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HEADPHONE CULTURE, MUSIC, IDENTITY AND PUBLIC SPACE

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Abstract

This research considers the movement of private space across public space in the context of the use of portable electronic devices - for music consumption - in the public realm. The research project determines to what extent are headphone users constructing a new understanding of public space. This project explores the growing role of technologically driven networked communication in late modernity. It suggests a resulting decline of traditional forms of social interaction in the public realm. Using qualitative methods, this research project involves both a critical analysis of existing sociological literature and a range of semi-structured interviews with headphone users. This research case study gauges the interviewees' experiences through their own language and detailed accounts. The research focuses on the central themes of public space, music, portable media devices and identity. It contributes to a relatively new field of sociological study in that it examines burgeoning mobile technologies and the changing attitudes, etiquette and ethos surrounding their use in the public realm. The research highlights a growing trend of individualization in the public sphere and it points to headphone users' effective privatization and spatial atomization of their own social milieu.

Introduction

In this age of late modernity when governments are actively selling off state assets and there is a growing trend of the privatization of state services, it seems appropriate to examine how the social actor experiences public space. This research project is focused on a triumvirate of social phenomena: music, identity and place. In exploring the interaction of these social phenomena, this project will examine the blurring of spatial boundaries in late modernity. As people listen to music on headphones in public space, it seems that private space is increasingly infringing upon the realm of public space. Thus, this research project explores the movement of private space across public space in terms of the use of portable electronic devices for music consumption.

During my own term of undergraduate study at NUI Maynooth, the privatization of the campus parking zones has been a salient and topical example of public space becoming effectively commercialized. As a sociologist, musician and music lover, I have felt motivated to utilize my academic learning and my musical experience in a bid to explore both the motivations behind public headphone use and the wider social implications of headphone culture.

Some other hallmarks of late modernity include the rise in individualism and the decline in social capital. In recent years, there has been a particularly resonant sociological argument (such as Robert D. Putnam's argument against television as an agent of decline in American

social and civic engagement) that some technologies can lead to people's disengagement from public life and public space.

However this research project will also explore the potentially positive effects of technology on society in terms of how it serves cultural memory. Also, in terms of using headphones to listen to music in public space, one could argue that other senses (such as sight) are still in play and that such senses may even be heightened. It could even be argued that headphone use both creates more visual awareness and promotes a cinematic experience of social space. Consequently, this research aims to explore whether people are totally privatizing the space around them or whether they are constructing a new understanding of public space.

Space both helps to shape a sense of belonging and it provides a platform for identity performance. In his 2007 song "The City," Dublin singer-songwriter Damien Dempsey uses an urban lexicon to define his life experience: "concrete, you have made me. Concrete, you enslave me." In conventional terms, public space offers freedom to people in that they physically move through it. Conversely, one could also say that public space limits people in terms of spatially-imposed conventions of identity performance. My research project aims to explore the binary dialectic between public space and private space, the impact of this tension upon identity performance and also the role that portable electronic devices play in mediating people's experience of public space.

Chapter 1. Review of literature

1.1 Introduction

In late modernity, technology is playing an increasing part in people's lived experiences. By focusing on this contemporary area of research (portable technology and its effects on society), my research project aims to provide some significant value to the field of sociology. My research will focus on the assimilation and consumption of music in public space by means of privately owned portable electronic devices. The public use of portable electronic devices allow individuals to stay virtually connected to the wider world while simultaneously becoming disengaged from their immediate social surroundings. My research project aims to investigate iPod culture and how the public consumption of music by private means is possibly helping to drive forces of individualization and to erode traditional forms of social interaction. The literature review that I am providing focuses on two themes: that of public space and that of technology (namely, portable electronic devices). All of the literature reviewed here thematically corelates to my research question and sub questions.

1.2 Public space

Georg Simmel's exploration of social and public space sets the psychological features of space apart from the physical features of space. Essentially, Simmel's theory gives primacy to the social actor's cognitive experience of space: "space in general is only an activity of the mind" (1997:138). However, Simmel does acknowledge the significance of physical dimensions of space. Simmel notes that physical space acts as a frame around social interaction, both containing the action and setting the performative parameters. In its focus on spatial limitation, Simmel's theory resonates with the hypothesis that the public use of portable electronic devices increasingly moves individuals to inhabit privatized spatial bubbles. Simmel observes the atomization of space by processes of modernity (such as the advent of portable media devices): "for our practical use space is divided into pieces which are considered units and are framed by boundaries" (1997:141). The liminality of spatial limitation and also the nascent value attributed to physical space in late modernity (in terms of private property) could be said to engender individuality and solitude. The individual's struggle to remain apart and discrete from others while in crowded urban space is explicitly articulated by Simmel:

> the deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the
> individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence
> in the face of...external culture. (1997:174-175)

Following on from Simmel's insights, it seems relevant to pose my own research questions. Simmel's spatial theory also provides stimulation to further investigate whether the public use of technology plays an increasing part in shoring up people's sense of individuality in the face of globalized forces of homogenization.

Herbert J. Gans notes that by using natural space, people turn it into public space: "all social life is emplaced...all social life exists in space" (2002:329). Gans argues that there is a reciprocal relationship between people and space. He asserts that individuals have effects on space while space simultaneously affects individuals. Gans states that space affects people in that it shapes their behaviour – not in absolute terms but certainly in terms of behavioural mediation. This research project aims to investigate the effects that the public use of technology has on people's social space. In doing so, it will incorporate Gans' theory that a reciprocal symbiosis exists between social actors and social space.

In his essay "Filmic Cities: The aesthetic experience of the personal-stereo user," Michael Bull observes the capacity of headphone culture to provide an internalized soundtrack for the user. Bull posits that headphones users often experience public space in a cinematically controlled way:

> Personal-stereo users often refer to their experience as being cinematic in nature. (2006:148)

The headphone experience thus enhances the user's social environment and lends cinematic significance to ordinary everyday life. The capacity of

headphone-mediated music to soundtrack public space points to a subjective exertion of control over one's physical milieu - wherein the iPod user can idealize their spatial experience. Bull adds that personal-stereo user enjoys "perfect control" (p. 154) over their environment. Thus, personal-stereo use gives primacy to "an interior flow of experience" (p. 154) and allows the user to hermetically seal themselves off from dystopian social reality.

