

MOBILE INTERFACES IN PUBLIC SPACES

Locational Privacy, Control,
and Urban Sociability

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THE PUBLIC AND THE PRIVATE

Johanna leaves the baggage claim area at the airport and looks for the subway. It is Saturday and the airport is more crowded than usual. She never liked crowds, but a crowded place in an unknown city makes her even more anxious. The signs to public transportation are not clear, and because she is in a new country, turning on the data features of her iPhone to look for directions is expensive. She has no choice but to ask some random stranger for directions.

She finally finds the train and takes it toward downtown. After a long flight across time zones, she is extremely tired. All she wants to do now is to find the apartment she had rented online, eat some food, and sleep. She wants nothing more than for the train ride to be finished. A woman comes in, and sits by her side. She has lots of bags and occupies two-thirds of the seat, making Johanna slide closer to the window. Another group of about ten teenagers enters the train, probably going to some party or bar downtown. They are speaking loud and laughing, and they don't sit down. Almost immediately after the young people arrived, a man in his thirties sits across the aisle. He turns on some random pop-music on his phone—without headphones. "Maybe they are competing to see who can be louder," thinks Johanna. Another man complains about the noise because he is trying to read. They ignore him.

She then decides to listen to her iPod, thinking that maybe she can ignore everything else until she gets to her station. After listening to music for a couple minutes, she begins to feel better and is relieved that she no longer has to listen to the random sounds of the train. She entertains herself by watching the teenagers interact with each other, but without really knowing what they are talking about. She tries to imagine a fictitious dialogue between a boy and girl who seem to be flirting with each other and almost forgets how tired she is. Faster than she expected, the train arrives at the downtown station. She takes one headphone out of her ear, and gets off the train. Her new apartment is two blocks from the subway station.

Mobile technology use in public spaces has often been perceived as an invasion of the public by the private, and the divide between public and private spaces is a problematic one. Norbert Bobbio (1989) labels this divide one of the "grand dichotomies" used to understand the social world. As with all dichotomies, the separation of two terms on opposite poles obfuscates a wide range of distinctions and variance. In between two pieces in a binary opposition there lies much fruitful ground that is ignored when objects or situations are forced into one of two boxes.

Theorists who use the public/private dichotomy face a more serious problem than the broad strokes necessary for any theoretical dichotomy. Namely, public and private mean very different things to different people. For example, for many urban theorists public spaces are shared open spaces, such as plazas and squares. For many social theorists, they are spaces for public deliberation, following the model of the Ancient Greek Agora. In the eighteenth century, these public spaces could be cafes, where much of the political talk took place, but for economists, cafes are private spaces because they are owned by private individuals or corporations. However, for feminist theorists, private spaces equate to the secluded space of the home. Regardless of which perspective one adopts, public and private are always socially constructed, and thus shift across cultures and time. What is considered private and what is considered public has changed through history, and the borders between the two have always been permeable.

The private and public divide is also challenged as new technologies are introduced into the social fabric. Mobile technology use in public spaces complicates traditional understandings of what it means to be in public, allowing people to bring previously private activities (reading, listening to music) into public spaces. When people sit on a crowded train with headphones in their ears, is the space as public for them as it is for the two people sitting two rows behind who are engaged in a conversation? Or does the space become private, personal, and controlled? The answers to these questions depend on how we understand the terms "private" and "public."

In this chapter, we build on the previous chapter's examination of the relationship between mobile media and space by discussing the use of mobile technologies in public spaces and situating our approach to public spaces within a discussion of the public/private dichotomy. So far we have examined how mobile technologies work as interfaces to public spaces by mediating people's relationship to these spaces and to other people in them. Mobile technologies can be viewed as interfaces because their use also influences the meanings and perceptions of public spaces. We have been using the term "public space" quite a lot, but we have not discussed what we mean by public space. In this chapter, we define our approach to public spaces by contrasting it to the idea of private spaces. We show how the idea of public and private has assumed different meanings throughout history. For example, Jeff Weintraub (1997) characterizes four different models through which the public/private dichotomy has been conceptualized: the

citizenship model, the feminist model, the economic model, and the sociability model. We re-frame this multifaceted approach to discuss how mobile technologies—namely, the portable camera, the book, the Walkman, and the iPod—complexify commonly understood divisions between private and public experience.

