



Soundscapes of the Car

A Critical Study of Automobile Habitation

Michael Bull

When I get in my car I turn on my radio. I haven't got a journey to make before I get home. I'm already home. I shut my door, turn on my radio and I'm home. I wind the windows down so I can hear what's going on and sometimes as the sun's setting and I'm in town and I think. Wow. What a beautiful city that I'm living in, but it's always at the same time when that certain track comes on. It's a boost.

(Automobile user)

Today the highway might well be the site of the radio's most captive audiences, its most attentive audience. The car is likely to be your most intensive radio experience, perhaps even your most intensive media experience altogether. Usually radio is a background medium, but in the car it becomes all-pervasive, all consuming . . . the car radio envelops you in its own space, providing an infinite soundtrack for the external landscape that scrapes the windshield. The sound of the radio fills up the car encapsulates you in walls made of words.

(Loktev 1993)

For twenty-five centuries Western knowledge has tried to look upon the world. It has failed to understand that the world is not for beholding. It is for hearing . . . Now we must learn to judge a society by its noise.

(Attali 1985)

To each his own bubble, that is the law today.

(Baudrillard 1993)

This chapter discusses the manner in which we lay claim to the spaces we inhabit through the automobile. While it is commonplace to comment upon the automobile as a technological extension of the driver, in this chapter I focus specifically upon the auditory nature of that technological form of habitation. I do so in order to discuss the specific relational qualities attached to driving to mediated sound in the form of radio or cassette sound. The nature of this aural technological habitation will be discussed through the use of qualitative interview material filtered through an eclectic mix of critical theory.

The metaphor of the car as a home has a long anecdotal history in cultural theory. The root of this is discerned in the automobile as metaphor for the dominant Western values of individualism and private property, which is coupled to the romantic imagery embodied in travel as signifying individual freedom. The cultural meaning of the automobile as a privatized entity is inscribed into its very origin. From the move away from travelling collectively in trains at the beginning of the twentieth century (Sachs 1992), to the discomfort of inhabiting restricted spaces with strangers (Simmel 1997) to the desire for smooth, unbroken journeys unfettered by timetables (Urry 1999); these concerns have become embodied in everyday attitudes towards automobile use.¹ The image of mobile and free dwelling on the road denotes the representation of the heroic period of the automobile made mass and democratic. Yet this very democratization of autonomy and control is mediated by the power of the car, hence is dependent. This observation prompted Adorno to remark in 1942: 'And which driver is not tempted, merely by the power of the engine, to wipe out the vermin of the street, pedestrians, children and cyclists?' (Adorno 1974: 40). This description of 'road rage' also signifies the contradictory nature of the automobile embodied in everyday use whereby the driver is simultaneously all-powerful and controlled, not just by technology of the automobile, but by other drivers and the road system itself. The values embodied in the car also rest uneasily with a growing antipathy to the mundane nature of many aspects of urban everyday life for car users (Sennett 1990; Bauman 1993). Jacobson, catches the ambivalence of control while at the driving wheel:

In the car you are physically cocooned . . . It is the last private space in an overwhelmingly public world, the nearest we get to a lavatory at the bottom of the garden, where people once went to have a little time to

them. Thus does the motor car perpetuate it. The worse it gets on the roads, the more we seek the solace of our vehicle. This is the way the world will end – trillions of us fleeing Armageddon, one per car. (Jacobson 2000)

The contradiction appears to be resolved by the nature of automobile habitation itself. Jacobson's metaphor of the garden lavatory is instructive: the car as a private, traditional immobile space of habitation. Yet traditionally Jacobson's escapees retreated into spaces of silence, to be alone with their thoughts. Car habitation, in contrast to this, is infused with multiple sounds. The aural privacy of the automobile is gained precisely through the exorcizing of the random sounds of the environment by the mediated sounds of the cassette or radio.