In his article "The Politics of Public Space in the Media City," Scott McQuire writes about the changing nature of public space in the face of technological advances. McQuire's dual focus on historical socio-spatial trends and the spatial influence of technology correlates to thematic elements of my own research project. McQuire critically analyzes the intersection of technology, architecture and public space. He claims that the dialectic between public and private space has been partly driven by the advent of new media such as television, cell phones and mp3 players. His claim that "public culture (has) been displaced by a pervasive withdrawal into a private sphere" (McQuire 2006) is based on the increasing use of mobile media devices in everyday social life. In this article, McQuire charts the changing nature of public space from the 19th century to the 21st century. From the flaneur experience of 19th century Parisian boulevards to the 20th century electrification of Berlin to the media saturated streets of 21st century New York, McQuire asserts that public space frames human interaction. McQuire attributes the present culture of increasingly privatized space to socio-historical movements such as the (American government's policy-driven) post-World War II exodus from American inner cities to suburbia. For

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McQuire, the mid-twentieth century mushrooming of suburbia (and the attendant rise in consumer culture - which saw the advent of privatized lifestyles and home entertainment through new media such as television and radio) represents a rupture in public human interaction. The suburban incorporation of the front lawn and the back yard has resulted in an increasing privatization of space in late modernity. Consequently, as suburbia has burgeoned, collective engagement seems to have regressed into a collective disengagement of social actors. This theme of increasingly privatized space and contested social space is pertinent to my field of research.

Anthony Giddens (2001) describes the interface of public space and technology as a phenomenon involving both spatial control and temporal control: "such technological change has rearranged space" (p. 100). It seems that public space is affected by technological factors in terms of the compression of space and time. Giddens also states that people's everyday lived experiences have become fragmented, indeed delineated into separate spheres of public and private action:

> we have to separate urban experience into the public sphere of
> encounters with strangers and the more private world of family, friends
> and work colleagues. (2001:576)

Giddens' acknowledgement of the significance of the private sphere in late modernity points to the ongoing privatization of the public realm by social actors. Following on from Giddens' recognition of the dual spatial nature of

modern life, my research project aims to establish the extent of (and the reasons for) people's privatization of public space, specifically through their use of portable electronic devices.

David Harvey's (1990) seminal critical work *The Condition of Postmodernity* explores the compression of time and space in late modernity. Harvey draws attention to music's capacity for shaping temporal experience:

> music, after all, contains its aesthetic effect through its temporal movement. (p. 207)

By means of their insertion of music into the public sphere, portable media devices can be viewed as catalysts of time-space compression. Harvey observes the human cerebral capacity to shape perceptions of time:

> Our mental processes and perceptions can play tricks, make seconds feel like light years, or pleasurable hours pass by so fast we hardly notice. (p. 202)

The human tendency to distort temporality has been aided in late modernity by portable technology. Harvey's ideas are pertinent to my field of research in that they illuminate the transformative effects of technology upon time and space.

1.3 Portable electronic devices

Robert D. Putnam's seminal book *Bowling Alone* focuses on the nascent individualization of contemporary American society. Putnam's sociological

theory emphasizes the decline in social capital and the rise of anomic social relations in late modernity. Throughout this book, Putnam contextualizes people's use of technology as a type of 'cocooning' - whereby individuals erect a technological buffer between themselves and their social surroundings. Putnam notes that technology has allowed users to customize their experience of their social environment: "electronic technology allows us to consume this hand-tailored entertainment in private, even utterly alone" (2000:217). Putnam's assertion, although primarily based on television and the automobile, points to the explicit privatization of social space. Putnam states that technology (such as television) can lead to people's disengagement from public life and public space. He claims that "heavy users of these new forms of entertainment are certainly isolated, passive and detached from their communities" (2000:246). Putnam's theories of privatization and disengagement can be contemporaneously considered in terms of how people's experience of public space is impacted by the use of portable electronic devices. My research aims to establish whether people's public interaction with technology has impacted on human social interaction in public space. Therefore, Putnam's theories of social fragmentation and individualization are pertinent to my own research project.

Claude S. Fischer, in a 2001 paper, objects to Putnam's use of the sociological term 'social capital' and instead suggests that terms such as 'individualism' and 'privatization' are more appropriate in describing the apparent changes in American society. Fischer also observes that Putnam does not entirely discredit technology as an agent of social decline:

Here and there in *Bowling Alone*, Putnam notes hopeful new signs...new forms of social connections, some aided by technology. (2001)

Fischer's observation illustrates the spatial dichotomy inherent in the public use of these devices: although portable media devices can be seen as agents of social decline in terms of one's immediate physical social space, Fischer is careful to point out that these devices enable virtual social connections - thereby circumventing physical space - by means of mobile internet connectivity. I will further explore this spatial dichotomy in my findings chapter.

Michael Bull's 2007 book *Sound Moves: iPod Culture and Urban Experience* focuses on the social effects of the advent of the Apple iPod, particularly in the context of the cityscape. Bull's research provides a contemporary sociological analysis of iPod use in public urban space and therefore, it is relevant to my own research project. As a post-millennium phenomenon, the iPod has become a cultural icon as it has heralded a paradigm shift in terms of music sales and distribution, from physical product to digital product. Bull draws attention to the iPod's essential function of privatizing the user's experience of public space:

in iPod culture we have overpowering resources to construct urban spaces to our liking as we move through them, enclosed in our pleasurable and privatized sound bubbles. (2007:5)

By creating personal playlists on their iPod, the user soundtracks their everyday experience of social space. By means of filtering public space through the hermetic experience of listening to music on headphones, the iPod user can essentially customize and tailor reality to their own liking. Bull cites the iPod's potential to allow the user experiential control over their social environment:

> the Apple iPod is symbolic of a culture in which we increasingly use communication technologies to control and manage our experience of the urban environment. (2007:4)

By offering control over environment, the iPod provides a safe space of retreat and escape for the user. Thus, the iPod's facility of control comprises a movement away from the traditional culture of civic participation and social interaction towards a new culture of technologically-mediated solitude. Bull elaborates on Putnam's theory (the increasing individualization of postmodern society) by suggesting that within the congestion of the cityscape, the individual's desire for solitude is fulfilled by iPod use. Bull observes the solitude inherent in privatization of public space: "the desire for solitude in the street...as many retreat into the most private spaces...iPods are by their very nature primarily a privatising technology" (2007:5). Bull's work addresses a dearth in research on the adverse effects of the iPod on the minutae of everyday social interaction between individuals. It provides some key information that I hope to draw upon to enrich my own research project.