In the first chapter, we discussed the book, the Walkman, and the iPod as mobile interfaces individuals use to control their interactions with public spaces. In this chapter, we analyze how mobile interfaces complicate the very notion of public space. We do so by examining different theorists who have discussed how mobile technologies challenge the public/private divide, most often arguing that mobile technologies privatize public spaces (Bull, 2000, 2007; du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, & Negus, 1997). But we disagree that what is occurring is only a privatization of public space. Certainly, mobile technology use in public spaces may help people feel more familiar with those spaces. But, more importantly, mobile technologies make the socially negotiated nature of public and private visible. They do not lead to the death of public space. Instead, mobile technology use is a physical instantiation of the constantly negotiated understandings of how public and private are related. Mobile technology use in public spaces foreground the already blurred lines between private and public, forming what Mimi Sheller and John Urry (2003) call “private-in-public” hybrids. As Bruce Bimber, Andrew Flanagan and Cynthia Stohl (2005) suggest, “as individuals are able to move more seamlessly between private and public domains, the structure of public domain themselves is altered” (p. 382). We therefore end the chapter by discussing the role of mobile technologies in (re)constructing the meaning of public spaces.

The Different Understandings of the Private and the Public

Public spaces are shared spaces. They exist outside the domestic sphere. We understand public spaces as spaces where strangers congregate and where heterogeneous individuals co-exist. Following Jane Jacobs (1961), we view public spaces as social spaces, comprising “fluid sociability among strangers and near strangers” (p. 17). Anthony Giddens (1991) discusses how Richard Sennett (1977) has argued that “the words ‘public’ and ‘private’ are both creations of the modern period” (Giddens, 1991, p. 151). Giddens points out that Sennett may be correct in one sense, but his argument misses the different ways in which the private and public have been used as organizing logics of social, political, and economic life throughout history.

The tension between the public and the private traces back much further than Sennett suggests. In Ancient Greece, Aristotle (2010) saw this tension as the split between the household (*oikos*) and political life (the *polis*). Similarly, Hannah Arendt (1958) discusses the Ancient Greek divide between the public realm and private life. In Greek society, the public was the place for politics, such as the Agora,

where things “could be seen and heard by everybody” (Arendt, 1958, p. 58). The private, however, was the place of property and the family. Private spaces were then secluded closed spaces, separate from the public open spaces.

Arendt’s discussion of the Ancient Greek *polis* and its creation of public and private spaces is closely aligned with what Weintraub (1997) calls the citizenship model. For thinkers such as Arendt, Aristotle, and Habermas, the “public” was the setting for democratic deliberation and discussion. Public space in this model is viewed as distinctly political. Arendt labeled it the “public realm” and Habermas (1989) called it the “public sphere,” both of which exist in relation to the non-political (at least in a direct sense) nature of private domestic life. Arendt’s public realm was, to a degree, physically bounded: She identified the Greek Agora as the site of public life. For Habermas, the public sphere was not strongly dependent on a bounded physical space. The prototypical public sphere for Habermas was the café life of the eighteenth century, but Habermas also viewed the political discourse that took place in eighteenth-century print culture as a “site” for the public sphere. Internet theorists have also argued that websites can function as vital pieces of the public sphere, showing that public spaces do not necessarily take place in physically bounded spaces (see Burrows & Ellison, 2004).

Arendt’s and Aristotle’s linking of the private with the domestic also has similarities with what Weintraub identified as the feminist model, which emerged around the 1970s most notably in the work of Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo (1974). In the feminist model, private is most commonly associated with the family and domestic life to the point that Weintraub argues that domestic and private are almost interchangeable. Public, consequently, becomes everything outside the domestic sphere. One of the problems that feminist critics saw with the private/public split is that the public tends to be valorized over the private. The private is the space society has traditionally associated with women and the public becomes the sphere in which males operate; however, unlike with Weintraub’s citizenship model, the public in the feminist model encompasses most everything (especially economic life) outside the household, not just political life. This is in direct contrast with the economic model of thinking about the distinction between public and private (Weintraub, 1997). In the feminist model, the private is the domestic sphere. But in the economic model, private belongs to the market forces of businesses and individual actors, while the public is the realm of governmental programs and services. In the economic model of thinking, the public typically represents the state, as in “public sector” or “public goods,” and the private refers to the market, as can be seen in the oft used term “private sector.”

