [which] assures people that nothing disturbing or demanding is happening "out there". You build neutrality in order to legitimize withdrawal' (1990, 65). Urban retreat as a means to maintaining a subjective sense of balance or equilibrium can be traced back to the work of Simmel who described the urban subject as constructing a blasé attitude towards the physical nature of the city in order to achieve this aim. The blasé attitude negated difference through distancing itself from what surrounds it:

> ... things themselves are experienced as insubstantial. They appear to the blasé person in an evenly grey tone, no one object deserves preference over any other ... The self preservation of certain personalities is bought at the price of devaluing the whole objective world. (Simmel 1997, 179)

Simmel, in effect, became the first thinker to propose that a rich and full interiority was prefaced upon the negating of the urban environment that confronted the individual. Thus, the dystopian image of urban life is prefaced upon a rejection of difference and indeed of physical presence. Urban life, from this perspective, becomes a dialectical process of freedom and insecurity whereby urban citizens progressively retreat into their own cognitive or physical shell whilst simultaneously neutralizing the public spaces of the city. Urban retreat subsequently becomes the dominant metaphor in the dystopian image of urban life whereby the urban citizen attempts to maintain a sense of 'self' through the progressive creation of distancing mechanisms from the 'other'. Technology both comes to the aid of, and furthers, this management of urban space and cognition. iPod use becomes a habitual 'mode of being in the world' (Geurts 2002, 235) in which users choose to live in an increasingly privatized and 'perpetual sound matrix' through which they 'inhabit different sensory worlds' whilst sharing the same social space (Howes 2005, 14).

City life is invariably about surfaces: the superficial reading and the transitory clues involved in our observations of others, hence the overriding dominance of the visual in urban culture (Bull 2000, 2007). Connectivity – if it occurs at all – is largely virtual for iPod users. The 'personalization' of the user's sound world imbues the street and others with its own atmosphere in which the world appears intimate and endowed with significance. The cosmopolitan image of city life is at least partially a function of life on the street (Simmel 1997). Through interacting with and being open to experience, the urban citizen contributes to the rich fabric of city life. Whilst many iPod users report enjoying city life, theirs is a mediated experience of the pleasures of the city. The city is frequently viewed through the products of the culture industry in the form of music and the iPod itself:

> I refer to my iPod as my pace maker, it helps me find that place. I almost exclusively travel to NYC when not in London. I have a dedicated playlist called 'NY State of Mind' this includes a lot of New York rap music and NY/East coast Jazz. Something With NY in the lyrics, but also the sophistication, edge and energy of the place. (Sami)

> It makes NY City feel like a happy place – a place where taxi's don't honk ... also, it always helps adjust my mood – if I'm listening to John Denver, I am happy go lucky – If it is AC/DC, I'm feeling like a New Yorker ... (Susie)

The meaning of city spaces itself derives from the playlists of users. Cosmopolitanism, an urban cultural ideal, becomes a fictional reality existing in the often-eclectic mix of music contained in the iPod, in the users' music collection itself. For many iPod users, the pleasure of the city comes not from interacting with others who 'disrupt' and 'distract' their energy but rather from listening to music, which it might remind them of what it is to live in a city. A mediated cosmopolitanism is encased in the users' iPod.

The audio-visual is dominant in iPod use with users aiming to create a privatized sound world, which is in harmony with their mood, orientation and surroundings, enabling them to recreate urban experience through a process of solipsistic aestheticization. In doing so, they create an illusion of omnipotence through mediated proximity and 'connectedness' engendered by the use of their iPod.

The sonic training of the sensorium – an urban aesthetic

The imagination of iPod users is mediated through the sounds of the iPod, which becomes an essential component of their ability to imagine at all. iPod users frequently construct an aesthetic narrative to the city, deciphered from the sounds of music emanating from their iPods. The world is brought into line through a privatized, yet mediated, act of cognition. iPod users often describe their city experiences in filmic terms. The world experienced as a movie script in which the user takes command is a common description of iPod users. The world and the user's experience within it gain significance through their enveloping and privatized sound world. This explains the motivation of iPod users to invariably listen to their music with sufficient volume to provide them with an overwhelming sense of presence whilst simultaneously blocking out any sound from the environment that might sully the heightened and empowering pleasure of use.