John Farnsworth and Terry Austrin's article "Assembling Mobile Worlds:

Sound Technologies and Mobile Social Networks" focuses on the effects of mobile technology on social interaction. The authors note the pervasive nature of portable technology and the hegemony of mobile phones and mp3 players in everyday modern life:

> The pocket size and the extreme portability of
>
> these technologies facilitate their role as ubiquitous mediators in the
>
> growing mobility that characterizes modern societies. (2005:14)

My own research project will investigate the suggestion that portable electronic devices, as mediators of public space, provide privatized space in the form of a buffer zone between social actors. Farnsworth and Austrin's article sheds some light on the above hypothesis in its assertion that human behavioural patterns are affected by portable electronic devices: "human and object (bind) together as an increasingly indissoluble unit" (2005:15). Thus, Farnsworth and Austrin suggest that people develop possible dependencies upon their portable electronic devices (mobile phones perhaps in particular) in their everyday negotiation of public space. The authors further elaborate on this symbiosis between social actor and electronic device: "humans and their objects become, in effect, a hybrid entity themselves" (2005:15). This theme of symbiosis is pertinent to my own research question in that it points to a disruption of traditional forms of social interaction (verbal communication between social actors) by a new type of interaction, namely that of electronic companionship: social relations that occurs exclusively between the individual

and their phone or mp3 player.

Fran Tonkiss' (2003) exploration of the soundscape of the modern urban environment acknowledges the prevalence of individuality and solitude amongst the crowded streets: "the wordless solitude of the individual in a noisy city captures in sound a larger urban tension between collective and subjective life" (2003:303). Tonkiss' notion that the "wordless solitude" of the cityscape denotes tension is particularly interesting in terms of my own research. It suggests that the prevalent urban culture of anonymity perhaps obscures tensions between discrete ethnic groups or even discrete class groups. Tonkiss also observes the explicit role of technology in providing a platform for individual disengagement from immediate social interaction:

> The mobile technologies of the personal stereo or telephone realize this logic of separation...immersed in a private soundscape...you do not have to be in the city as a shared perceptual or social space. (2003:304-305)

Thus, Tonkiss' work recognizes the privatization of public space by portable electronic devices. It seems that the safety zone of an mp3 player shields the individual from potential nuisance or distraction, be it a noisy street vendor or a zealous religious preacher plying their trades on city streets. Tonkiss also signals the performative aspect of listening to music in public space: "such acute individualization also finds its expression in the renegade desire to stand out" (2003:305). This desire to differentiate oneself points to a

performance of identity through the public use of portable electronic devices (in particular, for the consumption of music).

Aileen O'Carroll's article "Busy Ireland" highlights the increased tempo of modern life in Ireland. O'Carroll points out that in late modernity, in terms of both work and leisure, there seems to be a notion of filling in 'empty time' by multi-tasking through the medium of technology:

> Computers are designed to allow one to work on many different tasks at once...multitasking compresses holes; instead of taking a break from work, we switch from doing one task to another. (2008:249-250)

One could argue that the iPod is emblematic of the phenomenon of multi-tasking. The iPod (like the iPhone and Android devices) successfully and seamlessly blends function and aesthetic. It virtually shrinks space by compressing music into mp3 files (thus allowing increased memory capacity). In tandem with its ability to compress space, the iPod also compresses time by providing a technological platform for multitasking (the device, like many others, can simultaneously operate as a handheld portable music player and a web browser). O'Carroll further observes that the current culture of multitasking and busyness can be read as a possible signifier of people's attempts at identity performance:

> Busyness results from the exhausting attempt to construct meaningful identities in a world of endless identity choice. (2008:254)

The phenomenon of multi-tasking in late modern social life (as embodied by portable electronic devices and their synchronous capacity to perform multiple functions) seems to be symptomatic of the human desire for progress. In this way, technological advancements can be seen to serve the human need for dual control of temporal movement and also self-identity in the social world.

1.4 Identity

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman posits a dramaturgical approach as a means of explaining social interaction and performance of self-identity. In Goffmanian terms, one performs their social identity by means of masks and props - a set of "expressive equipment" (1959:34) - that function as one's front stage or personal front. Goffman argues that the social actor perpetually guages social situations and interpretes social roles, thereby performing a dynamic and idealized version of self-identity: "activity is transformed into a show...the notion that a performance presents an idealized view of the situation is, of course, quite common" (1959:44). Goffman proffers self-identity as a performative, dynamic and malleable enitity. Drawing on symbolic interactionism, Goffmanian theory gives primacy to individual agency over social structures. Goffman asserts that although the individual constantly exerts agential control by means of impression management, he/she is not entirely autonomous of environmental and social influence. Indeed, forces of socialization, social cues and learned roles are often performed by social actors in their bid to

assimilate themselves successfully into society. Goffman further argues that personal attributes such as clothing, posture and facial expression make up one's personal front:

> Some of these sign vehicles are relatively mobile or transitory, such as facial expression, and can vary during a performance from one moment to the next. (1959:34)

The notion of sign vehicles (in their capacity as transitory and mobile means of expression) seems particularly applicable to portable music players. This research project aims to transpose Goffmanian dramaturgical theory onto the social phenomenon of portable music players. In doing so, this project will investigate the notion of these devices as perfomative accessories and potential indicators of one's cultural taste and social status.

Tia DeNora's essay "Music and Self-Identity" posits that music functions as a trigger of cultural memory and also as a prominent marker of self-identity. DeNora suggests that through music, social actors can "recapture the aesthetic agency they (once) possessed" (2006:143). Thus, music seems to act as a gateway to past experience and also perhaps even as a souvenir of a past self. However, DeNora also notes the relevance of music in people's present lives and in their real time construction of self-identity:

> (Music) serves also as a means of putting actors in touch with capacities, reminding them of their accomplished identities, which in turn fuels the ongoing projection of identity…music thus provides parameters for experience constituted in real time. (2006: 143-144)

DeNora argues that music itself can be used as a tool in one's social construction of identity. One could argue that in much the same way as wearing a Beatles T-shirt marks one as a rock & roll music fan, wearing headphones (and using an mp3 player/smartphone while negotiating public space) marks one as both a music fan and a proficient technology user. To this specific end, DeNora states: "musical materials provide terms and templates for elaborating self-identity" (2006:145). As a means for elaborating self-identity then, music can be seen as a material and tangible mechanism. Accordingly, the iPod could be seen as a physical manifestation of signifiers which gives the user both technological and cultural capital amongst their peers and ultimately helps to shore up one's sense of self-identity. Consequently, this research project will address the iPod (and other similar portable music players) as a physical tool with which one can represent their self-identity to the social world.

