ABSTRACT

For the first time in industrialised culture, over fifty percent of the population possesses the ability to privatise whatever environment they might be in through the use of a dedicated MP3 player or through a mobile phone with MP3 capabilities. The consumption of technologically mediated sound in the 20[supth] and 21[supst] centuries represents an increasingly significant mode of being-in-the-world in which the self claims a mobile and auditory territory for itself through a specific form of 'sensory gating' permitting the user to screen out unwanted sounds through the creation of their own seductive soundscape. The untrammelled pleasures of creating a privatised mobile soundworld resonates through urban and cultural theory posing a set of interrelated theoretical problems relating to both our relation to the spaces we move through, the nature and meaning of public and private space, the potential for urban aestheticisation, urban retreat and withdrawalln this paper I discuss the use of Apple iPod in terms of its use as a technological support system of users. The paper draws upon the Internet responses of over one thousand iPod users worldwide between 2004 and 2005. The paper investigates the specific nature of auditory mediation that use entails. It argues that iPod use can usefully be interpreted as a form of pleasurable toxicity within which the 'total mediated' world of users lies a dream of unmediated experience of direct access to the world and one's emotions.

KEY **WORDS**

Mediation, toxicity, we-ness, filtering, music, mp3, mobile.

«I feel almost cut off from society if I don't have my mobile, whereas I feel like I'm cut off from a part of myself if I don't have my iPod» (iPod user). «I can't overestimate the importance of having all my music available all the time. It gives me an unprecedented level of emotional control over my life» (iPod user). Listening to music makes me feel better about my environment. Using an iPod keeps me from feeling oppressed by being constantly surrounded by other human beings, and it makes me feel emotional or in-tune or empowered, or whatever else I need to feel at the time (iPod user). «What music colours is the desolation of the inner sense ... it is the decoration of empty time» (Adorno 1976:48).

We have throughout the 20[supth] and 2[supth] centuries increasingly moved to music both through the provision of Fordist communication technologies, such as the radio and muzak technologies, that create sonic environments of uniformity for consumers or through the hyper-post fordist technologies of the Walkmans and iPod through which, with the aid of a pair of headphones, we create individualised and mobile soundscapes.

The age of mechanical reproduction is an age of sonic saturation and colonisation of urban spaces--both private and public. It is an age in which there has been a continual redefinition of, and contestation of, the meanings attached to the way in which individuals inhabit space and place sonically. Sound, in its fluidity seeps into the spaces of everyday life like no other sense. The way in which music/sound has become an ever-present desire/threat in the twentieth and twenty first century is the subject of this chapter. This chapter explains the above phenomena through the lens of mediation, solipsism and toxicity focusing primarily upon the contemporary use of the Apple iPod(FN1). The debate plays out at the intersections of pleasure, personal space, movement and desire.

The rise of headphone culture, which paralleled the rise of the Walkman and then the iPod appears to fit the model of mediated solipsism ideally whereby users withdraw into a private world of personalised music (Bull, 2000; 2007). It is to these phenomena that the term total mediation refers. Mediated experience refers to the sounds of music (the culture industry) between the ears fed directly through headphones often placed directly into the ears--directly into the experiencing subject--the outside world sinking into silence. Mediated experience appears to be more 'immediate' to the user of an iPod or MP3 phone whilst the technology of the object becomes increasingly invisible. Through the continual use of technologies like the Apple iPod mediated immediacy becomes second nature to the user. MP3 players are now possessed by over fifty percent of the population of every industrialised country either in the form of a dedicated MP3 player or through a mobile phone with MP3 capability. The privatising of social space is increasingly commonplace and hence in need of analysis.