> The world looks friendlier, happier, and sunnier when I walk down the street with my iPod on. It feels as if I'm in a movie at times. Like my life has a soundtrack now. It also takes away some of the noise of the streets, so that everything around me becomes calmer somewhat. It detaches me from my environment, like I'm an invisible, floating observer. (Berkley)

> I find when listening to some music choices I feel like I'm not really there. Like I'm watching everything around me happening in a movie. I start to feel the environment in the sense of the mood of the song and can find that I can start to love a street that I usually hate, or feel scared for no reason. (Susan)

> I'll pick music that complements the weather, and that can alter the outlook on the world around me. I can take joy in otherwise gloomy, rainy, dank weather by putting on something wonderfully gloomy and dank, something I love to hear. It's a fine synergy of the visual and auditory environments. It makes me feel like I'm walking through my own movie, with my own soundtrack. The people around me look like extras on the set. I see myself in the third person. (Angie)

Whilst the conditioning of the filmic in the creation of a personalized audio-visual aesthetic is prominent in the above accounts of iPod use, it is useful to interpret the dynamic of aesthetic appropriation in some detail. For the most part, users claim that the aesthetic principle tends to be dependent upon the use of their iPods. Users will pick playlists or fast-forward to music track that suits either their mood or their surroundings. In Berkley's account, the environment is transformed by the music played; indeed, the environment becomes a function of individualized sound. The listener becomes an auditory spectator. Yet, as in Susan's account, the iPod user is also dependent upon the music in order to recreate specific moods or images within their urban experience. Equally, Angie picks music that will enhance the environment – that suits her mood. It is important

to recognize the cognitive strategies being employed here. The world is being aesthetically reproduced in conformity to the users' mood or the mood of the music listened to. iPod users' overriding aim is to create a privatized sound world which is in harmony with their mood, orientation and surroundings, enabling them to recreate their urban experience through a process that might be described as solipsistic aestheticization. iPod users, rather than reaching out to understand or see the 'otherness' of the city as 'otherness', as represented by the traditional practices of the *flâneur*, for example, aim to habitually create an aesthetically pleasing urban world for themselves in their own image. Theirs is a strategy of bringing the world in line with their cognitive predispositions – as an act of mimicry. This aesthetic appropriation of urban space is a prominent cognitive strategy in their attempt to create seamless webs of mediated and privatized experience in their everyday movement through the city, enhancing virtually any chosen experience in any geographical location at will.

Strategies of sonic transcendence are multifaceted, but central to it is the construction of urban space as a 'seamless space'. iPod users possess the ability and have the desire to unify urban space as they move from home, to the street, to the automobile and to work, thereby denying the heterogeneity of the urban landscapes passed through. The use of the iPod appears to bind the disparate threads of much urban movement together, both 'filling' the spaces 'in-between' communication or meetings and structuring the spaces thus occupied. In the often- repressive 'realm of the ever-same' (Adorno 1991) or the 'ever-always-the-same' (Benjamin 1973), iPod users attempt to achieve a level of autonomy over time and place through the creation of privatized auditory bubbles. iPod users often refer to the magical nature of carrying their entire music collection with them wherever they go, thus giving them an unprecedented amount of choice of music to listen to. In this de-routinization of time lies both the unalloyed pleasure of listening and the management or control of the users thoughts, feelings and observations as they manage both space and time. Time and experience is increasingly micro-managed through the technological potential of the iPod. Jean, a 35-year-old bank executive, scrolls through her song titles looking for a particular song to listen to that suits her mood at that particular moment, and whilst listening to that song, scrolls through her list for her next choice – her musical choices thus merge seamlessly into one another during her journey. She describes her journey time evocatively as possessing 'no dead air'. The ability to continually adjust music, whilst on the move, to moods with such sophistication and precision is relatively new, if indeed the desire to do is not. Thus, users 'fine-tune' their relationship between cognition, space and music. This distinguishes iPod user from previous generations of personal stereo users where users were confined to the fixed contents of the tape or CD. iPod users are more akin to sophisticated 'listening selves' attuned to the transient nature of cognition whilst simultaneously attempting to 'tune' their relationship to public space (Coyne 2010).