Connell and Gibson's book *Soundtracks: Popular Music, Identity and Place* explores the tension between indigenous local cultures and hegemonic global culture in socio-cultural and musical terms. Connell and Gibson argue that globally successful consumer products (such as Sony's Walkman in the 1980s and more recently Apple's ubiquitous iPod) pervasively spread their universal influence and their commercial appeal "across national borders and cultural and economic domains" (2003:64). Indeed, the iPod, in its current capacity as a global phenomenon, could be seen as a locus of consumer desire and also as a material apogee of mass cultural appeal. In his seminal essay "Culture Industry Reconsidered," Theodor Adorno argues that

globalization has created a homogenized global culture that eschews difference and artistic independence:

> what parades as progress in the culture industry...remains the disguise for an eternal sameness. (2001:100)

Thus, in its consideration of consumer culture as an agent of social conformity, Adorno's thinking proffers a savage critique of mass culture. Taken in Adornian terms, iPod culture could be viewed as symptomatic of a herd mentality (wherein social actors seek not to differentiate themselves but rather to be similar to other social actors) and as running counter to Goffmanian notions of agency. In Adornian terms, iPod culture could be seen as part of a wider socio-cultural structure of brand loyalty and peer competition. When considered as part of mass consumer culture, iPods and other such devices (when used in public space) seem to allow for performative self-identity according to the behavioural patterns and strictures of the clan. Writing in the context of Ireland's post-millennial economic boom, Tony Cunningham argues that consumer culture has eclipsed traditional religion as a new catalyst for communal cohesion and shared values:

> the remarkable achievements of consumer culture. It seems to hold us together in a moral community, despite the fragmented, fluid and individualised nature of society. (2008:237)

One could argue that the power of consumer culture to create social bonds is rooted in the innate human desire for a sense of belonging. Taking the

notion of consumer culture as an extension of the human desire for belonging throws iPod culture into an interesting thought dilemma: as a practise it can be viewed as an isolated auditory experience yet iPod culture also inhabits a wider communal consumerist sphere. This research project will investigate the tension between atomistic individualism and communal interaction in terms of technology use in public space.

1.5 Conclusion

Much of the literature reviewed above suggests a growing trend of privatization whereby public space becomes atomized into privatized units of space (by those using portable electronic devices). Some of the literature reviewed here also signals how processes of modernity increasingly wire social actors into a circuitry of networked communication. Consequently, it could be said that mass connectivity somewhat circumvents public interaction between social actors. It seems increasingly apparent that the public use of portable electronic devices profoundly impacts upon social interaction in that it engenders a culture of individuality and solitude. Late modernity's globalized consumer culture has acted as a catalyst for individualism and self-reflexivity and has propagated links between social status and material accumulation. Overall, the literature reviewed here denotes a possible paradigm shift from a social model of public communal togetherness (through social interaction) towards a social model of public communal aloneness (through technological interaction).

Chapter 2. Research methods

2.1 Research question

This study will examine the people's changing experience of public space, as mediated by personal stereos and other portable electronic devices used for music consumption. In doing so, this study initially engaged existing literature regarding public space, technology and identity. Following the consideration of some of the main tenets of these readings, I formulated a central research question:

'How does the use of portable electronic devices, for music consumption, impact on people's experience of public space?'

I have also examined sub-themes relating to music and its social role, the rise in mass consumer culture and privatization in late modernity. Through my review of existing literature and my subsequent interviews, these sub-themes emerged as additional areas for consideration. As I conducted further interviews, I gave due consideration and thought to these sub-themes as they arose and used some of the pertinent ideas in my interview questioning.

2.2 The qualitative approach

My sociological research has been carried out within the paradigm of qualitative study. The focus on social meaning is a crucial factor of qualitative research. As a qualitative researcher, I am chiefly interested in both investigating and understanding the meanings and values that the social

world holds for the social actors who inhabit it. Silverman (2006) states that qualitative research allows the researcher "to examine what people actually do in real life" (p. 113). The open-ended, inductive approach of qualitative research has allowed my research themes to continually develop and thus, has benefited my special topic project. Qualitative study takes an idiographic approach in its absolute focus on meaning and subjective values. The chief reason that I selected a qualitative research technique is its capacity to generate richly detailed descriptions of social phenomena. Correspondingly, Silverman claims that "if you are concerned with exploring people's life histories or everyday behaviour, then qualitative methods may be favoured" (2006:34). I also felt drawn to qualitative study's focus on symbolic interaction and felt that I could learn most by engaging in interactive interviews with suitable candidates. Unlike quantitative study, qualitative study does not seek universalizations but rather focuses on particular social milieu. Thus, I have avoided making overgeneralizations (the microcosmic nature of qualitative study poses problems of generalization) in both my data analysis and my findings chapter. An obvious strength of qualitative study is the larger scope for types of responses (as opposed to qualitative study wherein surveys set a much lower limit on the types of responses) regarding naturally occurring social phenomena. Silverman (2006) notes that the wide scope of qualitative research gives it an "ability to study phenomena which are simply unavailable elsewhere" (p. 43). However, it must also be noted that qualitative study can prove potentially more expensive than quantitative in terms of time and resources. In my own experience, the transcriptions of

my interviews proved very time consuming. However, overall I believe that the in-depth, specific nature of qualitative study is the best approach for investigating the rubric of public space, technology and identity as it deals in subjective truth rather than numerical, objective truth.

I have conducted ten in-depth interviews as my primary method of collecting relevant data. By giving primacy to my interviewees' understandings of the conflation of technology and public space, I have taken an interpretivist approach in my research. This interpretivist approach attempts to study the world in holistic terms, taking account of how meaning and understanding varies from person to person. The interpretivist approach of these ten semi-structured interviews has allowed my research themes to continually develop and ultimately, my research has determined my theoretical framework. My preferred model of qualitative research has thus followed an inductive trajectory in that it has allowed the data to lead me to my findings. My open and inductive research approach allows for multiple realities and multiple meanings. Through its consideration of multiple realities, my research paradigm is rooted in phenomenology. In phenomenology, the disavowal of a concrete and singular reality allows for multifarious perspectives, unrestricted subjectivity and intertextuality. Thus, my phenomenological research paradigm allows for the pervasive influence of the social world and one's social peers upon the self and subjectivity. In conducting qualitative research (semi-structured interviews based on conversational explorations of themes), I have endeavoured to gain a clearer understanding of my interviewees' social perspectives on the changing nature

of public space - as mediated by technology. In using an emic approach (wherein I have engaged with and used the language of my interviewees and have thus conducted a close reading of their own social milieu), my study has achieved a detailed and microcosmic understanding of the changing relationship between public space and technology - as seen from the perspective of my interviewees. My interviewees' comments and responses have provided a crucial nexus to my further engagement with theory in my findings chapter.