The use of one communication technology should however be contextualised within the ubiquitous use of these technologies generally From the use of the internet, video games and social network sites to the vast array of mobile communication technologies which link consumers to the worlds of commerce, friends and strangers, mediated experience is fast becoming 'second nature' to many. Embodied in the manufacture of,

advertising of, and use of these communication technologies is a dream or desire for total mediation 24/7 connectivity. The nature and meaning of this mediated connectivity ranges from the functionally useful to the intensely pleasurable (Bogost, 2007; Castells & al., 2007; Goggins, 2006; Ito & al., 2005; Katz & Aakhus, 2002). Embedded in this 24/7 connectivity is the notion of toxicity. Toxicity refers to the transformation of subjectivity through the use of new media technologies which takes on a dystopian aura as the pervasive use of new technologies potentially decrease the capacity of subjects to disconnect from their intoxicating use, tipping subjects into what Rheingold and Kluitenberg refer to as a form of social 'toxicity' (Rheingold and Kluitenberg, 2006). In their analysis this state is not experienced as pleasurable, however in the following pages I propose a more nuanced understanding of auditory toxicity. Toxic pleasure refers to the pleasures attached to continuous withdrawal and aesthetic recreation engendered through the continuous creation of privatized sonic environments which have nevertheless potential social consequences in terms of shared social spaces in the city(FN2).

1.   The   Seductive   Nature   of   Sound

In their daily use of the Apple iPod users claims a mobile and auditory territory for themselves through a specific form of 'sensory gating', permitting them to screen out unwanted sounds and producing their own 'soundscape'. iPod users live within a mediated and perpetual sound matrix, each user inhabiting a different auditory world. For the most part these 'filtering' processes are intensely satisfying for users. Users often report that their iPod is their mobile technology of choice--giving them intense pleasure in the construction of their very own auditory bubble. The use of the Apple iPod tends to be seamless with many users putting their headphones on as they leave their front door and only taking it off when they reach their destination.

Traditionally the ears have been perceived as a passive sense, which remained continually open to the world--the introduction of headphones empowered the ears precisely by enabling users to choose whichever soundscape they wish to listen to. This empowering potential of technologies such as the Apple iPod permits users to redial their auditory map--yet they can only do this through the technology of the iPod itself. This empowerment is dependent.

Users filter out unwanted sounds in order to more fully control/regulate their own daily lives. Filtering is a heightening strategy of cognitive control. Technologies such as the iPod act as a 'framing' device, enabling a distinctive mode of auditory embodiment. iPod users, for example orchestrate their soundworld by toning 'down stimuli from one sensory field [whilst] amplifying information coming through another channel' (Geurts, 2002: 234). Sherry Turkle has recently referred to this form of continual connectivity as a form of 'tethering' of the subject to media technologies (Turkle, 2006). The 'tethering' of the subject to sound technologies such as the iPod casts light upon the meaning and significance of others with whom urban space is shared, and to the urban lands-cape/soundscape itself. The auditory filtering of experience represents the cultural template of much urban experience. Sensory filtering is central to the urban topography of daily life: 'Sensory orientations, therefore, represent a critical dimension of how «culture and psyche make each other up» and play a critical role in a person's sensibilities around inter-subjective dynamics and boundaries between self and others' (Geurts, 2002: 236).

Auditory filtering as such becomes 'second nature' to iPod users as increasingly large portions of daily experience become mediated through the use of communication technologies:

«I've gotten to the point that music portability is paramount to my day. I take my iPod into a relaxing bath. If my partner is watching TV I'll wear it whilst making dinner. I use it to go to sleep» (Ben). «I know listen to music any time I can. Walking to and from work, at work, on vacation, on a train or airplane, even at home when I don't want to disturb my partner. I have any song I want to listen to at my fingertips at any particular moment» (Susan). «I then started wearing it [the iPod] while shopping. I did it to control my environment and desensitise myself to everything around me. What I found interesting was that the more I wear my iPod the less I want to interact with strangers. I've gotten to the point where I don't make eye contact. I feel almost encased in a bubble ... I view people more like choices when I'm wearing my iPod» (Zuni).

«I do like to listen uninterrupted, and if I'm interrupted I feel slightly invaded. I listen to my iPod when I'm on my own. It's my time and in my space, and any interruption invades my time with myself» (Matt). «I don't want anyone to bother me when I'm listening. I'm not interested in doing anything but listening to the song when my headphones are on» (Wes).