Tuning in/tuning out

iPod use offers a glimpse into the internal workings and strategies engaged in by users in their management of themselves, others and urban space through engaging in a series of self-regulatory practices through which they habitually manage their moods, volitions and desires.

iPod users, in describing their attentiveness to the flow of experience, appear to intuitively tune their flow of desire and mood to the spectrum of music contained in their iPods, beyond the scrutiny of others, existing in a naturalized urban heterotopia (Foucault

1986). In the present age of instantaneous digital reproduction, iPod users manage their flow and flux of experience precisely through the technology of the iPod. Technologically mediated behaviour increasingly becomes second nature to iPod users, habitual and unrecognized. Everyday behaviour is mediated by, and constructed through, the omnipresent sounds of the products of music. Mediated behaviour is transformed into an ideology of directness – of transparency – like so much in consumer culture in which appearance masks the production process. Transparency is suggested by the technological enclosing of the ears by headphones, thus enabling music to be played directly and immediately into the ears of users.

The fluid nature of music itself coupled with the structure of choice offered by digital technologies like the iPod complements the very nature of the user's consciousness, thus enabling them to construct an 'individualized' relationship between cognition and the management of experience.

iPods become strategic devices permitting users to shape the flow of experience, holding contingency at bay by either predicting future experience – the next song on the play list – or by shaping their own sound world in tune with their desire. Users are also able to adjust their privatized soundtrack whilst on the move, thus micro-managing their mood with great precision and skill. iPod users frequently demand an instantaneous response to the nuances of their mood, signifying a ratcheting up of expectations demanded of new technologies such as the iPod.

The technology of the iPod promotes the development of an 'attentive' or 'listening' self embodied in rudimentary forms in previous analogue technologies such as the Sony Walkman. Earlier portable sound technologies provided less capacity for users, requiring prior and precise planning for the days listening. For some users, this was not a problem, as they would play the same tape each day for long periods of time – forcing their environment to mimic the straight jacket of their own auditory mindset. For most users, however, a hastily bundled selection of tapes or CDs would be carried in the hope that it would contain appropriate music (Bull 2000). The development of MP3 players such as the Apple iPod provided a technological solution to the management of the contingency of aural desire. Users now habitually take large portions of their music collection with them in their iPods, as one user describes: 'It gives me the ability to carry my entire music collection in my pocket instead of a steamer trunk'.

iPod users fully embrace the ideology that 'more is better'. The carrying of large slices, or perhaps all, of one's musical library in a small piece of portable technology appears to liberate users from the contingency of mood – they no longer have to predict what they will want to listen to or the vagaries of potential future moods.

Whilst the personal stereo was commonly used as an 'in-between device' – from door to door – the iPod expands the possibilities of use from the playing of music through attaching it to the user's home hi-fi device, plugging it into the automobile radio, and by connecting it to the computer at work, thus giving users unprecedented ability to weave the disparate threads of the day into one seamless and continuous soundtrack. In doing so, iPod use extends users' field of aspirational reorganization to include many more segments of daily life – the dream of living one's life to music becomes for some users a reality.

> I tailor my music and content by activity. 'Play lists' allow me to create subsets of music that I can easily call up. I create 'Play lists' to tailor my music to my different moods. I label them as 'Quiet' or 'Exercise Tunes' or 'Contemplative'. (Jeremy)

iPod use permits users an unparalleled micro-management of mood, environment and sound permitting the successful management of the self through the contingencies of the users' day.