You have to get it above the noise of the car . . . You switch off to the noise of the car because it's the same noise you get all the time. (Sharon)

The automobile as sound environment has been commented upon by Stockfeld:

The car is one of the most powerful listening environments today, as one of the few places where you can listen to whatever you like, as loud as you like, without being concerned about disturbing others, and even singing along a the top of your voice – the car is the most ubiquitous concert hall and the 'bathroom' of our time. (Stockfeld 1994: 33)

We can see from this that descriptions of automobile habitation are awash with domestic metaphors of habitation. More recently the car as 'home' is described as becoming increasingly filled with gadgets to make the driver feel even more at 'home'. Automobiles are increasingly represented as safe technological zones protecting the drivers from the road and, paradoxically, from themselves.

I want to suggest that the nature of this 'dwellingness' has changed from 'dwelling on the road' to 'dwelling in the car' . . . car drivers control the social mix in their car just like homeowner control those visiting their home. The car has become a 'home from home', a place to perform business, romance, family, friendship, crime and so on . . . The car driver is surrounded by control systems that allow a simulation of the domestic environment, a home from home moving flexibly and riskily through strange environments. (Urry 1999: 16–17)

There has indeed been a shift in the nature and meaning of automobile habitation, which I locate in the development of the automobile as a creator of a mediated soundscape (Schafer 1977). I suggest that the historical turning point between 'dwelling on the road' and 'dwelling in the car' can be located in a very specific technological development: the placing of a radio within the automobile. This has radically transformed the nature of driving and the driver's experience of space, time and place. Thus, an understanding of automobile habitation should focus upon the mediated aural nature of that experience. The custom fitting of radios into cars began in the early 1960s, and by the 1970s they were standard equipment in most cars. This was followed by the development of portable tape decks installed in automobiles:

Tape decks made music consumers mobile, indeed automobile . . . Thus the American mass market was opened up by the car playback system. The mediated sound of the radio and later the cassette deck produce their own specific aural relational qualities. (Kittler 1999: 108)

Automobile habitation is usefully understood as representing wider social transformations in which the intimate nature of an industrialized soundworld in the form of radio sounds, recorded music, and television increasingly represent large parts of a privatized everyday lifeworld of urban citizens. This affects habitual everyday notions of what it might mean to 'inhabit' certain spaces such as, the automobile, the street, the shopping arcade or indeed the living room.

Music was no longer a necessarily public, communal experience, but could be heard at home, divorced from the settings in which it was originally produced. Sound recording, then, gave a powerful boost to the 'privatization' of experience, which may have held to be a fundamental aspect of twentieth-century culture (Crissell 1986: 26).

The nature of these everyday aural privatized experiences has, however, remained unexplored, or rather 'invisible' in accounts of everyday life that rather prioritize the visual nature of that experience. Cultural and urban accounts of everyday experience tend to locate experience in a form of visual silence thereby ignoring the specific relational qualities attached to aural experience. These relational qualities will be sketched out in the following section before I describe the everyday nature of audited automobile habitation.

Sounding out Experience

If the world is for hearing, as Attali suggests, then there exists an unexplored gulf between the world according to sound and the world according to sight. Sound has its own distinctive relational qualities; as Berkeley observed, 'sounds are as close to us as our thoughts' (quoted in Ree 1999: 36). Sound is essentially non-spatial in character, or rather sound engulfs the spatial, thus making the relation between subject and object problematic. Sound inhabits the subject just as the subject might be said to inhabit sound, whereas vision, in contrast to sound, represents distance, the singular, the objectifying (Jay 1993). Therefore aural relational experience might well differ from a more visually orientated one. This is not to suggest that they are mutually exclusive but merely to suggest that the relational nature of a technologized auditory experience differs epistemologically from an explanation that prioritizes the visual. In the following pages I argue that technologies of sound affect automobile drivers' relation to the spaces they inhabit in very specific ways. In doing so I draw upon Lefebvre's understanding of social space together with the early work of Adorno, whose work on technology and the historical construction of the senses has been largely neglected or misunderstood.