The experience of continuity is often evoked through the use of an iPod whereby users construct seamless auditory bubbles for themselves as they move through daily life communing with the products of the culture industry. In doing so they banish the contingency of daily life through immersing themselves within their very own private auditory utopia in which they do not speak, but listen, silenced and silencing, through the spaces of the city, living in the continuous rhythm of unproblematic reception, shielded cognitively from the contingency of the world.

2. The Toxic Pleasures of iPod Use

iPod culture represents a desire for uninterrupted and continuous experience as a central facet of the users urban experience. This desire for a subjectively empowered sense of continuousness is enabled by, and facilitated through, iPod use. Which enables users to link disparate places and moods through the temporal immediacy of iPod sounds. Users often describe themselves as bereft without the mediated auditory presence of their iPod. Experience unadorned by the immersion of experience through the intimate sound world of the iPod is often described with apprehension:

«It [the iPod] removes the internal dread. For example, when I needed to do yard work I used to become depressed because my mind would wander. Now, with the iPod, yard work is a positive experience because I know I have hours of uninterrupted listening, exercise, fresh air, and no business worries ... Serb Erener's 'Everyway that I can' stirs me for some reason.» (Sam)

Non-mediated experience creates a sense of vulnerability in many users. This sense of vulnerability refers to the perceived uncontrollable nature of their own stream of consciousness and the cognitive states associated with it. Cognitive control comes with technological mediation in iPod culture. iPod use permits users to saturate periods of 'non-communication' with their own intimate, familiar and comforting sounds.

3. Sound Makes the City

As iPod users move through the city urban experience becomes synonymous with technological experience. Technology as a medium of organisation seamlessly mediates their urban experience. The aesthetics of the street is largely an audio-visual one in which they are transported from one cognitive and physical space to another through the dominant organising potential of privatised sound enabling them to create a satisfying aestheticized reality of the city.

iPod users aim to create a privatised sound world, which is in harmony with their mood, orientation and surroundings, enabling them to re-spatialise urban experience through a process of solipsistic aestheticization. This aesthetic appropriation of urban space is an effective cognitive strategy for them in their attempt to create a seamless web of mediated and privatised experience, enhancing virtually any chosen experience in any geographical location at will. In doing so they create an illusion of omnipotence through mediated proximity and 'connectedness' engendered by the use of their iPod.

Jason is thirty-five years old; he lives in New Orleans and works in online media distribution. He is married with one young child and has owned an iPod for over a year, never having possessed a mobile music player previously:

My world looks better; I get more emotional about the things including the people I see and my thoughts in general. Sometimes I project the lyrical content of songs onto the people I see while I'm listening. For example, I can distinctly remember listening to U2's «Stuck in a Moment» and I was looking at some of the people standing around me in a coffee shop, with the look of anxiety on their faces and general angst. It made me wants to hug them and tell them it's ok ... I would look at other people and they would smile at me, almost like they knew what I was thinking. ... it's like it polarized my world into these hemispheres of those who understood Bono's message and those who didn't. I'm not a Bono worshipper or anything; it was just the first time I had really listened to the lyrics of the song. That's a very private moment (in public). ... it's difficult to explain, but when he said the words «I know it's tough, but you can never get enough of what you don't really need» it all just crystallized for me. I've had a lot of surreal moments like that listening to the music on my iPod and watching the world around me ... it's almost like watching a movie, but you're in it.

