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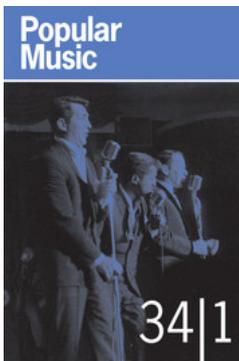
The walkman effect

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The walkman effect*

by SHUHEI HOSOKAWA

The walkman – a cassette recorder for headphone listening. This gadget, originally invented and marketed by Sony in the spring of 1980 in Japan, and soon exported, has become known throughout the West, however awkward its Japanese-made English may sound. As its use has proliferated, so have the arguments about its effects. One example, a report in *Nouvel Observateur*, was cited by Philippe Sollers (Sollers 1981, p. 50). The interviewer, apparently, asks young people (eighteen to twenty-two years old) the following: whether men with the walkman are human or not; whether they are losing contact with reality; whether the relations between eyes and ears are changing radically; whether they are psychotic or schizophrenic; whether they are worried about the fate of humanity. One of the interviewees replies: your question is out-of-date. All of these problems of communication and incommunicability, according to him, belong to the sixties and the seventies. The eighties are not the same at all. They are the years of *autonomy*, of an intersection of *singularities* in the construction of discourses. Soon, he says, you will have every kind of film on video at home, every kind of classical music on only one tape. This is what gives me pleasure.

The attitude of the inquirer is a common one: people once lived happily in harmonious contact with nature, but with industrialisation and urbanisation, especially in recent decades, they lose that healthy relationship with the environment, become alienated and turn into David Riesman's 'lonely crowd', suffering from incommunicability. The walkman, for such an interviewer, is taken as encouraging self-enclosure and political apathy among the young, under a structure of mass control. Such 'cultural moralists', as Umberto Eco calls them, are apt to adjust something novel or extraordinary to the normative epistemological system based on the known, on standardised factors. Therefore, they either cannot explain clearly the socio-cultural change brought about by something new, or more typically, they simply fear and refuse any attempt at clarification. Even for those with a keener interest, the new thing is considered as deviant or inappropriate to their ready-made framework of thought.

* This article is partially derived from Hosokawa 1981A.

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Our wise interviewee swiftly dodges the stereotyped questions: the eighties are the years of *autonomy*. It is not purely coincidental that the walkman appeared in the first spring of this decade. The walkman is neither cause nor effect of that autonomy, neither evokes nor realises it. It *is* the autonomy, or rather *autonomy-of-the-walking-self*. J.-F. Lyotard rightly remarks the position of the self in the 'post-modern' era: 'The *self* is small, but it is not isolated: it is held in a texture of relations which are more complex and more mobile than ever before' (1979, p. 31). The walkman represents parasitic and/or symbiotic *self* which now become autonomous and mobile. Consequently we should analyse it not as a phenomenon in itself or as one of the examples which represent the latest developments in musical life, but as an *effect* (not in a causal sense) or *effect-event* in the pragmatic and semantic transformation of the urban. To think about it is to reflect on the urban itself: walkman as urban strategy, as urban sonic/musical device.

I *Musica mobilis*

I define *musica mobilis* as music whose source voluntarily or involuntarily moves from one point to another, coordinated by the corporal transportation of the source owner(s). One can describe its short history as comprising four successive and accumulative steps; the fourth does not exclude the preceding three but coexists with them (see Hosokawa 1981B).

(a) First of all, there is the tone of urban life in general. In a city, there is no clear frontier between music and noise. Music becomes noise (the terrifying volume of the jukebox for some people); noise becomes music (the *Cries of London* of Thomas Weekes and of Luciano Berio, *Salt Peanuts* of Dizzy Gillespie; the voices of vendors in Oriental markets cannot be imagined without a kind of 'noisy music' or 'musical noise') (see Bosseur 1977). The same acoustic event can be considered as music or noise by different observers. Most of this 'music' is made involuntarily or without motive, in other words, without any conscious aesthetic motivation. The sound is nothing but one of the secondary consequences of other non-music-making activities (to promote, to vend and so on). It only shows that those involved *live together* (see *Musique en jeu* 1976).