The anti-positivistic approach of qualitative open-ended interview questioning is often referred to as emotionalism. Silverman (2006) states that interviewing conducted by emotionalist qualitative researchers is concerned "with eliciting authentic accounts of subjective experience" (p. 123). In my own research, I have taken an emotionalist approach to gauging lived experience through the subjective responses and feelings of my interviewees. However, it should be noted that open-ended interview techniques raise some issues regarding reliability and validity in that they give perhaps too much free reign to the interviewee's subjective feeling. Indeed, Silverman notes the limitations of open-ended interviewing techniques:

> Where the researcher maintains a minimal presence...this can create
> an interpretive problem for the interviewee about what is relevant.
> (2006:125)

Indeed in my own interviews, there were a small number of instances where the interviewees talked about issues that were tangential and divergent from

my own areas of interest. Silverman also states in-depth interviewing can rely too heavily on the notion that what interviewees subjectively feel is always true:

> Here we see a stubbornly persistent romantic impulse in contemporary social science: the elevation of the experiential as the authentic. (2006:128)

In my own experience however, despite potential issues of generalization and validity (due to the subjective nature of its approach), qualitative interviewing provides a platform for establishing trust and rapport with one's interviewees thus enabling access to their accounts of lived experience.

In terms of ethical issues and research protocol, my research is based on the informed consent of my interviewees. I have explained the nature of my sociological research - that it is being undertaken as part of my undergraduate degree at NUI Maynooth - to my interviewees. I have made my interviewees aware that they have the right to withdraw from my research at any time during the process. I have respected my interviewees' wishes and I ensured that the interview process would not cause them any emotional distress. I have also guaranteed my interviewees that the interview data will be kept confidential (on my password protected computer) and that I have issued them with pseudonyms in transcripts, analysis and findings in order to preserve their anonymity. In terms of transcription, I have assured my interviewees that their responses would be used in good faith and that they would not be quoted out of context. I have also assured my interviewees

that I can provide them with copies of my research if they so wish. In terms of access, I approached friends and family to ask them to take part in one-to-one semi-structured interviews. I engaged ten willing participants in my study, all of who regularly use portable electronic devices - for music consumption - in public spaces. Therefore, their experience of public space, as mediated by their own personal music consumption, has been very beneficial to my research project.

As a consummate music listener, I believe that the use of headphones allows one to experience music at a deeply personal, intimate and corporeal level. Headphones also allow the user a highly individualized experience of music rather than the communal experience of music one might enjoy at a concert. My own passion for playing music - I play drums and guitar and I also sing with several groups - and also listening to music via headphones has therefore intimately involved me in this research. In considering myself, the researcher, as both an active agent and an instrument in the research process, I have remained partial to the project throughout. My own personal experience of listening to music via headphones in public space coupled with my undergraduate study of sociology has given me a rich grounding from which to conduct this research project. The reflexive nature of this work has allowed me to engage fully with the themes and has allowed me to use my own musical listening experiences and interests as vital points of reference when conducting interviews and analysis.

2.3 Sources of data

Table 2.1: Table of interviews

Respondent	Gender	Age	Occupation	Device Type
JC	Male	30+	Nightclub DJ	iPod
JP	Female	30+	University student	iPod
RN	Female	30+	Teacher working in adult education	iPhone
JB	Male	30+	University student	iPod
LC	Female	20+	University student	Smartphone
DG	Female	20+	University student	Smartphone
NB & GJ	Female Male	20+	University students	Mp3 player iPod
LK	Female	20+	University student	Blackberry iPod
NL	Female	20+	Residential care worker	iPod
MT	Female	30+	Teacher	iPod

I drew my sample of interviewees from friends and family. Therefore, I primarily used availability sampling in creating my interview sample. I

conducted nine one-to-one interviews and I also conducted one interview with two interviewees at once. As I was aware that my sample interviewees are regular users of portable electronic devices (iPods/iPhones/mp3 players – for music consumption), I purposely approached them to take part in my research. Therefore, I have also used purposive sampling in choosing my sample of interviewees. My interviewees were drawn from the twenties and thirties demographic and they all professed a strong interest in music. Many of the interviewees are fellow university students. All of the interviewees listen to music through headphones while in public space – either on public transport, walking or training in the gym. Therefore, my sample's collective accounts of lived experience provided me with an opportunity to explore my themes.

2.3.1 The case study approach

In conducting interviews with a group of individuals on a common set of themes, I have carried out a case study. My case study highlights how technology impacts people's experience of public space in the context of everyday, real life. The case study approach has allowed me to take account of my interviewees' individual realities and subjective narratives. Through the interviewees' views, I have been able to examine the individual, intimate and personal experience of headphone culture in public spaces. This microcosmic approach allows for a detailed description of these individuals' attitudes towards headphone culture in the public sphere.

2.3.2 Interviewing

In conducting ten in-depth interviews with my chosen candidates, I have generated approximately eight hours of interview material. These interviews varied in length from thirty minutes to fifty minutes in duration and were carried out either at my own home or in the Phoenix restaurant on the NUIM campus. These in-depth interviews relate to the core themes of my research project: public space, technology (portable electronic music players) and identity. Ultimately, these interviews have allowed me to gauge the impact of portable electronic devices on my candidates' everyday lived experience of public space. The interview process was semi-structured and was respondent-driven. I avoided using a prepared script of questions and opted instead to allow the interviews to follow a thematic trajectory by talking around my three central themes. In this way, my interviewees helped to direct my questioning, thinking and subsequent data analysis. My interviewees' responses provided my study with a substantial pool of pertinent interview data from which to draw subsequent findings. I was careful to pick up on any particularly interesting and relevant comments made by my interviewees in the course of the interviews and ensured to ask them to further elaborate on same in order to generate as detailed responses as possible. My research has thus investigated the social experiences of my interviewees at the level of language and verbal expression. My research focuses on the narratives and stories provided by my interviewees. Through the process of in-depth interviewing, I have sought to gain a clearer understanding of the social implications (declining interaction, exclusion and

self-absorption) of the nascent use of portable technology - for music and media consumption - in public space. The interview transcripts give a descriptive and interpretive account of the public and social use of portable electronic devices for music consumption. The open-ended and thematic nature of the interview process allowed my interviewees to posit their own opinions regarding the movement of private space across public space through their engagement of portable electronic music players.

In terms of my preferred methodological approach, I have made a conscious effort to adapt my interview technique to best suit each successive interview scenario. I have also avoided sociological jargon in my efforts to maintain a simple, conversational atmosphere. Throughout the interview process, I endeavoured to allow pauses to intersperse the conversation in order to encourage my interviewees to take the initiative to talk at length. I also made detailed notes of any pertinent points or striking comments made by my interview candidates throughout the interview process. The open and conversational nature of these interviews has been conducive to the interviewees giving honest responses based on personal experience. Taking account of symbolic interactionist theory and also Goffmanesque notions of the performative self, I have endeavoured to fully engage my own language and gestures to generate informative and valuable responses from my interviewees. Crucially, the interview process has focused on these people's own descriptions of their own personal experience of public space - as mediated by the use of portable electronic devices.