> There are times where I will put on one song, and then halfway through it I will change my mind and switch it to another song because my mood changed or the song wasn't capturing my mood correctly. (Heather)

> I almost always keep the setting on 'shuffle' so that the songs come up randomly. If a songs starts that doesn't suit my mood at the moment, I just hit 'next'. (Karen)

The mundane world of the city becomes more adventurous within a privatizing sound world. The contingency of the street in which one moves with the others, dependent upon the ebb and flow of others, becomes manageable and potentially pleasurable. The subject is simultaneously 'passivized' and 'energised' as they wend their way through the street. Benjamin, in his analysis of city life, was attentive to the role that technology played in the navigation of the urban subject through the city; iPod users become reminiscent of the urban subject who Benjamin described as '[plunging] into a crowd as into a reservoir of electric energy . . . a kaleidoscope equipped with consciousness' (Benjamin 1973, 171). The iPod user has moved on technologically, accompanied by music, which drives both mood and their relationship to the spaces passed through. Enhancement relates to the mood of the user or, and sometimes also, the environment passed through which, in turn, feeds back into the cognition of the user.

Whether subjects live in New York, London or Paris, there is a similarity of description as to how the iPod functions to manage mood and experience – a similarity of desire to micro-manage experience through the use of the iPod and to construct a mediated and privatized auditory world through which experience is seamlessly filtered. This filtering aims not just at enhancement but also mimesis; to bring the world in line with cognition through music.

Epistemologically speaking – and following Marcuse (1964, 1978) – the audio-visual forms of aestheticization enacted by iPod users are largely transcendent. To aestheticize is to simplify, to strip reality of its inessentials. The aesthetic principle is inherently one of transcendence. An essential component of this transcendence for the urban citizen is to replace the multi-rhythmic and hence unmanageable nature of urban life with his or her own manageable audio-visual monorhythms.

In enacting these practices, iPod use embodies dialectic of utopian and dystopian impulses – aestheticization is an active mode of appropriating the urban, transforming that which exists by making it the user's own. The desire to engage in these processes derives from the habitual predispositions of users located in wider media use – for are not television and film viewers equally in positions of imaginary omnipotence whilst they watch from the comforts of their own homes (Morley 2000) – and from a response to the nature of urban space itself, the dislocation from it felt by the urban subject (Sennett 1977). Yet, in this denial of contingency lies a liberating moment whereby the city is re-enchanted through the individualizing of each journey – the city as 'aura' is reclaimed through the sonic 'tactics' of iPod users (de Certeau 1984). The price of this aesthetic enhancement paradoxically is the collective life of public space.

Note

1. More than 1000 iPod users filled out a 34-question questionnaire over the Internet in 2004. The respondents answered requests posted in the *New York Times*, *BBC News Online*, *The Guardian Online*, *Wired News* and *MacWorld*. These requests were then syndicated and replicated in a wide variety of newspapers and magazines worldwide. From February 2004 to April 2004, the author received 4136 requests for the iPod questionnaire. Respondents came mainly from the USA, UK, Canada, Australia and Switzerland but also included fewer responses from France, Italy, Spain, Denmark, Finland and Norway.

Notes on contributor

Michael Bull has written widely on sound, music and technology. He was until recently a consultant to *Portalplayer*, California, and is a core member of *New Trends Forum*, a European think tank funded by Bankinter, Spain. He is a permanent member of the international research network *Sound in Media Culture: Aspects of a Cultural History of Sound*. He is the author of *Sounding Out the City: Personal Stereos and the Management of Everyday Life* (published by Berg, 2000) and *Sound Moves: iPod Culture and Urban Experience* (published by Routledge, 2007), and is the co-editor of *The Auditory Culture Reader* (published by Berg, 2003). He is also the founding editor of *The Senses and Society Journal* (published by Berg).

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