(b) Besides the *musicien malgrè lui*, the city nourishes a group of voluntary musicians: so-called street musicians. In the subway or on the corner of the street, they play in order to earn money. Some people just pass by, others stop. As in a concert hall (though maybe less strictly), the participants are divided into two groups, musicians and

audience–passers-by, and linked together (more closely and intimately) because both groups share their inner and outer time, 'tuning each other'. They share the ongoing flux of time and consciousness, and thus feel a recovery of the lost links of social life. Though the music is transmitted mono-directionally, the two groups react and 'communicate' bi-directionally: a mutual tuning-in relation is maintained even if it is very transitory. The aesthetic or artistic quality of the performed music is usually less important than the ephemeral we-feeling which is produced. These people are in the world of Schutz's *making-music-together* (see Schutz 1964, 1976; Prato 1983).

(c) We find also in the city other people who are involved with the music, or rather, who live with it. They do not play but listen to it through technological 'instruments'. A portable radio (or cassette) listener in a street disperses the music as he walks. Passers-by are obliged to hear it for a few seconds. Sometimes two or three machines cross the street, emitting different tunes. Here, people do not always share their inner and outer time. On the contrary, they usually have in common only their outer, measurable time, without penetrating or communicating with one another. They seem to live in the world of *listening-to-the-music-together*. A car stereo system (or radio) can be considered one of the variants of this type. A car is often taken to be a 'secondary house' or 'mobile home' in metropolitan life. The situation, however, goes beyond this. Now, it is a house which is a 'fixed car' or 'permanent parking area'. A garage does not function as a place to anchor a car but as a place through which to pin the house to the route of the car.* The car, consequently the car radio too, is an intermediary between social and personal life: it concerns the semi-social and/or semi-personal, in a word, *family*. If one switches it on, other 'family', if any, are forced to hear/listen to it, as is the case with 'street listening man'. But, unlike him, the family is capable of stopping it if it doesn't please.

(d) Finally there is the walkman listener, who is found in the world of *listening to music alone*. This listener seems to cut the auditory contact with the outer world where he really lives: seeking the perfection of his 'individual' zone of listening, he is the *minimum, mobile and intelligent unit* (Robert Fripp) for music listening. One cannot imagine any further advance (even 'body sound', the latest product in 1983, which is a sort of jacket furnishing two 'speakers' for feeling musical vibration anytime and anywhere) which constitutes more than examples of secondary 'progress', such as the invention of lighter, smaller and higher fidelity apparatus, of a wireless headphone, of waterproof

* As suggested in the films of Wim Wenders, *Im Lauf der Zeit* and *The State of Things*.

(listen + swim) or hybrid gadgets (walkman + alarm clock + calendar + calculator + video game + bio-rhythm indicator + exposure meter + small light + holoscope + . . .). The walkman is doubtless the ultimate object for private listening, even though the proliferation of such 'secondary functions' (J. Baudrillard) will certainly progress right up to the vanishing point of the object, that is, to the point at which infinite differentiation makes them unrecognisable within the sea of objects, or at which the process of differentiation reaches the stage of a universe with no differences.

II Technological regression

It is interesting that, from the technical and technological point of view, the 'progress' from portable radio-cassette or car stereo to walkman is very minor, contrary to the conspicuous transformation on the level of praxis. Rather, the change seems to be a kind of 'devolution' because the walkman is a cassette recorder *minus* the recording function and the speaker. It is technologically a simpler object. Generally the technical development of an object is regarded as involving functional multiplication. When one type of object can do two things simultaneously, the user considers it more convenient (even if one of the two is quite useless to him, or, at least, if he has no need – is not able – to use both at the same time). For 'frivolous' consumers, then, differentiation of the secondary functions must be thought more important than the primary one (if any). The walkman, however, appears to be outside this law. It represents functional reduction, technological regression. According to the President of Sony, the idea of this reduction, which first came to him while walking in New York, was disliked intensely by the technical department because of its regressiveness. The engineers were in fact exclusively occupied with the 'techneme' level of the object, the President with the 'praxeme' level. He, well known for his ordinary-man-makes-good career and rationalistic approach, won the debate, risking capital and reputation, and came out on top in the commercial war. Needless to say, Sony was followed by many competitors (Toshiba, Aiwa, Philips. . .) who named their similar gadgets in more or less similar ways (*Walky, Cassette Boy*. . .). Some have a radio, some a recording function, others a battery meter: thus a refunctionalisation process. These products differ in only trifling ways. The war has already become less total than local, the old story of technical competition focusing upon the secondary functions. We can compare this with Kuhn's argument on the scientific revolutions (the relationship of paradigmatic change and ordinary science). The walkman constitutes