The reference to iPod experience as being like that of a movie is common although it's meaning varies (Bull, 2000). In Jason's account it refers to the world in which he lives appearing as if he were a movie in which he is also placed. The U2 song heightens Jason's mood. Listening to the song he recognises the superfluity of the ethics of consumption as articulated by Bono and seemingly etched upon the faces of the hapless customers in the café. The lyrics of the song appear to describe the cognitive state of the others, visually imagined and interpreted by Jason. The aesthetic principle serves to elevate Jason beyond mundane concerns--placing him in a position of an empowered interpreter of the world whilst remaining distant. In the act of interpretation, Jason remains silent, impenetrable to others. Silence protects the urban subject from «the harsh realities of the world». It is this silence, which promotes both isolation and the flowering of self; the richness of interiority contrasted with the blandness of the outside world. The flow of people moving through the street differs from that of those sitting or milling around a café. The café is also a place of talk, of snatched conversations, of potential exposure. The above account of iPod use re-imposes the purely visual onto the activity of others in order to construct them as significant--yet imaginary, others. Jason in drawing others into his 'enlightenment' vision is essentially saying 'If you could hear what I hear, then you too would be transformed'. Jason's enlightenment however remains a mute and private enlightenment in which others are unaware as they move through space with their own unknown pre-occupations. Jason's private revelations nevertheless cognitively empower him, heightening his sense of

presence and purpose; his is an audio-visual mastery of the world:

Sometimes I think I can calm people down just by looking at them when I'm listening to music. And sometimes when they look at me, I think they do «shift», because they recognise that I'm in a 'good place'.

Jason, in the act of private listening, imagines that he ceases to be a blank canvass, a mere surface that others look at disinterestedly. Meaning radiates from him, the internal becomes externalised, constructed through music and made transparent--immediate. He is transformed in the imagined eyes of others becoming the centre of a cognitive universe through which others reflect--his cognitive state becomes their cognitive state--though they are not privy to his sound world. The auditory 'look' is a sufficient tag, in the above account, for and imaginary recognition to flow from the 'other'. Jason is not merely a part of this audio-visual world; he becomes its director, orchestrating meanings in which he imagines others as 'knowing' cast members. Jason is not alone in summoning up precise aesthetic re-creations through the creation of scenarios in which others play unwitting stand up parts:

For some reason, Talking Head songs seem to work best for this. Like, I will look at an old woman with a cane, and imagine her singing one lyric. Then move on to a hip-hop style teenage boy, and have him sing to the next line. My imagination really can take off. It sometimes makes me laugh and smile to myself--especially if a particularly amusing line comes up. It really does transform my surroundings--I sort of feel like I'm in my own music video. (Karen)

Underlying this virtual connectivity appears a playful narrative of invention in which users remain cognitively invisible. Alternatively, the personalisation of the users soundworld imbues the street and its atmosphere, indeed the whole world with an intimacy, warmth and significance it otherwise lacks. The world mimics and moves to the rhythm of users. For iPod users the street is orchestrated to the predictable sounds of their favourite play-lists:

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» (Berklee). The solipsism of the user is frequently referred to in terms of general feelings of separateness:

I'm living in a world where music is going on and things are happening and everyone else who can't hear what I'm hearing is not really in that world or slightly less connected to it. There's something going on in my head that's for me and only me (Kate). I see people like I do when I watch a movie ... there is a soundtrack to my Encounters ... music to accompany my thought about others. It dramatizes things a bit. It fills the silent void (June).

Streets perceived as silent are in reality a complex of sounds--June's observation that her iPod filled the 'silent void' is indicative of users experiencing the world solely as a function of mediated sound--the unmediated sound world of urban society is a place where nothing happens--devoid of interest, throwing the subject back into the world of contingency, isolation and incompleteness. Unmediated experience is experienced as threatening, silence is associated with falling prey to the unmanageable and contingent nature of their own cognition. iPod use provides the user with the power to transform their environment seamlessly and continuously. A sense of completeness arrives through mediation.