What then are the relational qualities of sound in the car and what do forms of aural habitation consist of? In the following pages I draw upon empirical accounts of automobile habitation and reflect on the specifically aural qualities of that experience. The inhabiting of automobile space has cognitive, aesthetic and moral significance that are all relational in so much as they inform us of the ways in which car users relate to their surroundings, others and themselves.² By focusing upon the auditory and the technologized nature of everyday experience of automobile users, I explain their attempts at creating manageable sites of habitation.

Sounding out Automobile Habitation

The proximity of the aural defines car habitation for many drivers. Drivers often describe the discomfort of spending time in their cars with only the sound of the engine to accompany them. Driving without the mediation of music or the voice qualitatively changes the experience of driving. Many drivers habitually switch on their radio as they enter their automobile describing the space of the car as becoming energized as soon as the radio or music system is switched on:

In the mornings I feel relaxed when I get into my car. After rushing around getting ready, it's nice to unwind, put on my music and the heater and get myself ready for the day. (Jonathan)

I suppose I feel at ease. I put the radio on, put the keys in the ignition and I'm away. I've had new furry covers put on the car seats, so they are really comfortable and snug. In a way too, I suppose after getting out of the house, getting into Ruby (the car) is a way for me to relax and unwind. (Alexandra)

It comes on automatically when I switch the ignition on. Like I never switch the power off, so it automatically comes on as soon as I start the car. (Alicia)

Well it's on anyway. When the car starts it switches on. So it comes on automatically. (Gale)

I can't even start my car without music being on. It's automatic. Straight away, amplifiers turned on. Boom boom! (Kerry)

Mediated sound becomes a component part of what it is to drive. The sound of music competes with the sound of the engine and the spaces outside the automobile. Adorno in his early work describes this aural proximity in terms of states of 'we-ness', which refers to the substitution of 'direct' experience by a mediated, technologized form of aural experience. Music or recorded sound is both colonizing and utopian, according to Adorno, as it increasingly fills the spaces of 'habitation' in everyday Western culture. Recorded sound, according to Adorno

Takes the place of the utopia it promises. By circling people, by enveloping them – as inherent in the acoustical phenomenon – and turning them as listeners into participants, it contributes ideologically to the integration which modern society never tires of achieving in reality. It leaves no room for conceptual reflection between itself and the subject, and so it creates an illusion of immediacy in a totally mediated world, a proximity between strangers, of warmth for those who come to feel the chill of the unmitigated struggle of all against all. Most important among the functions of consumed music – which keeps evoking memories of a language of immediacy – may be that it eases men's suffering under the universal mediations, as if one were still living face to face in spite of it all. (Adorno 1976: 46)

Without necessarily endorsing the implied totalitarian nature of technology in the above quotation, Adorno's insight is significant in its heightening of the auratic quality of music together with its integrative and utopian function. The subjective desire to transcend the everyday through music becomes a focal point of his analysis, as is the desire to remain 'connected' to specific cultural products. The nature of this 'connection' constitutes the state of 'we-ness'. The 'social' thus undergoes a transformation through the colonization of representational space by forms of communication technology, and the 'site' of experience is subsequently transformed.³ Increasingly, for critical theorists, the technologically produced products of the culture industry, in all its forms, becomes a substitute for the subject's sense of the social, community or sense of place. This, for Adorno, produces consumers who become increasingly 'addicted' to using those products as a substitute for the above. Central to this is a transformed notion of relational experience:

Addicted conduct generally has a social component: it is one possible reaction too the atomisation which, as sociologists have noticed, parallels the compression of the social network. The addict manages to cope with the situation of social pressure, as well as his loneliness, by dressing it up, so to speak, as a reality of his own being; he turns the formula 'Leave me alone!' into something like an illusory private realm, where he thinks he can be himself. (Adorno 1976: 15)

