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ARTICLE

## The Seduction of Sound in Consumer Culture

Investigating Walkman desires

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Songs become part of their acoustic environment. And lyrics fulfilled what psychoanalysis – originating not coincidentally at the same time – saw as the essence of desire: hallucinatory wish fulfilment. (Kittler, 1999)

The allurement of the Sirens remains superior; no one who hears their song can escape. (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1973)

*Abstract.* Whilst much has been written about the nature of visual desire in Western consumer culture, the significance and nature of 'sound' desire has been largely neglected. This article sketches out what an epistemology of sound desire might 'look' like and reinterprets three iconic moments in the history of Western sound experience beginning with the Odysseus myth before moving on to early accounts of gramophone and radio use. The article then discusses the nature of Walkman desire and how the inherent mobility of Walkmans makes them an icon to individual choice, permitting users to create their own soundworld through the spaces, places and timings of consumer culture. Through an empirically grounded analysis of Walkman practices, the author delineates the nature of aural desire by analysing sound aesthetics, sound tourism and the intimacy of sound.

### *Key words*

aesthetic • colonization • individualism • intimacy • privatization • soundscape

CONTEMPORARY CONSUMER CULTURE IS increasingly a sound consuming culture in which daily life is mediated by a multitude of mechanically reproduced sounds (De Nora, 2000). We wake up to radio sounds, walk to music (Bull, 2000), drive to sound (Bull, 2001) and often relax and go to sleep accompanied by reproduced sound. Music follows us to work and is there when we shop, when we visit pubs, clubs and theme parks. Yet despite this routinization of sound in consumer culture it retains a largely 'utopian' place in consumer desire. It does so because sound appears to deliver what consumers want. Mediated sound reproduction enables consumers to create intimate, manageable and aestheticized spaces in which they are increasingly able to, and desire to, live. In this article, I investigate the nature of consumer desire attached to one very specific, yet powerful form of aural technology, the Walkman. Walkmans in their inherent mobility are an icon of individual choice in consumer culture, permitting users to create their own soundworld through the spaces, places and timings of consumer culture. The investigation of Walkman desires thus seems to be an appropriate vehicle for the study of aural desire in consumer culture.<sup>1</sup> The nature of aural consumer desires and the production of technologies enabling and furthering these desires have a long cultural history, yet the role of the aural in consumer desire has yet to be written. Despite the recognition that contemporary patterns of consumer behaviour and dispositions have long and complex pre-histories, theorists have tended to concentrate upon the visual pre-history of patterns of consumption rather than assessing the nature and significance of the aural (Benjamin, 1973; Crary, 1999; Denzin, 1995; Freidberg, 1993).<sup>2</sup>

With this point in mind I preface the following analysis of Walkman desires with a re-interpretation of three iconic historical moments of sound in Western culture. I begin with Adorno and Horkheimer's account of the meeting between Odysseus and the Sirens in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1973) before moving on to early 20th-century accounts of the use of the phonograph and radio (Kracauer, 1995; Taussig, 1993). One example is situated in the mythic pre-history of Western culture, the other two come from the West's 'heroic' period of mechanical reproduction. These examples point to what an analytical framework for understanding contemporary states of aural cultural desire might look like. In particular I focus upon the specific relational qualities attached to sound through which subjects relate to their surroundings, to others and to themselves.

I take as my starting point Bauman's understanding of social space in which: 'Social space ought to be seen as a complex interaction of three interwoven, yet distinct processes – those of cognitive, aesthetic and moral "spacings" and their respective products' (1991: 145).

In his work, Bauman concentrates upon the visual nature of these processes whereas in this article I discuss the specific relational qualities attached to auditory experience. Sound is essentially non-spatial in character, or rather sound engulfs the spatial; sound inhabits the subject just as the subject might be said to inhabit sound. I suggest in this article that subjects are simultaneously empowered and colonized by sound and that it is precisely this process that makes sound so seductive to contemporary Walkman users.<sup>3</sup> The following examples place Walkman use within the context of a Western odyssey of sound.

### THE SEDUCTION OF SOUND

In *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* Adorno and Horkheimer (1973: 33) analyse the passage from Homer's *Odyssey* in which Odysseus pits his wits against the Sirens whose song evokes 'the recent past, with the irresistible promise of pleasure as which their song is heard . . . Even though the Sirens know all that has happened, they demand the future as the price of that knowledge.' All who hear the song perish. Odysseus' aim is to outwit the Sirens by having himself tied to the mast of his ship, thereby enabling him to listen to the enticements of the Sirens' song without being destroyed on the rocks as all others had who sought to have their desires fulfilled. For his strategy to succeed, the oarsmen of his ship have their ears blocked with wax, rendering them deaf. The oarsmen are unable to hear either the Sirens' song or Odysseus' increasingly desperate orders to steer the ship onto the rocks. Adorno and Horkheimer discuss this passage in terms of a dialectic of Enlightenment in which myth, domination and work are intertwined. They correctly point to Odysseus' desire for pleasure as being sublimated into aesthetic experience; he can hear but do nothing about it. Yet strangely, given Adorno's (1976, 1991) work on music, the specific auditory nature of the experience is glossed over. It is precisely the aural configuration of the experience that I investigate here, specifically the confrontation of Odysseus with the Sirens in terms of the seduction of sound and its relation to the space that Odysseus and the Sirens inhabit.