2.4 Analysis of data

My research has given primacy to four themes: public space, portable electronic devices and identity performance (Goffmanian dramaturgical theory). By considering existing literature relating to these themes (and by examining secondary critiques of Putnam's work), my research project has critically analyzed the role of portable electronic devices in the public realm and also the movement of private space across public space. As part of my data analysis, I have focused on my interviewees' interpretations of their social worlds through the medium of their speech, language and idioms. I have transcribed and printed the interviews. Using highlighters, I have colour coded the transcripts according to theme. Thus, I organized interview responses into thematic strands. I subsequently critically analyzed these thematic strands in relation to the existing literature and synthesized this body of information into my findings chapter. The rubric of interview data and existing theory has provided me with an informed sociological perspective on the changing nature of public space as mediated by headphone culture.

Figure 2.1: An outline of the steps taken in this qualitative research project:

(Figure adapted from Bryman: 2004: 269)

Initial readings surrounding the topic of inquiry (These readings focused on three themes: public space, technology and identity)

$\downarrow$

Formation of general research question and initial theoretical framework (this includes theories, and literature surrounding the area of inquiry).
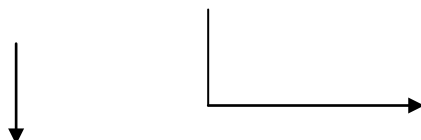
$\downarrow$

Collection of relevant data: interviewing and literature review.

$\downarrow$

Interpretation of data / analysis of data.

$\uparrow$ $\downarrow$

Conceptual and theoretical framework

$\downarrow$ →

Tighter specification of the research question

Write up findings/conclusions

Chapter 3. Discussion of findings

3.1 Introduction

The experience of public space in late modernity - as mediated by portable electronic devices - seems to be undergoing a process of privatization and individualization. Although concerts and live performances provide a platform for the communal consumption of music, the nascent use of portable technology had created a widespread culture of atomized and individualized music consumption. Prior to the advent of recorded music in the twentieth century, music was experienced as a communal phenomenon - in that one had to be physically near the performer in order to hear the music. As a result of its physical mode of transmission, music then acted as an agent of social cohesion. In late modernity, technology is transforming society in terms of people's everyday lived experience. Portable media devices enable virtual social connections (by means of mobile internet connectivity) while they dislocate the user from their immediate and physical social milieu. My in-depth interviews provided me with some tangible evidence of the increasing privatization of public space, increased time compression and the decline of traditional social interaction (at least in verbal terms) between social actors as they negotiate public space.

3.2 Public space

As my interviewees' headphone experiences are not tied to particular places, I believe that these experiences can perhaps be described as existing across space rather than in space. As their listening experiences occur in transitory

contexts - primarily on public transport - it could be said that my interviewees' experiences occupy a liminal space. Public transport offers a spatially unfixed environment that is experienced *in media res*. It seems that by using portable media technology, social actors seek to regain spatial control and to centre themselves – apart from the flux of their environment. Some of my interviewees' comments illustrate the individual's creation of personal and private space by using headphones - even while in company:

> JP: I have traveled with people I know and still listened to my music. I've just put on the tunes and didn't want to talk. I just looked out the window and traveled that way…wearing headphones is the norm…if I wanna avoid people in my home, if I'm gonna be in the same room as them, I put them (headphones) on.

LK's social experience concurs with this:

> I have a friend who always listens to her iPod but even when she's talking to people…she'll have one earphone in and still be listening!

This quest for individual independence is caused by environmental conditions and illustrates Gans' theory regarding the reciprocal symbiosis between social actors and social space. This above interview data also supports Simmel's argument that individuals perpetually try to remain discrete from others while in crowded urban space. My interviewees' comments provide salient links between technology and social space in that the headphone users often create their own personal spatial niche by means of an iPod/mp3 player.

Similarly, much of my interview data reveals a nexus between widespread headphone use and the explicit control and appropriation of public space. The notions of control and choice resonate with central ideas of late modern capitalism and the neo-liberal economic model. Some of my interview data echoes Scott McQuire's ideas on the privatization of space through suburbanization, private property and consumer society. It seems that iPods and other such devices provide opportunities for users to choose, control and customize social space. To this end, RN states:

> I think that's kind of the way the world is today. We feel like we have the right to control and own everything...you can choose the music that you want and you can just put your headphones in.

Similarly, GJ tailors her environment by choosing her favourite music. She says: "I have to find the perfect music for the perfect environment." This social behaviour illustrates an extension of capitalism's ethos of choice onto space itself. Headphone users enjoy their own privatized versions of public space. Indeed, MT says: "with the iPod it's your choice of music and your selection of songs." Headphone culture provides choice and control and in doing so, it emphasizes selfhood above community.

Some of my interviewees' observations clearly resonate with Michael Bull's analysis of personal-stereo/headphone culture as a cinematic and aesthetic mediator of public space. It seems that the heightened auditory experience of headphone use engenders a heightened visual experience of public space. Indeed, MT states

I put the iPod on shuffle and Pink Floyd comes on and it just fits perfectly with the surroundings...of being on the Tube...it's like a soundtrack yeah, like a sountrack to your life.

It seems that headphones allow a filmic enhancement of the user's physical surroundings. This interview data signifies headphone culture's idealized and utopian experience of space. JC's comments echo this notion:

So I mean I suppose there are some people that would walk out onto the street wearing headphones and listening to music...the music is a soundtrack and they are looking and noticing things.

There is also some evidence of heightened visual awareness amongst headphone users. GJ notes: "if you sit and just focus on your music, you can pay more attention with your eyes." This potential optic enhancement of headphone use resonates with Bull's cinematic analysis of personal-stereo use. The above interview data harmonizes with Bull's notions of the filmic experience of the personal-stereo user. The function of headphone-mediated music then, for some users at least, could be said to be to de-familiarize the familiar and mundane, to render the ordinary everyday social environment in glorious technicolour. The popular cultural references of film and music seem to overlap within headphone culture – again providing a liminal space wherein fantasy conflates with reality.

Some of my interview data ties in with Harvey's theory of postmodernity and its attendant compression of time and space. My interviewees comments signalled the tendency of headphone use to stretch or

shrink time. Several of them use their portable media devices to ease their daily commutes. Accordingly, RN says:

> One thing that I do find when I'm listening to music on a personal stereo, I'm often listening to albums that I know well and sometimes the length of the album is really pronounced and you're like, God, I'm at the end of that already, surely that's an hour long or whatever. So yeah, it'll shorten the journey.