Music, for Adorno, increasingly fills the gap left by the absence of any meaningful sense of the experienced social. Technology is perceived as paradoxically enhancing and increasingly constituting that impoverishment that, for Adorno, contributes to the dependency of the user/listener. Music, as such, becomes a substitute for community, warmth and social contact. In this isolated world of the listener a need arises to substitute or replace one's sense of insecurity with the products of the culture industry, leading to new forms of dependency. However, it is specifically from Adorno's recognition of an 'unfulfilled' articulated through the auditory that a potentially active formation of agency and intentionality might be developed. The aural nature of 'we-ness' can be charted in the behaviour of automobile users in their everyday experience. For many users the radio/sound are integral components of automobile habitation:

Well, the stereo's the most important thing in my car. I don't like driving especially if I'm doing long distances on the motorway. I have to have music. (Alicia)

It's lonely in the car. I like to have music. (Joan)

I don't like the dark anyway. But when it's really late at night and the streets are really deserted, I think that does help. You know. You turn it up or whatever and at night when I have the radio on, they have like 'Late Night Love' and it's just hearing other people's voices, and it's actually quite funny listening to stuff they say. I think if I didn't have that I would be a bit more freaked out about driving late at night. (Alice)

I put it on Radio 4, because I knew I had a long drive. So it depends what kind of drive, Radio 4, I wanted someone talking to me, yes, I need someone talking to me, so I put it on Radio 4. I want to be listening to a voice telling me about various bits of news, etc. (Sharon)

The talking stations are very much to key yourself into the world – to engage. (John)

It connects me to the world because you've got someone talking to you, to connect you. (Ben)

Automobile users thus appear to prefer inhabiting an accompanied soundscape. However, many drivers prefer this audited space to be occupied solely by themselves. Drivers often mention that the space of the car is preferably a privatized space.

As a private sphere the car is first and foremost a transportation environment, different in kind from the living, leisure and working spheres. For many drivers the time spent in the car may well be the only regular opportunity for reflection, voluntary solitude and concentrated listening to the radio or to record music, the only chance to do nothing without having to appear to be doing something else. In the car you can be at peace, you are whoever you like (Stockfelt 1994: 30).

It's a totally different environment. I like driving, I love driving on the road and you like driving on your own because it's a totally separate environment. It's a total indulgence, it's your environment. You control it. You can do whatever you like in it. It's like time off. You're travelling from A to B, but it's the ultimate idleness, really. You're not really doing anything

but listening. It's great . . . So when there's someone else in the car with you, you don't have so much control over the environment. You can't let go so much. (Sharon)

The privatized aural space of the car becomes a space whereby drivers reclaim time, away from the restrictions of the day. The mundane activity of the day is transformed into a personally possessed time. Listening to music/radio enhances the drivers' sense of time control/occupancy.

I always have the radio on when I'm driving on my own and I'm always really annoyed when people in the car with me don't want the radio on. I just enjoy really, especially if I'm doing a drive I do regularly, that, I can sort of switch off and also if I'm doing it at a similar time. I can key into the Radio 4 schedule, and I know where I am in reference to whatever's on the radio. (Susan)

It's my time. I'm at home. I feel that I'm in my own space. More so than I would be in a tube listening with a Walkman. I feel totally at home. I could stop the car in the middle of a lane and eat in my car . . . A lot of people used to say: Joyce doesn't have a room. She has a car. (Jo)

It's much more convenient to use my own car. I can relax, I listen to the Breakfast Show on Radio 1 and get into my own time. (Alexandra)

The sound of the radio voice or music fills up or overlays the contingency of driving, transforming the potential frustration associated with powerlessness into pleasurable, possessed time:

It's good if you're in a traffic jam 'cos you can just forget where you are and just listen to it. It's more background though. I usually sing along. (Gale)

I couldn't drive without music. Driving without music is too boring. (John)

Sometimes you can just lose an hour, I can completely forget say between Swindon and Cheltenham. It will be like, did I do that? Because I've been so involved in my music. It's like I'm on autopilot. (Lizzy)

It's really boring in a car without sound. I don't want to go on a journey in a car without a radio. (Mark)

Not only does time pass more pleurably, it is also potentially more predictable:

I always go at a certain time, so I always listen to the same programme, a dance programme. I look forward to it. The relax programme! (Sharon)

It's important that the same programme comes on at the same time. I feel I start the day when I listen to the day's Story at 9.45. (Susan)

I have a few favourite sings along tapes. These are for long journeys. I will have them on the side, on the passenger seat, a selection of tapes because you can't rely on the radio for such a long journey. (Lizzie)

The structure, duration and meaning of the journey are increasingly mediated by sound. While automobile drivers speak of the car in terms of 'home' the aural space of the car differs from that of the living room. Radio programmes or music listened to in the car do not repeat patterns of domestic consumption.