While Weintraub does not directly mention “public space” in his discussion of the economic model, some ideas of public versus private spaces do partially fit inside this model. For example, critics have argued that public space is increasingly being replaced by private spaces, such as malls and other shopping centers (Davis, 2006; Freeman, 2008). In these arguments, public space is equated with spaces run by the government, whether at a local or federal level, while

private spaces are spaces owned by private actors. We, however, do not use the term “public space” to refer only to spaces owned and controlled by the public sector. Instead, we think of public spaces as anywhere strangers often congregate. This is more in line with what Weintraub called the sociability model, which is closely tied to the work of Richard Sennett.

In the previous chapter we discussed Sennett’s (1977) argument that the private life of intimate ties had encroached upon the public life of street sociability. Sennett, along with Philippe Aries, Georges Duby (Aries and Duby, 1987) and others, is one of the strongest proponents of the understanding of the public as social spaces. Jane Jacobs (1961) can also be put into this camp with her discussions of the public street life of American cities. Public life for Sennett and Jacobs is not represented by the collective action of strangers, as with the citizenship model; it is instead the co-existence of heterogeneous individuals. Public life, then, is in direct contrast to the private domestic life, and the tight-knit community. The sociability model is also tied closely to issues of physical space. Jacobs wrote extensively on ways in which urban planning could encourage a healthy urban life, and her influence was later taken up by William Whyte (1980) and others. The understanding of public space as the world of random sociability, and private space as more intimate and controlled setting, is the way we use the terms throughout this book.

Public space, then, is often understood as the space where strangers co-exist, a setting over which individuals have little control. Private space thus becomes a controlled space,¹ a space where interactions with others tend to happen on terms that are more comfortable to the individual. However, public spaces are not only physical spaces. For example, a virtual world or a chat room can be considered a public space. In fact, danah boyd reframed the sociability model so that it also addresses online sociability, or “networked publics,” as she names it. In her formulation of the concept of “networked publics,” boyd (2007) argues that social networking sites are now the site where many teens learn how “to present themselves, and take risks that will help them to assess the boundaries of the social world” (p. 137). But in either case (a street or an online space), public spaces are sites of heterogeneity and co-existence of strangers. Also as it will become clear throughout this chapter, the borders between public and private spaces, although so often presented as a sharp divide, are in fact much more fluid and complex. What is considered private and what is considered public changes with time period, cultures, and the interfaces we use to interact with these spaces. The use of mobile technologies challenges the traditional borders between public and private spaces because individuals are able to interface with their experience of space in new ways, as they co-exist with others in public (and private) spaces.

Mobile Technologies, Public Spaces, and Privacy

Instead of looking at the tension between the public and the private as a divide or a dichotomy, it is more productive to the study of mobile technologies to

understand the shifting boundaries between the two as fluid and permeable. It may be more accurate, as we discuss below, to say that many situations involve hybrid forms of public and private that throw into question the analytical accuracy of the dichotomy. Private and public also are often subjective states of mind rather than any actually demarcated spaces, something that Weintraub’s four-part model does not discuss. Marking a space as public does not mean people will not have private experiences in that space, such as a couple carrying on a secret affair in the middle of a crowded restaurant. Likewise, just because a space such as a hotel room is supposedly private does not mean that people will automatically feel they possess the types of privacy typically associated with private spaces. However, despite the slipperiness of the terms, Allen Wolfe (1997) still urges that they are necessary for understanding the organization and experience of daily life. They have long been organizing logics we have used to understand the shape of our social worlds (Bobbio, 1989). Understanding the permeable nature of these concepts may be more productive than abandoning the terms altogether.

Take the example of the home, which is the prototypical private space in Western society. The home is where people can retreat from public life into the safety of their intimate relationships. While feminist critics have made great strides in moving past the idealization of home, it is still often considered the most private of spaces. The idea of home as private, however, is a relatively recent construction, one closely linked to technological developments. As Stuart Shapiro (1998) explains, it was not until the seventeenth century that people could really enjoy privacy in their homes. In medieval times, homes were not understood as bounded places that could only be entered by certain residents and contemporary understandings of privacy were more or less non-existent. On wedding nights, for example, the bride and groom would lie naked in bed in front of members of the community and consummate their marriage.

The way we understand privacy has greatly changed since those interesting medieval wedding nights, a change that can be closely linked to both new architectural layouts and the rise of individualism in the Modern period. In the sixteenth century, the “physical structure of the home reflected the low priority attached to individual privacy, as dwellings often consisted of a single communal room and were almost always crowded” (Castells et al., 2007, p. 278). At the beginning of the seventeenth century, more houses started being built with separate rooms inside the dwelling, allowing for increased privacy, but these rooms were still accorded a level of privacy much lower than what we are now accustomed to because houses were still rarely built with hallways. To cross through the house, one had to move through each room. It was the addition of the hallway that really shaped the house as a set of private spaces in the way we understand it today because people could move around the house without needing to walk through all the rooms. The hallway enabled people to enjoy what was closer to a more contemporary experience of the private spaces of the home.