To aestheticize, as Marcuse argued, is to simplify--to strip reality of its inessentials. The aesthetic principle is inherently one of transcendence--an essential component of this transcendence for iPod users is to replace the multi-rhythmic and hence unmanageable nature of urban life with their own manageable mono-rhythms. Mundane, yet nevertheless unmanageable urban life is transformed through iPod use creating movement and energy in the user where there was none before. Amy a thirty two year old who works in product design in Philadelphia, describes walking down the street with her iPod playing:

My music drives my attitude as I walk down the street. If I'm listening to melancholy music, my surroundings are a little greyer, a little more dismal, and the strangers I see on the street become a little more menacing. If I'm listening to upbeat music, the strangers look friendlier and my surroundings are not as depressing. While living in a city is practical for many reasons, it can also be overwhelmingly depressing. Having cheerful music in my ears as I see a homeless person digging through garbage to find a meal is disconcerting. Sometimes the music acts as a buffer between me and the city, and other times the music draws such a sharp contrast between what I'm hearing and what I'm seeing that it's hard to take. Other times, when I'm walking through the city with a great song, one that's appropriate to my external surroundings and internal feelings, I feel like I'm the star of my own personal movie, strutting along to my theme song of the moment.

Common in iPod accounts of aesthetic experience is making the street mimic the mood engendered by the music playing on the iPod. In the above account the homeless that are observed are not so much aestheticized, as recessed. Negatives are transformed into positives as Amy describes her elation as she traverses the spaces of the city. The following respondent also highlights this colonisation of space in which

one's surrounding take on the ambience of the cognitive state of the user mediated through their sound track: I feel as though life is a movie and is playing especially for me. If I listen to sad music, which I only listen to when I'm down (boyfriend break up, bad grade, just bad news) then everything sort of has a grey shadow over it, even when it's sunny outside (Betty). My iPod puts me in a place and time. It is very common for me to walk to the music, so to speak. What I am listening to affects how I see everything around me. I might listen to some classic soul while I walk and the city seems to have a very mellow vibe. On other occasions, I might have on some Rage Against the Machine or something like that, and the city seems chaotic, crazy, too fast. What I listen to always impacts the way I view my surroundings (Freedom).

 iPod use is non-interactive in the sense that users construct fantasies and maintain feelings of security precisely by not interacting with others or their environment. Sound both colonises the listener and actively recreates and reconfigures the spaces of experience. Through the power of a privatised soundworld the world becomes intimate, known, and possessed. Imagination is mediated by the sounds of the iPod becoming an essential component in the ability of users to imagine at all. Users are often unable to aestheticize experience without the existence of their own individual soundtrack acting as a spur to the imagination.

 In this process of aestheticization, iPod users transform the world into conformity with their pre-dispositions--the world becomes part of a mimetic fantasy in which the 'otherness' of the world in its various guises is negated. This is an important strategy for iPod users who subjectivize space--consume it, as if it were a commodity. In the process, immediate experience is fetishized. Technologized experience is fetishized experience--experience becomes real or hyper-real precisely through its technologization--through technological appropriation. The utopian impulse to transform the world only occurs in the imaginary--in its technologized instrumentality, the world remains untouched. Users prefer to live in this technological space whereby experience is brought under control--aesthetically managed and embodied--whilst the contingent nature of urban space and the 'other' is denied.

 The aestheticization of experience has traditionally been portrayed not merely as pleasurable, which it certainly is, but also as inconsequential insofar as the object of the gaze is left untouched--unsullied; «Aesthetically, the city space is a spectacle in which amusement value overrides all other considerations» (Bauman, 2000: 168). Yet, far from being inconsequential, this aestheticizing mode of urban experience contains cognitive and moral resonances. The aestheticization of experience remains relational--and whilst the subjects of the aestheticization process remain untouched--the aestheticizing impulse highlights the underlying values of users in their relation to the 'other' and the spaces passed through. The aestheticizing practices of iPod users contributes to our understanding of what it means to 'share' urban space with others from within an auditory bubble--immune to the sounds of others. Whilst some iPod users report enjoying city life, there's a mediated experience of the pleasures of the city. The city is viewed through the products of the culture industry in the form of music, talking books and of course 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 N.Y. in the lyrics, but also the sophistication, edge and energy of the place. (Sami)

 The meaning of city spaces itself derives from the playlists of users. Cosmopolitanism 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 from not 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 encased in the users iPod.