I think there's something specific about the car. There's a certain kind of sound you can achieve in the car that you can't at home. I think it's the smaller space. I just don't get the same feeling at home as I do in the car. I don't have the music on as loud at home. (In the car) I feel freer. (James)

I play it louder if I'm on my own and I let myself go a bit more if I'm on my own. (Gale)

Music or sound is chosen to suit the time of day or the mood of the driver.

I have to have it on loud [Radio 1]. Each track identity free, repetitious, high energy, that makes me drive very carelessly! (Susan)

I'm more likely to listen after work on the way home or when I'm doing something else because its much more relaxing and it's a different type of music as well. I'll listen to a dance station, such as Kiss or Radio 1 if they've got some good dance music on and that will make me feel good. And then there's the tapes. Tapes are reserved for those times when there's nothing on the radio. Then I've got my selection of tapes, and for long journeys - tapes are a way of recording how far you've got. So you change every 45 minutes. When you're on your own - so you say that journey will take four tapes. (Sharon)

Many drivers take a selection of tapes so as to be able to match their mood to the music. The music both enhances the time of the journey - the experience of driving itself - and enables drivers to control their thoughts:

It's about switching off, there's also the pleasure if I know I'm going out. Music is a way of shaking things off. (Susan)

The pleasure is definitely in the listening. I sometimes go and slap it on and get away from reality. (James)

The success of music/sound in transforming the experience of driving is largely dependent upon the intensity of sound. This means that all other sounds have to be masked by the aural sounds of the car:

If I'm on my own then I do have it on pretty loud. (Jo)

Especially along a motorway, I'll have it on really loud, cos there's nothing to do, I'm usually on a motorway when its dark anyway so I like to. It's really nice if I'm on my own - it's nice company, so I have it up loud. (Kate)

The aural space of the automobile thus becomes a safe and intimate environment inhabited by the mediated presence of consumer culture. Making the mobile, contingent nature of the journey into one that has the appearance of precisely the opposite of this. However this aural form of habitation often includes interaction with the drivers themselves contributing to the soundscape of the automobile.

Singing in the Car

The car is a space of performance and communication where drivers report being in dialogue with the radio or singing in their audited/ privatized space. Baudrillard's bubble (Baudrillard 1993) is however a fragile one, in which even aural absorption doesn't fully protect the aural bubble of habitation. The space of a car is both one to look out from and to be looked into. It is simultaneously private and public. Drivers both lose themselves in the pleasure of habitation and become increasingly aware of the 'look' of others. Many drivers sing or talk to their radio while driving:

Actually that's one thing I love about my car – she's all mine. I don't have to share her with anyone. I can do what I like in my car – with reason – I can turn the radio up full blast and have a good sing song without anyone looking at me. Actually, sometimes I suddenly realize that I'm merrily singing along, and the person in the next car is having a good laugh at me, but I forgot that people can see in and I get really embarrassed. (Alexandria)

I'll sing along at the top of my voice and I always worry what people in other cars think when they see me. They think I'm talking to myself or something . . . I just sing along all the time. I don't stop, like every song that comes on. Cos I watch a lot of music channels at home, so I know the words to a lot of songs. If I'm listening to the radio, I'll sing along to practically every song that comes on. (Alicia)

It's the embarrassment factor. When you're in your car and you get caught talking to the radio, dancing or smiling – it happens so regularly. When you're on the motorway, there's no one there, but in town, it's different. In town you switch to the fact that you're visible. (John)