The construction of hallways highlights the permeability of private and public, even inside what is often considered the exemplar of a private space. Note that hallways did not *cause* new forms of privacy. There had to be at least an incipient desire for that privacy for people to begin planning hallways (Shapiro, 1998). Nonetheless, examining the interrelationships between technology use (in this case, the house) and the shifting boundaries between private and public is important because often technology use is closely related to a shift in people's perceptions and understandings of public and private spaces. Communication technologies are also strongly related to these boundaries as well. Take the example of the telephone. The telephone allowed individuals to call into the space of the home, an act that was perceived as blurring the boundaries between public "outside" spaces and the private spaces of the home (Marvin, 1988). Broadcast media worked in a similar way. Through radio, and later television, the public could be brought into the private space of the house, further evidencing the permeability of the boundaries between the two concepts (Foucault, 1999).

The television complicates these boundaries by contributing to what Raymond Williams (1975) calls "mobile privatization." Television allowed people to remain in the private spaces of the home even as they watched the more public life of broadcast media from the comfort of their couches. Before televisions and radios, a shared experience of a stage play or a musical performance had to be experienced in a shared space with other people. With the television, people could "travel" to the performance and watch it as others were watching it without ever leaving their homes. The television contributed to the paradox that individuals were increasingly living both a more private and a more mobile life, traveling to far off performances through the television without having to leave their living rooms. Mobile privatization made the public more private by letting people experience public performance from the privacy of their homes. But it also made the house less private and, like with the telephone and the radio, allowed outside entities to reach into the home. These communication technologies did not turn domestic spaces into public spaces, but they did signal a shift to a new hybridized form of public-in-private that challenged the traditional public/private borders. Mobile technologies invert this situation. They take private activities into public spaces. At the simplest level, they do so because they are mobile. That may not say much we do not already know, but it is the mobility of these technologies that places them in an interesting relationship with accepted understandings of the private and the public. When technologies become mobile, they often leave the confines of places commonly understood as more private (e.g., the house, the office) and can be taken into public spaces, spaces shared "among strangers and near strangers" (Weintraub, 1997, p. 17). However, while mobile technologies bring private activities into public spaces, they can also make the public *even more public* by challenging pre-established notions of privacy. We can see this through an examination of an early type of mobile technology: the portable camera.

The Portable Camera and New Publicity

With the development of celluloid roll film and more portable, usable box cameras, the late 1880s witnessed the growth of amateur photography. George Eastman used his considerable business skills to market his new Kodak camera, and soon people were wandering the streets taking snap shots of whatever passed by (Figure 2.1). As media archeologist Erkki Huhtamo (2004) argues, these new amateur photographers often challenged social expectations through their camera practices, leading to what contemporary critics called "The Camera Epidemic."

The portable camera, like the mobile technologies we discussed earlier, basically untethered previously fixed practices. Cameras had existed long before Eastman and others began developing easy to use, portable cameras. Earlier cameras, however, had to be operated by professionals and were usually too bulky to be easily moved and taken out in public. Consequently, photography was a practice that typically took place in more closed, private spaces. The portable camera took photography out into the streets, allowing people to complicate societal norms by taking pictures of unsuspecting individuals. A robust market even arose for candid, hidden cameras "imaginatively disguised as hats, walking sticks, bags, and—yes—pocket watches" (Huhtamo, 2004, p. 3).

The simple description of how amateur photography disrupted societal norms would be to say that it violated individuals' right to privacy. In a way, it certainly did. But in another way, we can look at the portable camera as playing a major role in establishing that right to privacy. Before the portable camera, there was no explicit writing in U.S. legal scholarship about the rights individuals had regarding privacy. Privacy had certainly been discussed long before the portable camera became popular in the 1880s, but there was no expected right to privacy in the U.S. legal thinking (Solove, 2008). In 1890, that changed with Samuel Warren and Louis Brandeis' legal review article "The right to privacy," still one of the most important legal reviews in U.S. legal history.