The auditory nature of their meeting means that for Odysseus to experience the Sirens' song, and therefore gain knowledge of all that can be known, he merely needs to hear their song. It is not the 'seeing' or 'touching' of the Sirens that motivates Odysseus but the 'hearing' of their song; the Sirens' song literally enters Odysseus. As Odysseus listens, tied safely to the mast of his ship, the Sirens' song transforms the distance between his ship and the rocks from which they sing their beguiling song. Their song

colonizes him and yet he uses this experience in order to fulfil his own desires. Odysseus becomes a rational and successful shopper of experience in his strategy of outwitting the Sirens. Aesthetic reflection is a price worth paying for gaining the seductive experience of song. Whilst Adorno and Horkheimer (1973) correctly point out that Odysseus' ability to experience the Sirens' song is purchased at the expense of the sailors' lack of this experience, and that Odysseus' aestheticization of the world is premised upon the absence of the auditory for the oarsmen, they concentrate on the 'social class' element of the experience. Yet there is an attendant issue concerning the nature of Odysseus' soundworld that I wish to briefly investigate. What Odysseus desires, the sound of the Sirens' song, originates beyond him. If he is to receive it, he has to rationally calculate how to achieve it. It is the Sirens who construct Odysseus' soundscape.<sup>4</sup> Yet through his cunning he transforms the nature of this soundscape by having the oarsmen's ears blocked with wax. The soundscape now encompasses only Odysseus and the Sirens, it exists only between him and them. Socially speaking, Odysseus is in his very own soundworld. This passage from Homer becomes the first description of the privatization of experience through sound.

This, however, doesn't exhaust its meaning in my analysis. Odysseus is also a traveller who makes himself through his journey. He outwits the Sirens and in doing so furthers his self-development. Odysseus becomes an early tourist of experience (Todorov, 1993) whose experience becomes aestheticized. Unlike the seductions of sound in contemporary consumer culture, Odysseus only has to experience the Sirens' song once; he doesn't need to 'replay' the experience. The Sirens form an aesthetic presence in his biography representing, in part, the draw of the 'exotic' and the forbidden as encountered in his travels and mastered through his intellect.

Adorno and Horkheimer (1973) describe sound before the dawn of mechanical reproduction, before its commodification and routinization. With the rise of mechanical reproduction the 'exotic' appears to come home in the space where the exotic, the magical and technology meet. As Thomas Edison sings 'Mary has a little lamb' into the first phonogram in 1877, playing it back to himself he exclaims delight and fascination with hearing his own voice, as if by magic. Many early accounts of aural reception point to the 'magical' quality of the experience of hearing the recorded voice before this experience became routinized through the steady incorporation of reproduced sound into domestic and public spaces.<sup>5</sup> Technologies of sound and their use appear to disclose something about both the user and the culture from which they come. For example, Taussig describes the early use of the phonograph amongst explorers who often

took a gramophone with them into the colonial spaces they were to study and exploit. Their aim, he argues, was to display the scientific magic of the West to the rest, to record the 'exotic' and to play records to themselves. In his analysis, the gramophone already has an element of routinization attached to its consumption.<sup>6</sup> The sometimes-obsessive nature of this activity is captured in:

Werner Herzog's delirious effort in his film *Fitzcarraldo*, set in the early twentieth-century Upper Amazonian rubber boom and constructed around the fetish of the phonograph, so tenaciously, so awkwardly, clutched by Fitzcarraldo, the visionary, its great earhorn emerging from under the armpit of his dirty white shirt, Caruso flooding the forests and rivers, the Indians amazed as Old Europe rains its ecstatic art form upon them. Bellowing opera from the ship's prow, it is the great ear-trumpet of the phonograph. (Taussig, 1993: 203)

Taussig's description differs considerably from the use and reception of sound found in Adorno and Horkheimer's (1973) account of Odysseus and the Sirens. On display in Taussig's account is the magic of Western technology and sound. *Fitzcarraldo* takes his own Western soundworld with him and it is his soundworld that re-creates the Amazon jungle for him, making it what it is. The jungle becomes aestheticized as a function of Fitzcarraldo's imagination mediated through the sounds of Caruso's voice. The presence of 'Caruso' in the jungle is only maintained through continuous sound, through the repeat. For Fitzcarraldo the aesthetic impulse is both 'literal' and dependent upon the sound of Caruso's voice, unlike Odysseus whose experience of the Sirens travels with him, internalized and sublimated. In contrast to this, *Fitzcarraldo* needs the voice of Caruso to maintain his image of the jungle and his place in it. Contrast *Fitzcarraldo*'s use of sound with the soundworld of the indigenous populations of the rain forests to discover the seductive similarity and dissimilarity of non-Western appropriations of sound:

[Turnbull] elaborates on how Mbuti imagination and practice construct the forest as both benevolent and powerful, capable of giving strength and affection to its 'children'. For this to happen Mbuti must attract the attention of the forest, must soothe it with the strength of sound that is fully articulated in the achievement of song. The sound 'awakens' the forest . . . thus attracting the forest's attention to the immediate needs of its

children. It is also of the essential nature of all songs that they should be 'pleasing to the forest'. (Feld, 2000: 255)

Turnbull, as well as Feld (1990) in his analysis of the Kaluli, point to the symmetrical nature of the soundworld of the inhabitants of the rain forest whereas Odysseus and Fitzcarraldo are both 'colonizers' of space and experience. Just as sound colonizes them so they use sound to recreate the spaces they inhabit in their image. Their experiences take place in the grand and 'heroic' vistas of a world 'tamed' through their aestheticization of it. This is in contrast to Kracauer's (1995) description of early radio use in the domestic spaces of Berlin in the 1920's:

Who could resist the invitation of those dainty headphones? They gleam in living rooms and entwine themselves around heads all by themselves; and instead of fostering cultivated conversation (which certainly can become a bore), one becomes a playground for Eiffel noises that, regardless of their potentially active boredom, do not even grant one's modest right to personal boredom. Silent and lifeless, people sit side by side as if their souls were wandering about far away. But these souls are not wandering according to their own preferences; the news hounds badger them, and soon no one can tell who is the hunter and who is the hunted. (p. 333)

The radio enables Kracauer's radio users to prioritize their desires. Just as Odysseus prioritizes his desires over that of the oarsmen, so the privatization of aesthetic desire of Kracauer's radio user has social consequences. Kracauer's radio listeners privatize their already 'private' space of experience. Who indeed can compete with the 'Eiffel' noises of the radio as the inhabitants of this privatized space sit 'silent and lifeless' next to one another? The technology of the radio is used to prioritize the experience of the listener who is taken far away into the aestheticized space of the 'Eiffel' noises. Kracauer points accurately to the reconfiguring of space in which the power relationship between the consumer and the producer of sound remains ambiguous. Yet what remains clear is the enticement of the radio sounds for the user who is transported out of his or her domestic boredom into the magical realm of communion with the 'far' away and enticing sounds of the radio.

In the contemporary world of Walkman desire, space – as with Kracauer's radio listeners – is inhabited by the sounds of the culture industry coming directly into the user's ears. Like Odysseus, their soundworld is constructed through the transmitting of sound from elsewhere. But in this

instance the Siren's voice is a domesticated and mechanically reproduced one in the form of music or radio voices. Unlike Odysseus, users suffer no penalties from listening. Equally, their own listening does not preclude others from listening. However, each listener, like Kracauer's radio user, must inhabit his or her own private and mediated soundworld. Contemporary users live in a more democratized consumer culture in which many are rather like Odysseus and fewer of us are 'oarsmen'. Yet as Walkman users travel through the spaces of consumer culture, in what sense do they make those spaces into functions of their own mediated desires?

These brief examples point to a framework with which to situate the possible role that sound plays in the contemporary geography of consumer culture. They indicate a powerful motivation to use sound, and especially music, to re-organize the user's relation to space and place.<sup>7</sup> In each case sound colonizes the listener but is used to actively recreate and reconfigure the spaces of experience. Odysseus, Fitzcarraldo and Kracauer's radio listeners all repossess their spaces of habitation in order to make them conform to their desires. Through the power of sound the world becomes intimate, known and possessed. These examples point to the powerfully seductive role of sound which appears to root the consumer in the world with a force that differs from the other senses (Simmel, 1997; Welsch, 1997). They point to the reconfiguring role that sound can have on the relational qualities of experience. The manner in which Odysseus, Fitzcarraldo and our radio users inhabit social spaces point to the cognitive, aesthetic and moral significance of social space which by its very nature is relational. Sound enables the subject to manage and orchestrate the spaces of habitation in a manner that conforms to their desires. The following sections discuss contemporary Walkman use by drawing upon processes of aestheticization, sound tourism and intimacy in order to investigate the nature and meaning of aural desire in consumer culture.

#### WALKMAN DESIRES: SOUND AESTHETICS

"When I'm out looking for things that I see – in the world, human interaction – beautiful things that I think can touch my soul – you know, that certain sound will come at that certain time and it will just move me to tears – it's filmic, but it's very real. I'm not seeing something that's not there. That woman in the street. She's really there. She doesn't have anywhere to sleep. But it's because I'm listening to music that's really tender that it moves me even more." (Jay)