In accordance with the above statement, JB says: "It makes the trip go really quickly. The time flies when you've got a few songs." These interview statements correlate to Harvey's claims that the cerebral trickery of temporality is compounded by the fleeting, rapid movement of the late modern spatial experience, particularly in urban settings. My research data suggests that iPod culture shapes the temporal experience of users' daily commutes and that travel time is often made to feel shorter because of individualized music consumption.

3.3 Portable electronic devices

As signaled by some of my interviewees' comments, the experience of listening to music through headphones offers a high level of intimacy and a kind of cerebral and visceral immersion. The sensory immersion experienced by headphone users points to an auditory 'cocooning.' This in turn recalls Putnam's critical analysis of the social fragmentation of American life in his work *Bowling Alone*. Many of my interviewees' comments support and

strengthen Putnam's theory of social disengagement and individualization. These portable electronic devices - when used with headphones for music consumption - seem to attenuate the unwanted social interaction of everyday life in public space while intensifying the personal sensory experience of the user. Discussing his iPod use in public space, JB admits:

> you are, to be fair, away in your own world for a while when listening to the music. With your imagination, you're somewhere else I guess.

As pointed out earlier by several of my interviewees, the headphone auditory experience acts as a kind of distraction and escape from the monotony of daily commutes. However, there also appears to be a deliberate use of these devices in public space so as to avoid the obligations of verbal social interaction. LC's experience of listening to FM radio on her phone confirms this:

> yeah definitely it's a great way of tuning out. Especially in the early mornings if people are talking and having conversations you just don't wanna hear.

These devices seem to be used as an implicitly accepted means of avoiding unwanted social interaction. JP says:

> I personally don't like to talk to people when I'm listening to my music. I'm guilty of avoiding people...even those that I know that see me...I still want to listen to my music...I listen to music 'cos I don't wanna

> hear what people are saying around me so I suppose it's a way of escaping from reality.

There are salient correlations between my interviewees' accounts of their personal-stereo use and Putnam's account of the privatization of public space by people's use of technology. Headphone use in public space allows the user to circumvent social reality and to disavow traditional verbal interaction with others. In agreement with this notion of a deliberate self-prescribed social isolation, JC says:

> I guess that in a sense by doing that, yes it is, it is about creating a private sphere for myself. If I'm sitting on a bus or on a plane and I put my headphones on, I'm closing myself off to the person next to me…I'm stopping them from striking up a conversation. And I suppose it's done intentionally and knowingly.

Echoing Putnam's claim that television and automobiles privatize public space, iPod users establish private bubbles of auditory experience that help them to negotiate everyday social space. These claims also correlate to Michael Bull's assessment of iPod culture in urban space. Bull argues that the iPod user is removed from the urban melee by means of their hermetic headphone experience. Remarking on the merits of personal-stereo use in public space, LC says: "I suppose it is, it's like your own private kinda bubble…it's so much easier to ignore someone if you've headphones in." The interview data signals the passivity and isolation of headphone users in public space. It also

highlights headphone users' active privatization of space into auditory pleasure bubbles. Likewise, DG states:

> well it definitely takes away from social interaction anyway. I was on the bus this morning...a girl got on the bus that I'd gone to secondary school with and I hadn't seen her in three years but I was too into the music to take my earphones out to talk. I think it's almost like a culturally understood thing that if you have earphones in...it means that you're not in the mood for conversation...an iPod is just an excuse to fall back on.

As stated in the comment above, there is an apparent social code - a 'culturally understood thing' - implicitly accepted by social actors, that one should not attempt to verbally engage a fellow headphone user. In support of the comment above, LK says "you're a million miles away from the person in the seat right beside you...total separation. I mean I wouldn't strike up a conversation with someone who is wearing headphones." Thus, Putnam's theory of social disengagement bears out in the interview data. This research also establishes the reciprocity of social disengagement from one headphone user to another. iPod culture and headphone use appears to both generate and propagate a lack of social interaction. Speaking about her iPod use at the gym, NL says:

> I put my iPod in and I listen to that and it is so I don't have to talk to anybody...I do not want to communicate with anybody.

Regarding the conscious avoidance of social interaction, MT crucially states:

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on a bus or on transport I use my iPod to have the license to be anti-social.

My interviewees' above statements clearly illustrate headphone-mediated social disengagement and confirm the notion that verbal interaction in the public realm is suppressed by the use of portable media devices. Putnam's claim that social capital is declining is pertinent and applicable to the current social phenomena of iPod culture and headphone culture. Michael Bull's sociological work on iPod culture is also validated by my interviewees' comments regarding their retreat into solitary space through their use of portable media technology. The use of such technology as a means to establish a safe space for the self is today apparently both culturally understood and socially accepted.

New portable electronic devices that enable mobile music consumption can enrich people's daily lives but they also seem to have helped create a culture of human dependence on technology. As discussed earlier in the literature review, Farnsworth and Austrin suggest that people are becoming overly dependent on their media devices. This suggestion is echoed by some my interviewees' sentiments. In relation to people who use their portable media devices intensively, NL says:

I hate the obsessive rituals that people have with their iPhones...their iPhones become how they live their life...they live their life through a phone rather than communicating with people.

Bearing in mind the above comment and Farnsworth and Austrin's suggestion, it could be said that headphone culture creates an excessive emphasis on human interaction with technological devices rather that with other social actors. Tonkiss' depiction of the cityscape's 'wordless solitude' resonates here also. The tendency of headphone users to inhabit their own solitary spatial bubbles actively fuels the anonymity of late modern urban life. The prevalence of smartphones, voice recognition software and mobile computing devices in late modernity appears to demand more time of users which in turn leaves less time for traditional means of social interaction.

Portable electronic devices such as phones and mp3 players seem to be compounding the time-space compression so prevalent in late modern culture. This time-squeezed culture has embraced the polyfunctional capabilities of portable electronic devices. The more tasks that these devices can simultaneously perform, the more that users seem to engage and temporally invest in them. JC's statement supports this notion:

> I think there's kinda become an obsession now with trying to fill in every empty minute in your life. People don't like the idea that there's empty time where they're doing nothing. So, listening to music is kinda filling that space...it's just filling time and stopping your mind from thinking about other things. People can be watching a movie or watching TV and still be checking their Facebook page status on their phone. So it's become chaotic.

The above statement illustrates the role that portable media devices play in accelerating the tempo of social life. The phenomenon of multi-tasking is driven by new mobile technologies. Music consumption on these new devices then has become one of a myriad of activities whereas traditionally, music was played on single-function portable devices such as Walkmans and Discmans. Hence, it could be argued that new mobile technologies are potentially undermining the audiophile's focused musical enjoyment by squeezing multiple functions into smaller frames of space and time. Accordingly, one of my interviewees' comments highlights the adverse social implications of technology (and its inherent time compression and multi-tasking): DG says:

> as regards all of these up-to-date phones, I think our society is being destroyed by technology. Even the Kindle has taken away from reading a simple book. We've become so lazy.