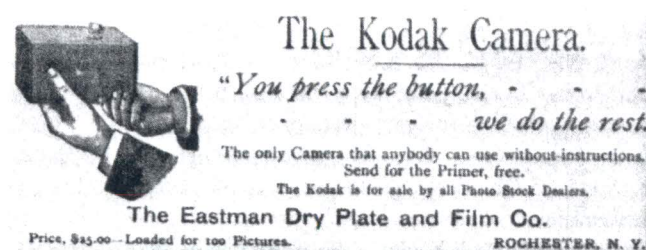


Figure 2.1 Advertisement for the Kodak camera in the *Overland Monthly Magazine* from August 1889. Copyright: University of Michigan's Library Making of America.

“The right to privacy” begins with a rather teleological argument, tracing the development of rights and laws as if each new step was inevitable. Warren and Brandeis’ (1890) brief history of law then arrives at their contemporary moment, and they write, “Recent inventions and business methods call attention to the next step which must be taken for the protection of the person, and for securing to the individual . . . the right to be let alone” (p. 195). The “recent inventions and business methods” were the development of the portable camera and more scandalous approaches of newspapers. Newspapers had begun to focus more and more on gossip, and they supplemented this gossip through photographs of unsuspecting people. No one was safe from the portable camera. As John Durham Peters (1999) writes, “privacy, quite explicitly, emerges as a concern once it is threatened by new media of image and sound recording” (pp. 174–175).

The ability to capture images while in public played a major role in the establishment of the right to privacy in the United States, but how did it affect the relationship between private and public space? It did so by making public space more public. Georg Simmel (1950) argued that one of the ways in which individuals dealt with the urban metropolis was to hide in the cloak of anonymity. In the crowds of strangers moving through the city, there was a privacy in numbers that was not present in rural areas where someone was likely to be recognized walking through a town. Drawing from Simmel, Turo-Kimmo Lehtonen and Pasi Mänpää (1997) argued the same with their idea of “street sociability,” which suggests that in public in the city we are at once interested and yet indifferent and anonymous. We expect a certain amount of privacy even in public spaces, and we maintain that privacy by remaining anonymous faces in the crowd.

The portable camera challenges the anonymity that individuals use to maintain their privacy in public. As Warren and Brandeis (1890) argue, when someone’s image is captured by strangers while she occupies public space, she is no longer anonymous. The level of privacy one expects even while in public is taken away, making the public even more public because one’s image can later be shared with newspapers or interested others. The portable camera complicates the public/private dichotomy in ways that do not fit well inside Weintraub’s four-part model. Instead, the portable camera shows that private and public are often subjectively experienced by the individual and can be more of a state of mind than a specific type of space. The crowded street can feel private for some people because they enjoy an anonymity not present in smaller towns or more closely knit neighborhoods. But image-capturing technologies can take away that anonymity, making the space feel more public and exposed for the person whose picture is taken and whose anonymity disappears. There are no lines that mark an experience as public or private; instead, a street can be both or neither depending on the perspective of the individual.

Interestingly, the portable camera works in contrast to how other mobile technologies such as the book, the Walkman, and the iPod are frequently analyzed as technologies that help individuals privatize public spaces. We,

however, look at these technologies differently: We argue they help individuals control their experience of public space.

The Book as the Interface to Private and Public

In the last chapter we saw that before the nineteenth century, books tended to be large and immobile. Texts were supposed to be read aloud. As Jason Farman (2011) notes, “The process of reading is one of deep attention, focused between the text and the individual. Only when a text is read aloud does it enter the sphere of the exterior, group space. Otherwise, the text is ingested internally as a function between the eye and the individual” (p. 119). Reading became an individualized act and a private activity typically performed in demarcated sites, whether homes, monasteries, or libraries. By the nineteenth century, publishing houses began producing mobile, paperback novels in part because of the new social environments of new transportation infrastructure. These new environments of the railway can be understood in the terms of the sociability divide of private/public. As we have seen, private has traditionally been associated with intimacy and controlled sociability. Before the train, most bourgeoisies traveled in carriages with a select few individuals with whom they were familiar. The railway changed transportation infrastructure from the relatively private space of the carriage to the more public space of the train compartment that was filled with strangers. To negotiate the new, more shared nature of travel, and feel like they had some control over the heterogeneity of the new social environment, people focused their attention on books and newspapers. The space of the train could not be made private in the same sense as the carriage, but by avoiding random sociability in the more public train compartment, individuals could feel more comfortable and familiar in those strange spaces (Figure 2.2).