I'm sitting there mouthing off to it. You talk, as you would any time when you're on your own. If the TV's on and there were some news programmes, I'd talk, like that's a load of rubbish, etc., I'd chatter away to it. (Sharon)

The space of the car becomes a free space in which the driver feels free to indulge his or her aural whims with no inhibitions. Houses have other occupants or neighbours to inhibit any such desire:

The louder the better. In fact, I use my car, I use it more than in the house, because I don't want to annoy the neighbours. But in the car, traffic is very noisy, so nobody can hear you. I sing incredibly loudly, especially on the motorway. In fact I have certain cassettes that I put on to sing incredibly loudly to. (Susan)

The sound of music together with the sound of their own voice acts so as to provide a greater sense of presence as well as transforming the time of driving. Drivers, even in the act of singing, are not, of course, hermetically sealed from the outside world. The very act of driving requires a steady focus on the road. Outside space becomes the space of the road before the driver. Drivers may well 'look' to music but more often report the intimacy of sound in their space. Sometimes this

auditory home encompasses the aestheticization of the world outside of the automobile:

When I'm sat in a traffic jam or at traffic lights, in town especially, to ease the boredom, I quite enjoy watching what's going on around me. I look in other people's cars, and watch people walking down the street. I like to see what they're doing and where they're going. As I am in my car a lot, I do need something to take away the boredom. The radio is good for that too. Actually I find music in the car changes how I look at the outside. It entertains me to watch other people with my music on. It is as if they are walking along to the music. (Richard)

Sound thus acts to transform the representational space of habitation, both within and outside of the automobile.

You and the car are one thing and that's it and that's your space. Outside it's different. You're in your own time capsule, it's like your living room, your mobile living room. (Sharon)

It's an extension of my space when I'm on the road. (Susan)

Drivers do experience their space as one that is hermetically sealed:

When you're in your car you don't notice the pollution even though you're in your car which is polluting the atmosphere. Somehow you don't notice it. And I do find when I'm in London and I'm on foot and I'm having to walk and get a tube I'm much more tired at the end of the day and actually have a headache. It does get to me a bit more. The chaos of the city. Whereas in my car I can be stuck in a traffic jam for three hours and it doesn't affect me. I stay calm. (Jo)

I think you're in your own little bubble. You're in your own little world and you have a certain amount of control and you don't have so much interruption. (John)

When I'm in my car with the radio on, nothing outside seems to matter. It's like I'm the only one who is really there, and everyone else, the drivers, the people walking by are not king of real. I suppose it seems like that because I'm shut off from other drivers. They don't seem real. (Alex)

This hermetically and aurally sealed form of living in a privatized public space also affects the driver's relation to the act of driving. Driving is invariably described as more pleasurable when accompanied by music or radio sound. Some drivers report avoiding certain kinds of music as they feel they might drive too quickly or get 'carried away' by the sweeping or emotional force of the music, but this is by no means universal. Equally drivers sometimes report moving or manoeuvring through traffic in a dance-like manner, as if the relation between the driver and the act of driving were essentially aesthetic. Descriptions of driving often take on a romantic or filmic resonance in the literature:

Who can resist keeping the station tuned to 'Born to be Wild' whilst racing down the interstate? Crankin' it up. Firin' up a cigarette. Rollin' down the windows. Exceedin' the speed limit . . . Dreamin of automotive decadence. (Locktev 1993: 206)

While this is of course one structural possibility of the aural experience of driving, it is incorrect to stereotype the aural experience of driving under this heroic banner. More interestingly, the following driver describes the simultaneous nature of listening and driving in which the private experience of listening is seen as paralleling the public occupancy of the road:

It's very strange, what happens. You're driving on a very low level in terms of your awareness of you're driving and you drive on this low level . . . This whole conversation is going on in your head with the radio which is on a totally separate level and you're absolutely, you feel 100 per cent aware of both. You're quite capable of taking in information from both, but they're both separate. (Sharon)