It seems that the increased functionality of these devices pushes people to become busier in their everyday lives. The devices fill empty time to such an extent that perhaps the boundaries between work and leisure have become too porous. The perpetual quest for smarter technologies and faster devices has created a breed of devices that allow people to do more in less time.

3.4 Identity

As stated by several of my interviewees, listening to music is an entirely subjective experience. Music can be seen an extension of one's self-identity and as a social marker of one's cultural taste. Correspondingly, NB says that

his iPod music library is "a reflection of his personality." Similarly, GJ says: "when I listen to my music I feel it's me, it's my music and it's a reflection of myself." These interview comments illustrate the potential of music to function as a means of expression, as piece of expressive equipment. My interviewees' statements regarding how music reflects their self-identity resonates with Goffmanian dramaturgy. The performance of self, in terms of the signification of one's musical taste, can be informed and enhanced by one's public use of headphones. New technologies, like some olders technologies can act as physical extensions of identity. To this end, JB states:

> if you look back to the 1980s when people had boomboxes over their shoulder carrying the stereo, maybe the Dr Dre headphones now are an extension of that and is just a contemporary version of it maybe.

The personal-stereo user interacts with the social world in terms of technological expression rather than perhaps, verbal expression. Goffman's theory of performative action is supported by my interviewees' claims that music reflects and reinforces self-identity. Headphones, in terms of Goffmanian dramaturgy can be viewed as a part of the individual's front stage. Thus, headphone culture can be seen as conscious construction of identity. Whether as an audiophile or as a casual music listener, headphone culture puts the user in control of their auditory experience of public space.

Music also creates emotional ties to place and engenders a sense of belonging. As a subjective phenomenon, music carries particular resonances that intensify the listener's experience of space. JP says:

I love listening to Radiohead when I'm out in public space because you can identify with it...you can identify with everyday life through it...it makes you feel like you belong in a way.

In addition to its ability to promote a sense of belonging, music can encapsulate experience and memory. The notion of memory is key to DeNora's work (as explored earlier in the literature review) and also to Proustian philosophy. Headphone culture helps to re-establish connections to past experience. In this regard, DG says that "mostly I get lost in my own thoughts and memories...I'm listening to the words in the song and I'm thinking back to a memory...I turn off the music twenty minutes later and half the bus is empty and I didn't even notice." Similarly, JC explains: "the best songs are the ones that speak to you about a time or a situation in your own life. If I put on my iPod I put on a playlist...there's certainly an emotional high that you get with music." Therefore, it could be said that memory is bound up with place and sensory experience. Music then, acts as a reminder of one's past experience, achievements and provides temporal reference points that mark out one's lifetime experiences.

Tony Cunningham's appraisal of consumer culture elucidates the ways in which technological gadgets act as markers of social status and wealth. The social currency afforded to such devices is symptomatic of processes of

commodification and globalization. Several of my interviewees pointed to the performance of social identity (in terms of wealth status) through the public use of electronic media devices and related accessories. Indeed, NL says: "certainly people do use (expensive accessories such as Dr. Dre headphones) for a sense of their identity...it's the side of identity that the Celtic Tiger formulated." Likewise, RN states: "If I see a sixteen year old with the big headphones that I know cost two or three hundred euros...I would assume that for a person of that age, it's more of a status symbol." Therefore it could be said that these devices delineate the user's class background and wealth status. Again, this interview data highlights portable media devices as material extensions of identity - used as props to signify cultural taste and perhaps even economic status.

As discussed earlier, Putnam's idea of social 'cocooning' relates to these devices and their capacity to act as a type of social buffer between the user and their environment. NL states that she uses her iPod and earphones as a kind of social armour while in social space: "I would use my iPod because I'm on my own and I'm a little bit paranoid about walking into town on my own." This statement confirms Putnam's theory of social 'cocooning' and also extends the notion of iPod culture as a panacea against personal insecurities and potentially low self-esteem. It seems plausible that many iPod users shore up their social anxiety by wearing headphones and thus exempting themselves from social interaction. The scope of new technologies to counteract users' fears of the physical and social world could be viewed as

both a mechanism of escape and as a mere diversion from the insidious

damage wreaked by anxiety and insecurity.

Conclusion

This project has discussed the social phenomenon of portable music players that enable music consumption on private terms while also operating in the public realm. Thus, this project has explored the movement of private space across public space. A rupture in traditional forms of social interaction has been partly driven by these mobile technologies that allow for both an elision of spatial distance and a compression of time. The result is a salient rise in atomized society and individualization. Performance of identity has become enhanced by the public use of technology and has acted to counter the heterogeneity of globalized modernity.

This research has highlighted the nexus between identity and space. The research has also illustrated the reciprocal relationship between social actors and their surroundings. The use of personal-stereos and their creation of privatized bubbles of space can be attributed to the willingness of social actors to escape social reality in late modernity. This highlights the dystopian nature of crowded metropolitan space and its attendant social anxieties. Headphone culture appears to provide a means of filmic fantasy, a veritable escape from the mundane everyday grind. Headphone culture also correlates to notions of control and self-reflexivity so prevalent in late modernity. It seems that headphone users seek to tailor, customize and ultimately control their experiences of public space.

Putnam's theory of declining social capital gave this project a theoretical starting point. The interview data supports many of Putnam's

assertions. Bull's work pertaining to iPod culture and the filmic experience of urban space also resonates with much of my research data. Goffman's dramaturgical theory also correlates with some of my interviewees' attitudes towards status performance. I believe that public headphone use provides a liminal space for the user wherein he/she can occupy both public and private space. This duality of experience - existing on the threshold between the public and the private sphere - could be said to mark out headphone culture as sensorially unique. The ideas generated by the existing sociological literature sustained my own thinking and provided a cognitive map for my research project. The interview process proved highly rewarding in terms of practical learning and for me, it highlighted the importance of research methodology and protocol.

There seems to be a dearth of sociological research conducted on the adverse affects of these new mobile technologies. Michael Bull's work offers the most comprehensive exploration of iPod culture. However, I believe that there are some unexplored avenues of research in terms of mobile phone use in public space – both texting and talking. In late modernity, there appears to have been a normalization of the overt use of mobile phones while people negotiate their social lives in the public sphere. In terms of ethics and acceptable social behaviour, there does however appear to be some reticence around this public use of mobile phones. Therefore, I believe that further qualitative research should be conducted to establish the changing ethical implications and etiquette standards of mobile phone use in public space.

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