 iPod users also display a heightened sensitivity towards the mundane existence of others in public space. The noise of 'otherness' is banished and with it the 'quirkiness' of the other--For Wes, a twenty four year old programmer from America, this extends to the 'tonality and accent' of other people's voices:

 When I'm around others in a public place I use music to block them out. To begin with, people aren't as likely to approach someone wearing headphones, Secondly, small talk and chatter gets on my nerves, and I don't want to be drawn into other people's lives or conversations either vicariously or directly. Also the tonality and accent of certain people's voices is terribly grating to me. (Wes)

 The more users wish to remain in a private auditory space of control the more sensitive they tend to become to the contingent nature of the everyday world, which they wish to push away. Tracy a thirty two years old script writer living in Phoenix, Arizona typifies these widespread urban strategies of exclusion. Tracy was an early adopter of MP3 technology having had a player for four years. Control is an overriding consideration in Tracy's description of how she uses mobile technologies. The iPod is described as 'a tool' enabling her to control whatever environment she occupies. Tracy is a heavy user of the iPod using it continuously at work and elsewhere, «Since I'm a writer, I'm left mostly alone. If I had the option, I wouldn't

take my headphones off all day. Listening to music at work makes it slightly bearable. I've quit jobs that wouldn't let me listen to musics. Tracy uses music to accompany her during most activities of the day. The need and desire for musical accompaniment to a wide range of activities is taken for granted in her description of use. Music is chosen to match her mood and activity, whilst doing yard work, for example, she describes needing music with a «faster beat. A Mozart sonata isn't going to motivate me». Continuity of listening is a way of organising the rhythms of the day--continuity implies separateness for iPod users such as Tracy. Forced interruption is described in the following terms, «Sometimes I feel violated if I have to turn it off for an unplanned reason». The breaking of her auditory bubble represents recognition of the fragility of her auditory empowerment. Interruption becomes tantamount to the touching of an exposed nerve--the flow of subjective sound takes users away from the physicality of the world which is described as recessed by some, or not 'really being there'. An involuntary and sudden return to the world, as others experience it, is invariably experienced as unpleasant.

In America, people are often loud and rude and it's sometimes hard to concentrate effectively. In Phoenix, we have a lot of Mexican immigrants. They don't learn English and they have no control over their children. I believe in mutual respect when in public places. It was becoming increasingly difficult for me to shop without encountering a bombardment of Spanish or screaming kids. The iPod lets me filter them all out. I'm much calmer now when I shop. The iPod lets me overlook the lack of courtesy. Using the iPod helps control my concentration. Since I'm familiar with the music, I can let it float to the back of my consciousness. (Tracy).

Tracy achieves a state of equilibrium precisely by withdrawing into herself, Sennett described this form of behaviour as representing «an early sign of the duality of modern culture: flight from others for the sake of self-mastery» (Sennett 1990:44). iPod use can usefully be understood as a filtering mechanism permitting users like Tracy to remain focussed on themselves through the negation of the 'distasteful' and contingent nature of urban space. If the social politics of the street is one of proximity whereby the public spaces of the street are gendered, racialized and class bound, (Massey 2005) then the constant use of technologies such as the iPod erase the differential nature of these spaces.

4. **Conclusion**

MP3 users live in world of mediated we-ness. Theodor Adorno coined this phrase when he argued that the consumption of mechanically reproduced music increasingly functioned as an effective substitute for a desired sense of connectivity that modern culture lacked. 'We-ness' refers to the substitution of technologically mediated forms of experience for direct experience. Music for Adorno enables the subject to transcend the repressive nature of the social world precisely by integrating themselves more fully into the everyday through the consumption of music. Music provides both the dreams and the chains for urban subjects. Mediated aural proximity--the music coming directly through the headphones into the subjects ears--constitutes this state of we-ness producing 'an illusion of immediacy in a totally mediated world, of proximity between strangers, the warmth of those who come to feel a chill of unmitigated struggle of all against all' (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1973:46).