Odysseus and Fitzcarraldo aestheticize their world and in the process make themselves through their travels. Odysseus' success is dependent upon both the Sirens and his own guile; Fitzcarraldo relies on the technology of the phonograph and the voice of Caruso. In contrast to Odysseus and Fitzcarraldo, Kracauer's radio listeners are immobile, the world comes to them through the radio. Kracauer's radio listeners have their domestic and mundane world transformed from within. Yet in all three examples time and space become aestheticized. In contemporary consumer culture we do not have to travel to the 'far away' in order to aestheticize it. Walkman users therefore can aestheticize both the mundane everyday of the city streets they pass through and the 'far away' spaces they visit with their Walkman sounds. Indeed, the everyday and the 'far away' appear to become increasingly similar in the experience of many Walkman users. In the extract above, the Walkman user aestheticizes her experience through musical accompaniment. The experience is described as having pathos in the same way as if she were watching a film or television programme on poverty from the comfort of her home. Implied in the above description is that if the music is not right, then somehow the woman in the street, who is really there, will not have the same presence. The 'subject' of this aesthetic appropriation, however, remains untouched, as she merely constitutes an aestheticized fragment contributing to the user's sense of urban narrative. This user is, however, no *flâneur*, she does not imagine herself in the world of the homeless woman but rather sees the scene as a function of her own aesthetic desire. Indeed, Walkman 'looking' confers greater powers on the subject; auditory looking substantially differs from non-auditory looking:

"It's easier to have eye contact with people, because you can look but you're listening to something else." (Stephanie)

"I feel a bit more confident. So I just stare at them." (Dan)

"It's like looking through a one-way mirror. I'm looking at them but they can't see me." (Julie)

Walkman users often refer to 'looking' without being 'seen' and in doing so escape the 'reciprocal gaze'.<sup>8</sup> Sound 'looking' becomes both voyeuristic and omnipotent, whereby the viewing subject 'disappears' into an unobserved gaze. The avoidance of any 'reciprocal gazing' means that the 'subject' can only be fixed as an exteriority by the 'other'. The 'colonization' of urban space points to the deeply social nature of the experience as the examples of Odysseus, Fitzcarraldo and Kracauer demonstrate. Yet the 'relational' nature of aestheticization is often downplayed in urban and cultural studies:

The beauty of 'aesthetic control' – the unclouded beauty, beauty unspoiled by the fear of danger, guilty conscience or apprehension of shame – is its inconsequentiality. This control will not intrude into the realities of the controlled. It will not limit their options. It puts the spectator into the director's chair – with the actors unaware of who is sitting there, of the chair itself, even of being potential objects of the director's attention. Aesthetic control, unlike any other, gruesome or sinister social control which it playfully emulates, allows to thrive the contingency of life which social spacing strove to confine or stifle. Inconsequentiality of aesthetic control is what makes its pleasures unclouded . . . I make them (people) into whatever I wish. I am in charge; I invest their encounter with meaning. (Bauman, 1993: 6)

The asymmetrical nature of aesthetic experience is captured by Bauman, yet the ramifications of this form of social asymmetry when broadened out into a mode of 'being in the world' tend to be rendered harmless. There appears to be a conceptual slippage concerning the aestheticization of daily experience. Simply put, modes of aesthetic experience concerning the appreciation of a painting or of a piece of music need to be distinguished from aestheticizing the practices of everyday life. Bauman, despite his interest in the nature of 'moral' spaces of experience, fails to note this distinction. Axel Honneth (1995), in contrast to this, perceives the aesthetic as inversely proportional to the realization of a habitable social:

I think all concepts of the 'post-modern' have at least one affirmative feature in common, viz. To see in the process of the 'dissolution of the social' the chance for an expansion of aesthetic freedom for individuals. (p. 23)

Aesthetic colonization plays a significant role in the daily use of Walkmans. They are used both as a mundane accompaniment to the everyday and as a way of aestheticizing and controlling that very experience. Its use greatly expands the possibilities of users to aesthetically recreate their daily experience. Structurally, Walkmans permit users to take their 'personalized' sound worlds with them virtually anywhere. Walkman sound is direct, with headphones placed directly in the ears of the user, thereby overlaying the random sounds of the environment they pass through. Walkman users construct their own privatized space of reception between themselves and the sounds of the Walkman. Theirs is an intimate space of reception:

“It fills the space whilst you’re walking. It also changes the atmosphere. If you listen to music you really like and you’re feeling depressed it can change the atmosphere around you.”  
(Catherine)

Walkman use creates a particularly intimate space of reception for users in which representational space<sup>9</sup> becomes primarily an aural space which can take on the form of ‘spectacle’ (Debord, 1977). These experiences are often referred to as ‘filmic’ in nature, yet what makes them filmic is precisely the sound accompaniment to Walkman experience:

“Everything becomes filmic. When you see things and when you have music on you hear a sound. I know that when you put music on to an actual image it becomes part of it.” (Mags)

“Without a Walkman, you wouldn’t, you might not even wonder. It’s no significance. Suddenly, you’re listening to 1492 and it’s like ‘are they lovers?’ You get caught up. You look at things differently, the pond, the flowers become more flowery. Things are enhanced, moments are enhanced . . . when there’s music I think less. It becomes more my journey. It becomes more emotional. It becomes more a sensory experience and it’s lovely.” (Dorinda)

“It’s sort of like making my life a film. Like you have the sound, the soundtrack in the back . . . It enables me to sort of bring my own dreamworld. Because I have the familiar sounds with my music that I know and sort of cut out people. So the music is familiar. I can go into my perfect dreamworld where everything is as I want it . . . Everything is exactly as I want it. Everybody is nice, everybody is happy, everyone is beautiful. The sun is always shining. I can do whatever I like.” (Magnus)

Almost any experience can be construed as filmic by Walkman users.<sup>10</sup> Music does not merely function as a definer of the experience in a determinate way but, rather, appears to be the necessary spark to a spectrum of aesthetic recreations. These examples indicate the powerful aesthetic impulse behind the desire to control the meaning and nature of the social spaces passed through by Walkman users. This aestheticized space appears also to be a moral space in which users prioritize their own experience.