a new paradigm owing to its 'revolutionary' effects on the pragmatic – not technical – aspects of urban musical listening, with the result that the technical assumptions come to seem ordinary. Sony had prepared a set of pragmatic presuppositions which were then 'taken for granted' (in Schutz's terms) by those who followed as 'knowledge at hand'. The walkman has become 'object at hand'.

III A walking gadget

The short history of *musica mobilis* sketched previously suggests several specificities of the walkman:

(a) *Miniaturisation*. The more compact, the more portable . . . Technology always wants to make an object something *more*: its universe is one of teleological but endless comparisons. If a thing can be done in a more efficient way, people approve it as 'progress' or 'development'. In the history of technology, miniaturisation is one of the most obsessional goals. Imagine the space taken up by the now obsolete radio or gramophone. Miniaturisation allows us to make use of the space which the older objects occupied; and to take the objects outdoors more easily and with more mobility. It, therefore, contributes not only to a strategy of more efficient use of space but also to an urban strategy, that is, to the way of life. The portable radio and car stereo, for example, made possible on the road an experience which had previously only been feasible indoors. So, without doubt, did the walkman; however, in a much more thorough way, as will be discussed below.

(b) *Singularisation*. Miniaturisation as double strategy – spatial and urban – is deeply connected with another feature of the walkman, singularisation, for it enables our musical listening to be more occasional, more incidental, more contingent. Music can be taken wherever and whenever we go. The walkman produces or constitutes a musical *event* which is characterised as unique, mobile and singular. According to Gilles Deleuze, this singularity is radically different from being individual and personal. It is rather anonymous, impersonal, pre-individual and nomadic: 'A consciousness is nothing without some synthesis of unification, but there is no such synthesis for the consciousness without the form of the "I" or the point of view of the self (*Moi*). What is not individual nor personal, on the contrary, are the emissions of singularities in so far as these are constructed on an unconscious surface and enjoy an immanent mobile principle of auto-unification, through their *nomadic distribution*. These are radically distinct from the fixed and sedentary distributions which are the conditions for the unification of consciousness' (Deleuze 1969,

pp. 124f.). The walkman obviously corresponds to such a 'singular' position of the self. It is not necessary to inquire into the causal relation between the birth of this consciousness and that of the walkman. What we must confirm here is the positional correspondence between them.

(c) *Autonomy.* Deleuze continues: 'The singularities enjoy a process of auto-unification which is always mobile and displaced by virtue of a paradoxical element which traverses and resonates the series, enveloping the corresponding singular points in the same aleatory space' (ibid. p. 125). Autonomy is not always synonymous with isolation, individualisation, separation from reality; rather, in apparent paradox, it is indispensable for the process of *self-unification.* Walkman users are not necessarily detached ('alienated' to use a value-laden term) from the environment, closing their ears, but are unified in the autonomous and singular moment – neither as persons nor as individuals – with the real. One instance may be quoted from the film starring Sophie Marceau entitled *La boom II.* At a party, a boy hesitates to approach the girl he loves, but finally manages to dance with her. He silently approaches her and puts a headphone on her head playing the same music as his. Their own exclusive music begins flowing between them. The happy pair dance to the different music, to the different rhythm. Is their dance an escape from reality? No, it is an 'incompossible' (Deleuze)* communication which establishes a radically *positive distance*: 'The idea of positive distance is topological and superficial, and excludes any depth or height which would lead the negative back to the pole of identity . . . Distance is . . the affirmation of that which it distances' (ibid. p. 203).