Adorno perceived the urban subject as increasingly dependent upon forms of mediated company within which to live; 'we might conceive a series leading from the man who cannot work without the blare of the radio to one who kills time and paralyses loneliness by filling his ears with the illusion of «being with» no matter what' (Adorno, 1991: 78). Apple iPods would appear to be the post-Fordist technology of choice for those wedded to the notion of 'we-ness', but a 'we-ness' that stresses the individualising of the soundscape rather than the Fordist one analysed by Adorno.

iPod users are simultaneously connected and disconnected from the urban world that they inhabit. Connected through the use of their iPod whilst simultaneously disconnected from the physical world through which they move. In the totally mediated world of the iPod user lies the dream of unmediated experience--of direct access to the world and one's emotions. Mediated immediacy becomes second nature to the user, their iPods functioning as digital Sherpa's accompanying them securely through the spaces and time of everyday life. The toxic pleasures of iPod use resonate through our understanding of what it is to live in an urban setting--historically a place that is shared with others--now increasingly a site of the pleasurable withdrawal from others.

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ADDED MATERIAL

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RESUMEN

Por primera vez desde el nacimiento de la cultura industrializada, más de la mitad de la población es capaz de personalizar cualquier parte de su entorno gracias a un reproductor de MP3 o a través de un teléfono móvil. El consumo de sonidos mediados tecnológicamente durante los siglos XX y XXI representa una forma cada vez más importante de «estar-en-el-mundo» el «yo» reclama un territorio sonoro móvil a través de una especie de «compuerta sensorial» que le permite filtrar los sonidos que no le interesan y crear el paisaje sonoro que más le satisface. El placer sin límites que supone crear un mundo sonoro móvil de carácter privado plantea, para la teoría urbana y cultural, un conjunto de problemas teóricos que tienen que ver con la relación con los espacios en los que nos movemos, la naturaleza y el significado del espacio publico y privado, el potencial de la estetización de lo urbano, y la incomunicación de la ciudad. También cuestiona el conocimiento de las tecnologías que se usan para medializar gran parte de la experiencia cotidiana. En este articulo se analiza el uso del iPod como soporte tecnológico para los consumidores. Se basa en las respuestas de más de un millar de usuarios entre 2004-05. Plantea que el uso del iPod puede ser interpretado positivamente si se considera como una forma de toxicidad placentera en la que bajo el mundo «totalmente mediatizado» de los usuarios subyace un anhelo de experiencia no mediatizada -de acceso directo al mundo y a las emociones de cada uno.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Mediatización, toxicidad, sentido de fraternidad, filtrado, música, mp3, movilidad.

Footnotes

1 The following article is based upon the use of primary data in the form of qualitative Internet interviews with over one thousand Apple iPod users worldwide between 2004 and 2005. For more extensive treatment of this material refer to Bull 2007.

2 Toxicity is often experienced as unpleasurable as in the following case of the use of a mobile phone: I had this good friend who came down from London to stay with me overnight. I got really annoyed, as she kept phoning her boyfriend every five minutes as we were walking to go out. When she wasn't phoning him he was phoning her every ten minutes. I got so annoyed I said I thought she had come to London to see me and could she tell her boyfriend not to keep phoning. We went to the cinema and he didn't phone. As soon as we left the cinema she phoned him and didn't get a reply. She went on about it all the time. When we got back to my flat, she asked to use my mobile phone as her battery had gone flat. She couldn't get hold of him, she was on the phone for three hours trying to track him down. Eventually, she phoned her brother and he was with him drinking--he'd turned his phone off. (Sarah)

Sarah, a thirty two year old photojournalist describes the weekend visit of an old friend. It is a description of the compulsiveness nature of the desire for control and proximity; it is also a picture of the impossibility of achieving this in an interpersonal world of contingency. The subjects continual phoning of the 'absent other', her boyfriend drifts into compulsiveness, engulfing her physical space and transforming her co-presence

with Sarah who becomes progressively involved in the drama of re-affirmation and search. The constant need for re-assurance, and the possession of the technology to supposedly provide it destroys the quality of the physically present as the user is cognitively orientated 'elsewhere'.