## WALKMAN USE AND SOUND TOURISM

For Fitzcarraldo his journey across the Amazon is both an adventure and a way in which he constructs his own narrative. The Amazon provides the backcloth to this. The music of Caruso provides him not with a desire to be elsewhere but rather makes the experience what it is. The Amazon and Fitzcarraldo's experience become one as he imposes himself onto the space thus inhabited. Equally Odysseus makes himself through the construction of his own manufactured privatized soundworld. These examples merely indicate a trajectory or moment in Western sound desire. The implications of this sound history have recently been commented upon by Philip Bohlman (2000) who argues that, 'In order to invest itself with the power to control and maintain its external domination and its internal order, Europe has consistently employed music to imagine its selflessness' (p. 188).

The sounds of Caruso enable Fitzcarraldo to exert order and control over himself. Odysseus, as we have seen, carries the internalized song of the Sirens within him as he travels whilst Walkman users equally inhabit their own privatized spaces. They carry their culture with them in the form of mediated sounds wherever they go. Their response to the spaces they inhabit might be indifference, aestheticization or a strategy to exclude 'others'.

The control exerted by Walkman users over the mundane everyday is replicated in their habitation of the 'far away'. Whilst Walkman users habitually construct their soundworlds as they travel to and from work or school, they often also take them with them on holiday. The following Walkman user plays book tapes as she walks through the Peak District whilst on holiday:

"If I'm going to the Peak District I normally find time to take a longer walk on my own and *Wuthering Heights* is just perfect. Because I know the books very well. I know the different scenes and I know exactly how each scene's going to look. If I'm in the Yorkshire Dales then it's *Jane Eyre*. It fits the book." (Sue)

Users also ski, dive, sunbathe and relax to Walkman sounds. Walkman users can mediate their experience of the culturally and spatially different through sound:

"I take it everywhere I go [in Cairo]. It makes me think I'm home. It just makes you feel you're back. You're just with everyone else." (Dina)

This user doesn't wish to be where she is, she rather imagines being back home. More typically, the following user experiences her holiday more in terms of a consumer event narrated through mediated sound:

“I use it lying on the beach. You need music when you’re tanning yourself. There’s the waves and everybody’s around. You just need your music. On the plane we were listening to Enigma and things like that. It fitted in . . . It livens everything up. Everything’s on a higher level all the time. It makes it seem a bit busier. You get excited. Everything’s happening.” (Donna)

For this user Walkman sound harmonizes the environment to her mood and enhances her experience by helping her to create her ‘perfect’ environment:

“I have the warmth but I don’t have all the crap around me. I can eliminate that and I can get much more out of what the ocean has to offer me. I can enjoy. I feel that listening to my music, I can really pull the sun’s rays. Not being disturbed by screaming kids and all that shouting which is not why I went there. I went to have harmony with the sea and sun. The plane journey, flying out and back you listen to different music, but it just helps me to still my mind and to centre myself and I feel that by taking this tape with me I’m carrying that all day and I feel that I’m able to take more from the day and give more to the day. Whether that’s right or wrong I don’t know but that’s how I feel.” (Jay)

The environment becomes re-appropriated and experienced as part of the user’s desire. Through listening to ‘her’ music the listener gets more out of the environment, not by interacting with it, but precisely by not interacting with it. Jay describes herself as personally receiving her environment through Walkman sounds. There is only the sun, her body and her music. This indicates that Walkman use can make the environment ‘what it is’ for users. The environment is received as a personal artefact via the Walkman. This is achieved by users repossessing space as part of, or constitutive of, their desire. This provides a clear example of the way Walkman users might ‘colonize’ and ‘appropriate’ the here and now as part of their ‘re-inscribing’ of habitable space. They might be described as the privatized Fitzcarraldos of contemporary consumer culture or as sound consumers of a manufactured intimacy.