The Aural Management of Space and Time in the Car

Drivers spend an increasing amount of their daily lives in automobiles, often involved in mundane and repetitive journeys. The above analysis demonstrates a variety of practices in which the daily scripts of experience are continually rewritten. These areas of everyday life, undertaken in public spaces, have often been assumed to be 'unscripted' and void of interest. Automobile habitation rather sees inhabitants rewriting their daily scripts through the mediation of sound. The aural script of 'driving time' is imposed upon those mundane and routine periods of empty

time, thereby reclaiming and transforming them. Alternatively, the 'script' is extended into linear time in order to delay involvement in the 'bad' script of the unpleasurable and inevitable everyday. The need to reappropriate time and script it in as many activities as possible is indicated in the above analysis of automobile use. Automobile habitation permits an analysis of the ways in which drivers redraw the meaning of journey times thus confounding traditional dichotomous definitions of the partitioning of the everyday into meaningful/meaningless time:

We can happily become lost in the anonymous ritualised journeys to and from work, for we know that this surrenders nothing that is important to ourselves. We do not live or do identity work in these places. Real life is elsewhere. (Cohen and Taylor 1976: 50)

Automobile habitation, with its privatized sound world, rather represents a form of 'compensatory metaphysics' in which time is transformed and experience heightened. The aural habitation of place and time becomes a way of re-inscribing the ritual of everyday practices with the driver's own chosen, more meaningful set of 'rituals'. What becomes clear is that the notion that 'real life is elsewhere' is experienced negatively by many automobile users who use the radio or the cassette as a means to reclaiming significance in the present.

Automobiles appear to operate as symbolic 'sanctuaries' in which drivers operationalize strategies of 'centredness' (Sennett 1990). This sanctuary represents a physical zone of 'immunity' between the river and the world or space beyond. Historically this zone was thought to be imbued with qualities not attributable to the world beyond, as in the spaces of a church. Sennett attributes this withdrawal to recognition that the urban world is one of confusion and instability, lacking in any clear definition. The attempt to create order, stability and control within some 'inner' realm is understood in terms of a progressive 'privatization of experience' in the work of Sennett. Following Sennett, the automobile might constitute one of the last, albeit problematic, refuges of a retreating public subjectivity. The 'automobile sanctuary' is conceptually enhanced through privatized listening, which erects a convincing and intimate barrier between the subject and the exterior world. Automobile users consistently refer to the car through the metaphor of 'home'. Yet a home in which they are preferably the sole occupant accompanied by the sounds of the radio or CD. Adorno frequently dwells on the historical process in terms of the auditory 'colonization' of the 'site' of experience by the social network:

We might conceive a series leading from the man who cannot work without the blare of the radio to the one that kills time and paralyses loneliness by filling his ears with the illusion of 'being with' no matter what. (Adorno 1991: 16)

Adorno points to the problematic nature of the 'site' of experience whereby the subject dresses up this 'site' which is actually an 'illusory realm' filled out by society. However, the above analysis indicates that automobile habitation is not merely 'passive' in its constitution. While Adorno's analysis of auditory experience, like Lefebvre's understanding of representational space, drifts towards notions of the colonization of experience, an empirical understanding of automobile use suggests a more dialectical process in which drivers actively reconstruct their experience precisely through the mediated sounds of the culture industry. Such an analysis sheds light on the ambivalent relation to public spaces embedded in the everyday use of the automobile.

Notes

1. Sachs notes that: 'Far from being a mere means of transport, automobiles crystallise life plans and world images, needs and hopes, which in turn stamp the technological contrivance with a cultural meaning. In this interchange, culture and technology prove mutually reinforcing. Technology does not fall from the sky; rather, the aspirations of a society combine with technical possibility to inject a bit of culture into the design like a genetic code. Yet neither do lifestyle and desire emerge from the thin air of culture; instead they coalesce around a given technology' (Sachs 1992: 92).
2. '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' (Bauman 1993: 145).
3. If car use transforms the relationship between the driver and urban space then this relationship can be located conceptually within Lefebvre's understanding of representational space, by which he means: '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 or 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). The 'site' of experience exists for Lefebvre with representational space. This can be described phenomenologically in terms of the direction, situation and relation of the experiencing subject. Lefebvre's analysis is able to accommodate a qualitative, multi-layered and dynamic evaluation of experience in relation to its surroundings. However, in doing so Lefebvre appears to create an either/or dichotomy that sits uneasily with his otherwise fluid analysis of experience.