To make this concept of 'positive distance' more precise, we may compare within the flood of objects the walkman with the polaroid, with respect to speed of act, immediacy of effect, simplicity of mechanical construction, verisimilitude of output, low-fidelity (lower than the ordinary stereo or camera) of reproduction, ease of operation, non-specificity of territory, anonymity of subject, and contingency of event.† The walkman is to the auditory domain what the polaroid is to the visual domain. If walkman is an occular polaroid, polaroid is an optic walkman: *La boom II* versus *Alice in der Städten.* These two 'minor' objects are often taken as frivolous by those who avoid the surface, searching for the depth and the height. But if the surface is the 'place of meaning' (*le lieu du sens*) (ibid. pp. 87ff., 126, 151), then the autonomy,

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* 'Incompossible' is untranslatable but means roughly a combination of 'impossible', 'incomprehensible' and 'uncomposable'.
† In Wenders' *Alice in der Städten* a man with a polaroid incessantly photographs the things which attract him. The little girl accompanying him reacts immediately to the images. The reality is instantly duplicated by the image; the image multiplies reality.

typically assigned to these two objects, can also give rise to a play of meanings.

(d) *Constructing/deconstructing meanings*. Walkman praxis focuses musical meaning on the surface of music, or generalises the surface to the whole: 'Musical meaning is . . . a *surface effect*, an effect of the resistant density of the sonorous' (Parret 1983, p. 30). With the walkman, the surface-ness of the music stands out, owing to the walkman's singularity and autonomy, realised by its miniaturisation. Creating meaning, in this case, goes parallel with objectification, in so far as we define an object as 'a status of meaning and a form' (Baudrillard 1972, p. 230). We are not interested here in the object in itself, but the object under use, not the lexical meaning but the practical one. The walkman, in fact, has no meaningless context; at the same time, paradoxically, no context is strictly appropriate for it. Every context (or no context) can be justified, appropriated and legitimated by its singularity and autonomy. Fellini once observed a boy with a walkman watching a film in a cinema: an example of a particular function of the *and*:

AND . . . AND . . . AND . . . There was always a fight in the language between the verb 'to be' (*être*) and the conjunction 'and' (*et*), between *est* and *et*. These two terms only agree and combine together in appearance, because the one acts in the language as a constant forming the diatonic scale of language (*langue*), whilst the other puts all into variation, constituting the lines of a generalised chromaticism . . . We cannot be satisfied with the analysis of the 'and' as a conjunction; it is rather a very special form of every possible conjunction, which establishes a logic and language itself.

(Deleuze and Guattari 1980, p. 124)

The practical meaning of the walkman is generated in the distance it poses between the reality and the real, the city and the urban, and particularly between the others and the I. It decontextualises the given coherence of the city-text, and at the same time, contextualises every situation which seemingly does not cohere with it. Though this double-faced work had already been partially achieved in the previous history of *musica mobilis*, it is the walkman that completes the process of the deconstruction of meaning which is inevitably coupled with its construction.

IV Walkman *versus* urbanism

So far the argument has been, more or less, from the point of view of the object. Now we shall look at the walkman from the point of view of the urban context. These two views are not separate and are often

indistinguishable. They are, rather, complementary and only different accentuations will be found.

More significant to our research on the urban environment than its planning or description is a theory of its use; we shall proceed, in other words, not from the generative end (taking the part of the addresser of the urban message, roughly identifiable with the planner) but the interpretative end (taking the part of the addressee, the habitant). The latter approach permits us to deal with a city as 'a set of interrelations and of interactions between the subjects and the objects' (Greimas 1976, p. 144): 'The reception of spatial messages is not (or not only) their perception in terms of what is called "living" the city, reacting in significant ways to all spatial stimulations . . . To live in the city signifies for the individual . . . being in that space towards which all spatial messages converge, but also reacting to these messages, by dynamically engaging in the multiple programmes and mechanisms which attract and constrain one' (ibid. p. 153). As we shall see, the walk act consists precisely in the 'interrelations and interactions between the subjects and the objects' which Greimas mentions, for the walking subject is always in the un-predetermined process of the visual, auditive, olfactive, gustative, tactile transformation of his integral experience through the ongoing change of his point of view: 'The point of view is open to a divergence which it affirms. There is another city which corresponds to each point of view, each point of view is another city, the cities being united only by their distance and resonating only through the divergence of their series, of their houses and their streets. And always another city in the city' (Deleuze 1969, p. 203).