#### THE INTIMATE SOUND OF WALKMAN USE

The quoted extracts also point to the intimate nature of users’ ‘inhabited’ soundworld. Just as, for Kracauer’s radio listeners for whom the radio

'speaks' just to them, so Odysseus is in intimate communion or rapture with the Siren song and Fitzcarraldo's 'jungle' is transformed into his jungle through the singing of Caruso, so Walkman users experience the world as a form of 'we-ness'.<sup>11</sup>

"I don't necessarily feel that I'm there. Especially if I'm listening to the radio. I feel I'm there, where the radio is, because of the way, that is, he's talking to me and only me and no one else around me is listening to that. So I feel like, I know I'm really on the train, but I'm not really . . . I like the fact that there's someone still there." (Mandy)

Mandy uses her Walkman to travel with on the bus and the Tube across London each day. The travelling time is four hours. She likes to listen to the radio on her Walkman as well as to taped music. She listens to music habitually, waking up to it and going to sleep to it. The Walkman appears initially to constitute a form of company for her whilst she is alone, creating a zone of intimacy and immediacy. This sense of intimacy and immediateness appears to be built into the very structure of the auditory medium itself.<sup>12</sup> Mandy describes herself as being where the music or the DJ is. Her experience constitutes an imaginary journey within a real journey. She is 'connected' and the space of reception might be described as a form of mobile home. Walkman users live in a world of technologically mediated sounds and images in which states of 'we-ness' are learnt and embedded in communication consumption in the home and elsewhere through television, radio and music reception (Denzin, 1995; Silverstone, 1994). The intimacy of a world experienced through mediated and technologized sound becomes a taken-for-granted backcloth for Walkman users' daily experience:

"I can't go to sleep at night without my radio on. I'm one of those people. It's really strange. I find it very difficult. I don't like silence. I'm not that sort of person. I like hearing things around me. It's like hearing that there's a world going on sort of thing. I'm not a very alone person. I will always have something on. I don't mind being by myself as long as I have something on."  
(Mandy)

Mandy goes on to describe her feeling of centredness, of being secure with her Walkman precisely by excluding the extraneous noises of the world around her:

“Because I haven’t got the external sort of noises around me I feel I’m in a bit of a world of my own because I can’t really hear so much of what is going on around me.” (Mandy)

Walkman use thus creates both the experience of being ‘cocooned’ by separating the user from the world beyond and simultaneously creating a different ‘space’ whereby the user moves outwards into the public realm of communication ‘culture’ through a private act of reception, thereby becoming absorbed into it. Mandy, for example, does not perceive herself as being ‘alone’ but understands that neither is she ‘really there’. This ambiguity of the space of reception in mediated soundworlds is similar to Kracauer’s (1995) account of radio listeners.

Sound transforms the space of habitation for users. The ‘outside’ world becomes a function of the desire of the user and is maintained through time through the act of listening. The world is brought into line but only through a privatized yet mediated act of cognition.

“Because when you have the Walkman it’s like having company. You don’t feel lonely. It’s your own environment. It’s like you’re doing something pleasurable you can do by yourself and enjoy it. I think it creates a sense of kind of aura sort of like. Even though it’s directly in your ears you feel like it’s all around your head. You’re really aware it’s just you, only you can hear it. It makes you feel individual. Listening also constitutes ‘company’. If there’s the radio there’s always somebody talking. There’s always something happening.” (Alice)

This is contrasted to the observation that nothing is happening if there is no musical accompaniment to experience. The aura which the user inhabits collapses. The nature of a world of ‘we-ness’ is a world accompanied by mediated messages of culture. When the Walkman is switched off the ‘we-ness’ falls away and the user is left in a void. Walkman users often describe feelings of being ‘deserted’ when the music stops. For users whose everyday experience is increasingly mediated through sound, the lack of sound potentially diminishes their experience:

“It also changes the atmosphere as well. If you listen to music you really like and you’re feeling depressed it can change the atmosphere around you. It livens everything up. Everything’s on a higher level all the time. It makes you a bit busier. You get excited. Everything’s happening.” (Sara)

Walkman users often describe their experience as heightened and invigorated. Their sense of space is one in which the distinction between private mood or orientation and their surroundings is abolished. The world becomes one with the experience of the Walkman user as against any threatened disjunction between the two. Walkman use colonizes space for users, transforming their mood, orientation and the reach of their experience (Silverstone, 1994). The quality of these experiences is dependent upon the continued use of the Walkman:

“It’s a little like another person. You can relate to it. You get something from it . . . You relate to it as if it’s another person. Though you can’t speak to it. The silence is freaky for me, that is kind of scary. It’s almost like a void if you like.” (Jade)

“It’s like when you’re in a pub and they stop the music. It’s an anticlimax. Everyone just stops. You don’t know what to say.” (Sara)

Switching off becomes tantamount to killing off their private world and returning them to the diminished space and duration of the disenchanted and mundane outside world. Users need their Walkmans in everyday life, just as Fitzcarraldo needed the sounds of Caruso in the jungle to make and enhance its meaning for him.

## CONCLUSION

Walkman practices of aesthetic colonization appear to be both utopian, and hence transcendent in character, as well as being located firmly in alienating and objectifying cultural predispositions that deny difference within culture (Sennett, 1990).