Books and newspapers allowed readers to carve a more private experience out of the shared public space of a crowded street or a crowded compartment. In the last chapter, we looked at how people could use books and newspapers to control how they engage with public spaces. Reading in public allows individuals to manage the public nature of a place by controlling the social nature of public life. One could conceptualize this as privatizing the public space of the train, but that is too general a formulation. The person reading the book is still a part of the larger public space, even if that person is enjoying a momentarily private experience. Even if there is a subjective feeling of privacy in public through the immersion in a newspaper or novel, the subjective experience still exists in relation to the larger social situation. The reader still must position herself physically in relation to other people in the space and must recognize to some degree the dynamics of the shared space. This all points to the relational and negotiated nature of what is public and what is private. Susan Gal (2002) argues that “the distinction between public and private can be reproduced repeatedly by projecting it onto narrower contexts or broader ones” (p. 82). That is, some things can be considered



Figure 2.2 Passengers riding on trains often use newspapers and magazines to avoid random sociability. Picture taken in Berlin on May 29, 1958 on the subway line between Friedrichsfelde and Alexanderplatz. Copyright: Deutsches Bundesarchiv (German Federal Archive).

private in certain contexts, but public in others, which we saw with the example of the portable camera. Gal uses the example of a house: A house is typically considered a private space, but the rooms of the house are then defined as private or public in relation to other rooms; for example, the living room is generally understood as the public space of the house even as the house is private when compared to the park across the street.

The same can be said about a mobile technology such as a book. At the more macro level, a crowded street is a public space regardless of whether or not someone is reading or listening to a book. But people sitting on a bench on a crowded street reading a newspaper or a book may be seen as occupying a more private space in comparison to others in that space who are not using mobile technologies to tactically exert control over their experience. Once again, this type of experience shows the shortcoming of Weintraub's four-part model by emphasizing that the blurring of private and public often happens inside the mind of the individual. The book allows the individual to divert attention away from the public nature of the street and to create a somewhat controlled experience of the space through the text of the reading material. Note, however, that reading a book does not "destroy" public space by fully privatizing it. Instead, even if the public changes with different subjective experiences of space allowed by mobile technologies, the space is not less public. Rather, these subjective experiences, whether seemingly more private or not, are combined to form a different public space, consisting of different ways of self-presentation

and co-existence. The subjective must still exist in relation to the inter-subjective nature of a place, and as we discussed in the beginning of this chapter, public spaces are spaces of co-existence and heterogeneity. A book or a newspaper does not negate that. Rather, the book becomes part of the experience of the public for the reader, not as a way to fully privatize or remove oneself from the public, but instead as a way to negotiate the (sometimes awkward) experience of being in public.

Books and newspapers, therefore, are also interfaces that individuals use to inform others about their levels of engagement. Ron Scollon (2001), drawing from Erving Goffman, argues that people who read in public demand a certain amount of civil inattention. By reading a book, they let others know that they are not fully or socially engaged with the public space. To address readers directly without violating norms requires an extra set of ritual interactions. For example, if someone is reading a book on a subway, the person sitting across from her would likely have to apologize before beginning a conversation. A productive way to think of these ritual interactions is to compare them to a room in a house. Before entering someone's room, it is customary to knock and ask permission. For the person who uses the book as an interface to a public space of a subway car, the apology required to strike up a conversation can be thought of as a knock on the door. The civil inattention required by reading in public means that to invade the mental space of the reader, the other must apologize and ask permission. Unlike with a physical wall in a room, however, readers may quickly re-engage with the broader public space if the social situation requires them to do so. As discussed in the last chapter, if the dominant involvement of the train passenger is brought to the foreground by, let's say, an announcement of the controller letting people know that the train will be delayed, the reader can quickly talk to the person next to him about how unfortunate it is that he will miss his appointment. So, rather than privatizing the space of the train, reading a book in public can be viewed as a form of "going away" (Goffman, 1963). That is, the book helps the reader to temporarily disengage from the space of the train by paying attention to something else. The book, in this case, works as a permeable boundary (interface) to that space, which changes how the reader experiences that space. It lets the reader control his experience of that space, enacting the type of control typically associated with private spaces. This does not mean that public and private spaces are a binary in direct opposition to each other. Rather, there are degrees of private in public and vice versa. As a result, the reader is still part of the larger, public situation of the train and can re-engage with others at any time by putting the book or newspaper down.