Not only the subject but also the environment is susceptible to transformation through this act, for the act can only be defined in terms of mutual and interdependent actions. It is not sufficient to say whether his interpretation of the spatial messages is pertinent to the environment or not: better to say that the pertinence of that interpretation is progressively adjusted by the progress of the act (see Sbisà and Fabbri 1980). Certainly his act presupposes several codes which have been socio-culturally conditioned, and he has a series of 'knowledges at hand' about his conduct provided partially by his experiences, partially and more implicitly by the urban planner who has hypothetically programmed and built the space and the place where he lives; but he, as walking subject, transforms these presuppositions, their knowledge, and, in consequence, his own self in a dynamic transaction with the environment: dynamic, because, as Baudrillard has noted, he himself does not confront the environment, but virtually and/or actually is a part of it (see Baudrillard 1972, p. 255).

He is included in his environment, so his act and his environment are in a relationship like the structure of a Russian doll: inside out and outside in. This trans-action progresses in line with the self-metamorphoses of the transactional world. If one assumes the city as a text, the habitants must be considered as a 'blank' within it, which should be completed by their interpretative acts, that is, their 'acts of reading' of the city-text-event (see Greimas 1976, pp. 151ff). The urbanist can only prepare this blank text to be read, though he sometimes fancies that he provides the integral text of a city and that the habitants should live almost wholly under the normative rules he has presupposed.

Planners are in many cases exclusively engaged in the planning of the spatial dimension of their city, leaving the acoustic aspect to one side. Every urbanist takes care, for example, of the proportion between habitant and window, trees and street, architecture and green zone and so on, neglecting what kind of tone the city has, that the habitants (are obliged to) hear. A city is not only unseen by the planner who observes it from outside – as noted critically by many humanists – but also unheard. The 'blind zone' (Henri Lefèbvre's *le champ aveugle*) is also the dumb zone. This is the case not only with modern urbanism, but also traditional city-planning, as well as, in a sense, the history of *Utopia* and *Città ideale*. From Plato and Piero della Francesca up to Fourier or Le Corbusier, most such schemes tell us very little about how the authors conceived the acoustic life of their cities, what kind of sounds the *abitante ideale* produces and is surrounded by. Are they monotonous or 'polytonous'? Maybe the ancient 'urbanists' did not feel they suffered from their acoustic ambience, nor imagined that each city had its own urban tone.

It was not until recent decades that urbanists began to care about this tone and to become actively involved in acoustic problems. The Canadian composer, Murray Schafer, though not a professional urbanist, carried out the first research worthy of note into the total theory of acoustic design or, in his terms, the *soundscape:*

Today, when the slop and spawn of the megalopolis invite a multiplication of sonic jabberware, the task of the acoustic designer in sorting out the mass and placing society again in a humanistic framework is no less difficult than that of the urbanologist and planner, but it is equally necessary. The problem of redefining the acoustic community may involve the establishment of zoning regulations; but to limit it to this, as is common today, is to mistake the trajectories of the soundscape for the property lines of the landscape. Only when the outsweep and interpenetration of sonic profiles is known and accepted as the operative reality will the acoustic zone rise to the level of an intelligent understanding.'