The absence of encounters with different subjects is more restful, since it never puts our own identity into question. (Todorov, 1993: 344)

Equally for Adorno, according to Honneth (1993), the consumer:

. . . can stabilise their identity only through continual exclusion of all sense experience that threatens to impair the direct pursuit of the principle of control. (p. 45)

My brief analysis of Walkman users’ construction of their aurally mediated experience points to users as both colonized and colonizing. The analysis appears to suggest that users negate notions of ‘difference’ in order

to inhabit a transcendent and safe space of experience that is characterized as a managed and controlled space which might be referred to as a sonorous envelope (Anzieu, 1989).

Sound and forms of ontological security appear to be closely related in the world of Walkman desires.<sup>13</sup> If consumers are seeking 'ontological' security through consumption, then the consumption of 'sound' is highly successful in operationalizing this desire. States of 'we-ness' are indeed states of ontological security. Walkman users' sense of 'being in the world' comes about through the re-inscription of the everyday through the technologies of the Walkman and reproduced sound. These strategies are neither merely emotional nor cognitive but both. Users are cognitively active in their construction of ontic security which itself is the result of the construction of a virtual connection, of a 'being-with' the products of the culture industry. Hence, Walkman users place great faith in the ability of their Walkman to actually deliver what they want. Walkman use can produce a powerful sense of centredness, of being in 'control', enabling the user to manage their thoughts, emotions, memories together with their relationship to the world which they inhabit. Just as Odysseus and Fitzcarraldo controlled their soundscapes, so the urban consumer might be seen as not so much protecting the site of experience from others as creating, albeit ambiguously, a utopian space of habitation. The fragility of this space is rendered more secure as the space becomes 'occupied' by signifiers of an imaginary and reassuring presence in the form of chosen sound. The Sirens hold no fears for today's Walkman user and neither are they overtly concerned with impressing the 'other' with the cultural status of the West as Fitzcarraldo was. Today's Walkman user often experiences everyday life in a conceptual space somewhere between that of Odysseus and Fitzcarraldo. The sounds of 'home' as experienced by Odysseus through knowledge becomes, for Fitzcarraldo, the jungle re-inscribed through the voice of Caruso, whereas Walkman users habitually aestheticize their daily experience through sound in order to transcend their geographical space and manage their own sense of presence in the world. Listening takes them away from the mundanity of their domestic place, their domestic thoughts and desires. The spaces of urban culture become both their 'jungle' and a domesticated but effective Siren song. Walkman sounds enable users to order and prioritize their desire for other emotional, spatial and conceptual spaces to live in. The power to individually transform the world at will becomes a seductive desire within an auditized consumer culture. Its pre-history is to be found in the sound spaces between the stories of Odysseus, Fitzcarraldo and Kracauer's radio listener. This story, however, remains to be fully written.

## Notes

1. The ethnographic material comes from a study of Walkman users that I conducted between 1994 and 1996 and consisted primarily of in-depth qualitative interviews with over 60 Walkman users living in and around London. The interviewees represented a cross section of users in terms of age, gender, ethnicity and occupation. Walkman users proved to be particularly elusive subjects. By the very act of wearing a Walkman, users are sending out 'do not disturb' messages. Younger users came from schools, colleges and youth clubs. Other users were contacted in their place of work through contacts and contacts of contacts. Perhaps the difficulty of contact is one explanation as to why in the Open University text on the Sony Walkman (Du Gay et al., 1997) no attempt is made to interview Walkman users despite a chapter being given over to consumption practices of users. Later in the article I discuss Walkman practices through user accounts. However it is not the case that I am presenting an essentialized account of Walkman users. The Walkman permits a variety of structural uses and within this structure individual users construct their own pattern of use. For a fuller discussion on methodology see Bull (2000).
2. Sound of course presents its own difficulties of study. Given the ephemeral character of sound, how are we to discuss its presence before the age of sound reproduction? However, an increasing number of scholars are now addressing the issue of sound in pre-industrial culture through the use of an array of innovative research methods (Alain Corbin, 1998; Richard Leppert, 1993; Leigh Eric Schmidt, 2000; Bruce Smith, 1999; Mark Smith, 2000). Equally, the role of sound in the 19th and 20th centuries is increasingly becoming a researched area, Douglas Kahn's (1999) brilliant exposition of avant-garde sound being a case in point.
3. Throughout this article I take the position that the organization of the senses is historically and culturally constituted so that notions of 'looking' and 'hearing' are mediated by cultural practices and strategies.
4. Schafer, in *The Tuning of the World* (1977), uses the term 'soundscape' to describe the total experienced acoustic environment. This includes all noises, musical, natural and technological. Schafer, a composer by trade, was concerned to analyse the changing historical and cultural configuration of soundscapes, arguing that it is necessary to understand what effect the configuration of sounds in our environment has in shaping human behaviour.
5. Adorno (1991) was aware of the way in which mechanically reproduced sound transformed areas of everyday life previously untouched:

Loudspeakers installed in the smallest night clubs to amplify the sound until it becomes literally unbearable: everything is to sound like the radio. (p. 58)

Equally, Kracauer (1995) describes the transformation of space from individual to collective space through sound:

Even in the café, where one wants to roll up into a ball like a porcupine and become aware of one's insignificance, an imposing loudspeaker effaces every trace of private existence. (p. 333)

For more on the history of the phonograph and its use and significance see Day (2000), Gitelman (1999) and Kittler (1999).