The Space of Sound and the Sony Walkman

If tapping a reader on a shoulder is similar to knocking on a door, then one might have to knock a little louder to get the attention of somebody with headphones

in her ears. Headphones have been viewed as a technology that allows people to occupy a private sound world even when they are among groups of people (Bull, 2000; Hosokawa, 1987; Sterne, 2003). They are most often associated with mobile technologies, particularly the Sony Walkman and the Apple iPod. Long before the Walkman, however, people used headphones to interface the relationships they had with people in their surrounding space. What may be most interesting about early headphone use is that the technique necessary to occupy an individualized soundworld existed before it was materialized in the technology of the headphones.

To most of us, listening seems like something natural, something we are born knowing how to do. Much of what we consider natural now, however, is actually what Jonathan Sterne (2003) calls *audile technique*: We have to learn how to listen in specific ways. For example, in the eighteenth century, performances tended to be a shared experience where audiences interacted with the performers. Performances were mostly social events and the audience frequently intruded upon the performance by calling out to the performers and conversing with other members of the audience. It was not unheard of for the actors to have conversations with audience members while on stage. But in the nineteenth century, individuals learned how to listen to a performance as if it were a private experience. People no longer interacted with others; they instead carved out their own private soundspace and experienced the performance individually, ignoring the presence of others in the crowd. As Sterne describes, the development of audile technique made these performances more private. While people were still sitting in the public space of the concert or the opera house, being in a performance was viewed more as a personal (and therefore private) experience, rather than a public experience shared with other listeners. Listeners, therefore, created their own individualized spaces inside the larger shared space.

These audile techniques developed in Western society have transformed the acoustic spaces we inhabit. Sterne suggests that, by the nineteenth century, listeners were “alone together” in the private sound world created by audile techniques (p. 165). As we will see below, this idea of “alone together” is echoed in arguments about the privatization of space related to the Walkman and the iPod.

Sterne’s description of learned acoustic spaces shows the difficulty of dividing public and private as separate entities. In one sense, the physical space of the opera house is certainly a public space; in another sense, however, Sterne describes people sharing a space while each engaged in a personal experience. This example shows how conceptions of private and public are subjective and often not clearly defined. The people in the opera house still occupy a public space filled with unknown others, but the nature of the public is altered by the individual experience of the acoustic soundworld. The combination of the two form a new public/private hybrid that might involve less conversation but is no less public or physically shared than a seventeenth-century performance. The lack of lively

conversations among strangers does not mean that space has become private; rather, these individual experiences are part of the public space. The shared setting does not die; but these dynamics change the nature of public space as audile techniques become more prevalent and ingrained in everyday life.

Headphones are a sort of material instantiation of the individualized soundworld created by the audile technique honed in the nineteenth century. They are both a technique and a symbolic marker of personal space, as we discuss in more detail below. Headphones eliminate one element of the shared nature of the public—the auditory experience—because the sound played through the headphones is experienced only by the person who wears them. While headphones are now most commonly associated with mobile technologies such as the Walkman and the iPod, they were actually used for decades before the Walkman, mostly attached to more sedentary technologies. Telegraph operators wore headphones, and as the image in Figure 2.3 shows, they were able to concentrate on their work by blocking out the other sounds present in the space.

Headphones also accompanied the development of home radios, and listeners were able to plug them into the radio and listen to their music at home without disturbing others (Sterne, 2003). Notice that these headphones were attached to radios that were most often played inside the home. Just as the camera could make public space a little more public, headphones could make the private space of the home a little more private. A man could sit in a room with the rest of his family listening to music or news only he could hear. Often though, more than one person would sit together to listen to the same program as Figure 2.4 shows. Marketing materials for phonographs, for example, included images of people standing around together, listening to multiple pairs of headphones, staring down at the ground. Sterne (2003) argues that even though they were engaged in the shared experience of listening, they still remained distinctly separate from each other and their engagement was with the machine and not the others they were with. He claims, “Headphones isolate their users in a private world of sounds. They help create a private acoustic space by shutting out room noise and by keeping the radio sound out of the room” (p. 87).