(Schafer 1977, p. 216; see also Sansot 1973, 1983)

Unlike Schafer's reconstruction of the past soundscape, which makes interesting use of history, literature and ethnography, his principal argument about the present urban soundscape seems to fall short of its reality, that is, of its necessary artificiality, which appears to him as something to be restored to a more natural, therefore a more 'human' state. His 'humanistic framework', supported by the ravishing neologisms, aims only at the improvement *ad hoc* of the soundscape in question on the perceptual level (for example, 'ear cleaning') or on the situational one (for example, 'soniferous garden'); there is no consideration of the underlying social interactions or of the process whereby the soundscape itself is institutionalised. His point of view still derives, against his wish, from that of the 'urbanist or planner', or that of the 'teacher', rather than of the user or habitant. One example: his 'acoustic ecology' is in fact based on an acute sensitivity to the existing soundscape; it is connected with the 'soundwalk' – which produces a report 'with specific reference to the sounds heard during the walk' – and presupposes that the given soundscape in a city is potentially pleasant. This presupposition appears quite doubtful except for those who feel pleasure when comparing the 'pitches of different cash registers or the duration of different telephone bells' or 'the pitches of drainpipes on a city street', singing 'tunes around the different harmonies of neon lights', or 'entering a store and tapping the tops of all tinned goods (Caribbean steel band!)' (Schafer 1977, p. 213). All of these are highly important as didactic experiments or exercises, but also miss the 'lived structure of praxis' (H. Lefèbvre), and, more particularly, are filled with the lament for a lost noise, a lost Nature. Baudrillard speaks against the sentimental ecologist:

> To speak of ecology is to signal the death and total abstraction of 'nature' . . . the great Signified, the great Referent. Nature is dead and replacing it is the environment which designates both the death of nature and its restitution as a model of simulation . . . As nature, air, water, after having been simple productive forces, become rare commodities and enter into the field of value, it is men themselves who are inscribed more deeply in the field of political economy.
>
> (Baudrillard 1972, p. 253)

What is lacking in Schafer is, on the one hand, reflection on this quality of simulation, based on that knowledge of political economy which is indispensable if we are to think of the total artificiality of our irreversible environment; on the other, the concept of plurality, as described by Michel de Certeau: 'Planning the city means simultaneously to *think of the plurality* of the real itself and to *confer effectivity* on this pluralised thought. It is both knowing how, and being able, to articulate' (de Certeau 1980B, p. 175). We do not live, as Schafer

implicitly assumes, in a one-layered 'sonoferous' reality, in which one factor can exercise its influence on total reality homogeneously, but in a multi-layered structure, in which one layer, even if identifiable as such, shifts away from another and no definite causality is found, no heroic height or spiritual depth permitted.

If Schafer's proposed manner of listening can be thought of as 'territorialised listening', because he intends that urban space should be a 'space of familiar and known noises', a 'space of security' (Barthes 1982, p. 218), then walkman listening on the street appears as 'de-territorialised listening'. It intends that every sort of familiar soundscape is transformed by that singular acoustic experience coordinated by the user's own ongoing pedestrian act, which induces an autonomous 'head space' between his Self and his surroundings in order to distance itself from – not familiarise itself with – both of them. The result is a mobility of the Self. Thus the walkman crosses every predetermined line of the acoustic designers. It enables us to move towards an autonomous pluralistically structured awareness of reality, but not towards a self-enclosed refuge or into narcissistic regression.

You may ask yourself how the walkman, while making no substantial contribution to the public soundscape, can intervene in the urban tone, how it can interfere with the urban acoustic without having a material effect. The answer is: through the *walk act*.

V Walk act

Though the walkman can be used with various types of act, the walk act will be the most privileged, as suggested by the strange name, walk-man. Walking is the most primitive, the most immediate, the most corporal medium for human transportation. All expressive corporal practices, especially dance, theatre, certain sports, derive from the human walk act (see Charles 1979). The walkman connects it with music. De Certeau is right to compare the walk act with the speech act:

The act of walking is to the urban system what enunciation (the *speech act*) is to language or to the system of available utterances. At the most elementary level it has a triple 'enunciative' function: it is a process of *appropriation* of the topographical system by the pedestrian (in the same way that the speaker appropriates and assumes language for himself); it is a spatial *realisation* of place (as the speech act is sonorous realisation of language); and finally it implies certain *relations* between differentiated positions, that is, certain pragmatic 'contracts' in the form of movements (in the same way as verbal enunciation is an 'allocation', a 'positioning of the other' in relation to the

speaker, and establishes a contract between speakers). Walking would therefore find its primary definition as a site of enunciation . . . Walking . . . creates a mobile organicity of the environment, a succession of phatic *topoi*.
(de Certeau 1980B, p. 180)

Jean-François Augoyard also thinks of the *poetics* of the walk, because the walk act is not the progressive totalisation of a given space to be traversed, but the articulation of a movement which constructs the lived experience of the space in a very perplexing manner (Augoyard 1979, pp. 28, 71; see also Bollnow 1963, Norberg-Schultz 1971, Sansot 1973).

The walkman may make the walk act more poetic owing to its 'stuttering' function of the Deleuzian *and*. One walks *and* listens (and inversely). One experiences *walk'n'listen*, or even walk'n'eat'n'drink'n' play'n' . . .'n'listen (boy with roller skates eating McDonald, drinking Coke, and listening to Michael Jackson through walkman . . .). The pleasure of walkman, as the *Nouvel Observateur* interviewee was, consciously or unconsciously, aware can be found in the way that listening is incidentally overlapped by and mixed up with different acts: as a listening act, it is not exclusive but inclusive, not concentrated but distracted, not convergent but divergent, not centripetal but centrifugal. In an *additional* listening act, as opposed to a *subtractional* one (for example, a classical concert), music is in-corporated with alien elements which are usually taken as non-musical. In walkman praxis, compared with other types of *musica mobilis* or with the dance-theatre of disco music, it is tightly conjoined with the corporality of the walk act itself. For, while in the disco the theatrical devices have been prepared before we enter and our body only dances in that pre-programmed circuit (even if the corporal movement itself is very fierce and almost sportive), with the walkman an amalgam composed of music and body is brought about and its user invents the art of their coordination on a daily level in order to figure out a 'short circuit' in the place he is walking around. Whether it is the walkman that charges the body, or, inversely, the body that charges the walkman, it is difficult to say. The walkman works not as a prolongation of the body (as with other instruments of *musica mobilis*) but as a built-in part or, because of its intimacy, as an intrusion-like *prosthesis* (see *Traverses* 1979). The walkman holder *plays* the music and listens to the sound come from his own body (see Barthes 1982, p. 265). When we listen to the 'beat' of our body, when the walkman intrudes inside the skin, the order of our body is inverted, that is, the surface tension of the skin loses its balancing function through which it activates the interpenetration of Self and world: a *mise en oeuvre* in the body, through the body, of the body (see Tibon-Cornillot 1982, p. 120). Through the walkman, then,

the body is opened; it is put into the process of the aestheticisation, the theatricalisation of the urban – but *in secret*.

VI Walkman as secret theatre

What surprised people when they saw the walkman for the first time in their cities was the evident fact that they could know *whether* the walkman user was listening to something, but not *what* he was listening to. Something *was* there, but it did *not appear*: it was secret (see *Traverses* 1984). Until the appearance of the walkman, people had not witnessed a scene in which a passer-by 'confessed' that he had a secret in such a distinct and obvious way. They were, in fact, aware that the user was listening not only to something secret but also to the secret itself, a secret in the form of mobile sound: an open, public secret.