6. Connor (2000) has recently pointed to this routinization of technological innovations:

Although there were some who were intrigued and amazed by the new invention, in many ways, the contemporary reaction of the coming of the telephone seems to have been 'about time too'. The telephone had been in use only for months before users began wondering irritably why the sound quality was so poor . . . In periods like the late nineteenth century, and like our own, in which the technological imagination outruns technological development itself, new inventions have a way of seeming out of date, or used up, on their arrival, like a birthday present with which you have been secretly playing in advance. (p. 411)

However I wish to point out the attraction that these routinized forms of consumption have in terms of the successful managing of experience.

7. Throughout this article the reader will be aware that I use music and sound interchangeably. This is not to deny their distinctiveness. However I wish to foreground the nature of sound's proximity to users and the power it gives them relationally rather than discuss the distinctive role of music over the voice. For example, Kracauer's radio listeners are listening to the 'voice' as do some Walkman users. Schafer (1993) has recently pointed to the foregrounding of music in Western urban experience:

Music . . . is the ultimate transcendence of space by sound. For music, freeing itself from objects entirely, moves us quite beyond ourselves and the ordinary, Euclidean geometry of streets and highrises, walls and maps. It is the last kind of sound we really listen to, the last we have allowed to possess us. (pp. 38–9)

8. Thus the proposition that 'reversibility is inherent in the very structure of visual perception' (Levin, 1988: 333) becomes historicized through the technological medium of the Walkman.
9. Representational space refers to:

. . . space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users' . . . This is the dominated – and hence passively experienced – space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its object . . . Representational space is alive: it speaks. It has an effective kernel or centre: Ego, bed, bedroom, dwelling house; or square, church, graveyard. It embraces the loci of passion, of action and lived situations . . . It may be directional, situational or relational, because it is essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic. (Lefebvre, 1991: 39–42)

Lefebvre's understanding of space, however, is largely visually orientated and drifts into one that is passively experienced. Lefebvre's subjects are colonized by the spaces they inhabit by claiming that lived space is passively experienced as a 'given' with the imaginary or symbolic activity of the individual appearing to be fully colonized by saturated forms of representational space:

Living bodies, the bodies of 'users' – are caught up not only in the toils of parcelised space, but also in the web of what philosophers call 'analogons'; images, signs, symbols. These bodies are transported out of themselves and emptied out as it were, via the eyes; every kind of appeal, incitement and seduction is mobilised to tempt them with doubles of themselves in prettified, smiling and happy poses; this campaign to void them succeeds exactly to the degree that the images correspond to the 'needs' that those same images have helped to fashion. So it is that a massive influx of information, of messages, runs head into an inverse flow constituted by the evacuation from the innermost body of all life and desire. (p. 99)

For Lefebvre even the 'overlaying' of physical space by the imagination merely constitutes an additional form of superimposed or structurally determined meaning. Yet in my account we see subjects as managing the flow of sounds in a manner that is not fully explained by the colonization of desire. The desirer also colonizes the spaces of habitation.

10. Walkman use suggests a reconfiguration of the visual to the auditory. I suggest in this article that the auditory is not always dependent upon the visual but that it can help to constitute or reconfigure the visual. Connor (2000) has recently supported this contention:

It is also possible for the ear to borrow and internalise some of the substantiating powers of the eye, and to mould from them a kind of sonorous depth, a space sustained by and enacted through the experience of sound and hearing alone. Under these circumstances, sound is not integrated into the domain of vision, but offers to create an alternative domain of its own, in the production of a sonorous space, a sense of volume, depth, and shape seemingly formed by and from sound itself. (p. 21)

11. States of 'we-ness' or 'being with' refer to the substitution of direct experience by technologically mediated forms of experience. Adorno highlights the auratic quality of music together with its integrative function. The subject's desire to transcend the everyday through music is central as is their desire to remain 'connected' to specific cultural products. The nature of this connection constitutes for Adorno a state of 'we-ness'. The 'social' undergoes a transformation through the colonization of 'representational space' by forms of communication technology, and the 'site' of experience is subsequently transformed, thus changing the subject's 'interiority'. This transformation is replicated phenomenologically in daily life. States of 'we-ness' might be seen as colonizing the Walkman user's desire for social attachment, thereby creating new forms of experiential dependency within the emancipatory desire of the user.
12. See Adorno and Eisler (1994):

Music is supposed to bring out the spontaneous, essentially human element in its listeners and in virtually all human relations . . . acoustic perception preserves comparably more traits of long bygone, pre-individualistic collectivities than optical perception. (p. 21)

13. See Giddens (1991):

The confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self identity and in the constancy of the surrounding material environments of action. A sense of the reliability of persons and things, so central to the notion of trust, is basic to feelings of ontological security; hence the two are psychologically related. Ontological security has to do with 'being', or in the terms of phenomenology, 'being in the world'. But it is an emotional, rather than a cognitive phenomenon. (p. 2)

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