References

- An Investigation of the Safety Implications of Wireless Communication in Vehicles (1997), <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/research/wireless>.
- Adorno, T. (1974), *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, London: New Left Books.
- (1991), *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, London: Routledge.
- Arato, A. and Gebhardt, E. (eds) (1992), *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, New York: Continuum.
- Auge, M. (1995), *Non-places: Introduction to Anthropology of Supermodernity*, London: Verso.
- Bachelard, G. (1994), *The Poetics of Space: The Classical Look at how we Experience Intimate Places*, Boston: Beacon Press.
- Baudrillard, J. (1993), *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, London: Sage.
- Bauman, Z. (1993), *Postmodern Ethics*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Bose, A. MIT Archives, MC 261, *Hifi for GM Cars*, lecture 3/19/84 to EECs Seminar, 2 audiocassettes.
- Brodsky, W. (2002), 'The Effects of Music Tempo on Simulated driving Performance and Vehicular Control', in *Transportational Research Part F*, Oxford: Pergamon Press, pp. 219–41.
- Brown, B., Green, N. and Harper, R. (eds) (2002), *Wireless World. Social and Interactional Aspects of the Mobile Age*, London: Springer.
- Cohen, S. and Taylor, L. (1976), *Escape Attempts*, London: Routledge.
- Crissel, A. (1986), *Understanding Radio*, London: Routledge.
- Frisby, D. and Featherstone, M. (eds) (1997), *Simmel on Culture*, London: Sage.
- Horkheimer, M. and Adorno, T. (1973), *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, London: Penguin.

- Jarviluoma, H. (ed.) (1994), *Soundscape. Essays on Vroom and Moo*, Tampere: Tampere University Press.
- Kay, K. (1997), *Asphalt Nation. How the Automobile Took Over America and How We Can Take it Back*, Berkeley CA: University of California Press.
- Lefebvre, H. (1991), *The Production of Space*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Loktev, J. (1993), 'Static Motion, or the Confessions of a Compulsive Radio Driver', *Semiotexte VI* (1): 37–53.
- Miller, D. (ed.) (2001), *Car Cultures*, Oxford: Berg.
- O'Connell, S. (1998), *The Car in British Society*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Robinson, J and R. Putnam (1999), *Time For Life. The Surprising Ways Americans Use Their Time*, Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Sachs, W. (1992), *For Love of the Automobile. Looking Back into the History of our Desires*. Berkeley CA: University of California Press.
- Schafer, R. (1977), *The Tuning of the World*, New York: Knopf.
- Schivelbusch, W. (1986), *The Railway Journey. The Industrialisation of Time and Space in the 19th Century*. Berkeley CA: University of California Press.
- Sennett, R. (1990), *The Conscience of the Eye*, London: Faber & Faber.
- (1994), *Flesh and Stone. The Body and the City in Western Civilization*, New York: Norton.
- Simmel, G. (1997), 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', in Frisby, D. and Featherstone, M., *Simmel on Culture*, London: Sage.
- Sloboda, J. A. (1999), 'Everyday Use of Music Listening: A Preliminary Study', in Suk Won Yi (ed.), *Mind, Music and Science*, Seoul: Western Music Institute, pp. 354–69.
- Stockfeld, O. (1994), *Cars, Buildings, Soundscapes* in Jarviluoma, H., *Soundscape. Essays on Vroom and Moo*, Tampere: Tampere University Press.
- Urry, J. (1999), *Automobility, Car Culture and Weightless Travel*, draft, Lancaster University at <http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/soc030ju.html>.
- (2000), *Sociology Beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Twenty-first Century*, London: Routledge.