As to the user, he employs the 'manners of the poacher' (de Certeau 1980B, p. 10). Secrets proceed according to a relationship of communication and incommunication. The secret-holder always has an advantage over the secret-beholder, in so far as the former 'confesses' to the latter only that he has something hidden, something unknown to the latter. And the secret must vanish when the holder leaks its contents. So it is effective only between the first utterance – which reveals its existence – and the second – which removes the mask to reveal the truth. Before that it is too latent, after this, too manifest to function as a secret. The walkman holder has just finished the first confession. He lets people know that he is listening to a secret. He neither refuses communication nor is isolated from reality, but continues enunciating the existence of his secret in this simple way. He lets people know voluntarily that he has the *truth* which, nevertheless, does *not appear*. Verification may be guaranteed in so far as *it* does not appear, in sum, in so far as it is secret. François Truffaut, in Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, thinks that the incomprehensible message from space must be true because it appears to him intuitively as a secret. This story is interesting to us for two reasons: (a) he imitates the received message-as-secret, when he, in his turn, emits it back to space; (b) the message is sonorous and almost 'musical' (d–e–c–C–G). ((a) can be seen also in *ET* when the boy and ET, in their first close encounter, imitate each other's gestures, as if both regressed to the mirror-phase of Lacan's psychoanalysis.) Truffaut's belief in imitation as the key to resolving the secret is also familiar among walkman-holders. Their curiosity to know the secret the others guard in public makes the gadget circulate all over the world. Certainly it is an article of fashion, but more particularly of a fashion for secrecy. The superiority felt by the holder to the beholder is

far from the casual satisfaction of acquiring something fashionable, but relates to receiving the visa for the secret garden of the walkman in which people communicate with one another through the form – not the content – of the secret. He neither knows the content of others' secrets nor cares about them. He just knows that others have secrets *as he does* and that they will know that he himself also has something different with respect to the content, but similar in its form: the cryptic. I know that he knows that I know that he knows it. . . They openly exhibit the form of their secrets to one another: this is the first level of 'expression' of the walkman act. The second level is the expressivity of the music tied up with that of corporal movement, of the walk act. Expression of the third level concerns what even the holders do not know exactly, that is the top secret of the walkman act, or rather of the music in general: 'What is listened to . . . is the *secret*: that which, enmeshed in reality, can only come to human consciousness by way of a code which simultaneously serves to encode and decode this reality' (Barthes 1982, p. 221).

Euphoric and dysphoric experiencing (to borrow Greimas' terms) of the urban by way of the walkman must be understood in terms of the network of that triple cryptic expressivity. These are two sides of a coin called 'aestheticisation', which may be defined as 'the act of a perception which attaches to the appearance of the object and tastes it as "sensible"' (perceptible by the senses) (Dufrenne 1979, p. 131). When the sensible is positive, we may call the result 'euphoria', when negative, 'dysphoria'. The important point is that what is aestheticis-able is what can be *mise en ordre sensible*, rather than concerning any judgement of the beauty of the object in question. The walkman is 'aestheticisable' in so far as it concerns the *sensible*, provoking certain reactions, either dysphoric or euphoric, and transforming decisively each spatial signification into something else. The aesthetic aspects are, at least in this case, also linked with *semantic* and *theatrical ones*: the former because the walkman is able to construct and/or deconstruct the network of urban meaning; the latter, because it can organise an open and mobile theatre by means of its clandestine manoeuvres, which transform the spatial constellation of the urban, communicate autonomously, surreptitiously, tacitly, and present the user as a possible stranger who speaks an incomprehensible pedestrian lan-guage (for certain dysphoric persons, he looks like ET, that is, the *Extra-Tangible*). The beholders feel as if they were spectators in a theatre because the 'dialogue' on the stage would still apparently continue without their actual presence. But they soon come to know that in effect they also participate in the theatrical process since the dialogue on the stage presupposes, if one takes theatre as *text*, the

existence and the reaction of the spectators themselves. They are indispensable for the textual process of theatre, and – why not? – of the walkman. Thus, with the appearance of this novel gadget, all passers-by are inevitably involved in the walkman-theatre, as either actors (holders) or spectators (beholders): 'There is no difference which separates passivity and activity, but only that which distinguishes the different ways of socially *marking* the space effected in a given (*un donné*) by a practice' (de Certeau 1980A, p. 248).

The walkman effect must be measured in terms of this practical mode of operation. Even when one switches off, or leaves it behind, theatrical effects are still active. The show must go on till the death of the gadget-object. We all live in the *Société ludique* (Alain Cotta), which is incessantly threatened by boredom and invaded by the play/game (*jeu*). It is up to you to choose your 'role' in this 'society of spectacle': actor or spectator.

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