However, the idea of a private world of sound needs to be complicated by thinking through what Sterne means by “private.” As we have argued throughout this chapter, public and private are not static entities. Putting on headphones does not automatically disconnect somebody from their physical surroundings. We have seen that many urbanists and sociologists define good public spaces as spaces where strangers interact and socialize with each other (Gordon & de Souza e Silva, 2011; Whyte, 1980) However, as with the previous example of the opera house, the fact that people are not actively talking to each other while co-present does not mean that they are disconnected from that space, or that there is no interaction with it. For example, Figure 2.4 shows children listening to a Christmas radio concert through headphones. If we compare this to a situation where people are sitting around a table, listening to someone tell a story, chatting and laughing

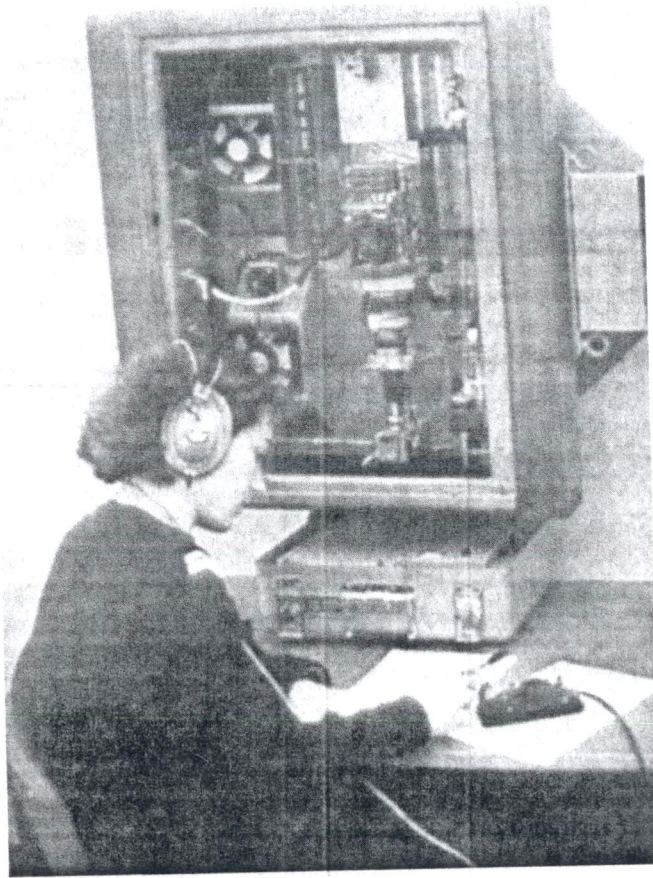


Figure 2.3 A wireless operator typing a telegram at the Radiotelegraphic French coastal station of Saint-Mandrier-sur-Mer in 1995. Copyright: Centre d'instruction naval de Saint-Mandrier.



Figure 2.4 A radio concert for children in the streets of London during Christmas Eve, December 1930. Note the collective use of headphones. Copyright: Deutsches Bundesarchiv (German Federal Archive).

together, we might think that the children are separate, isolated from each other. But if we look at the situation differently, we might suggest that they are sharing the experience of listening to the radio, and at any time they can remove the headphones and share what they are hearing. So the "private world of sound" is not a complete privatization of the shared space, nor does it necessarily isolate users from each other.

When the first mobile music players were introduced, headphones became even stronger interfaces to public and private spaces. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the first personal mobile listening device was the Sony Walkman. With the Walkman, what Sterne calls "private acoustic space" could be transported with the user. The Walkman user still occupies a shared, public space, but she does so differently. She replaces the sounds of the city with an individualized soundscape that just belongs to her (Hosokawa, 1984). The Walkman then becomes an interface that shapes the individual experience of public/private space.

The Walkman was a phenomenon. As du Gay et al. (1997) argue, it was one of the first technologies that influenced the popular opinion of post-industrial globalization because it introduced the world to the image of "Japanese-ness." Built in 1978 for Sony co-chairman Akio Morita, the Walkman was then marketed in both the United States and Europe. The marketing of the Walkman

is what du Gay et al. focus on most extensively, arguing that by crafting advertisements that were at once targeted at a mass audience and individualized, Sony achieved “the best of all possible worlds—mass marketing and personal differentiation” (p. 31). The personal differentiation came from how Sony sold the Walkman as a “hip” new device, both targeting and constructing audiences at the same time. Walkman advertisements featured beautiful young people enjoying the freedom of mobile listening practices.² Sony sold the Walkman as a technology of freedom for the young. They could block out the outside world, but at the same time show the outside world their status as a cool young person.

A notable design feature of the earliest Walkman model was that it included two headphone jacks. The two jacks allowed the owner to listen to music with a friend, similar to the images of the early radio discussed above. The Walkman designers thought the addition of the extra jack was important because they did not think many people would want to listen to music alone in public spaces. They thought people would see this as rude and undesirable. But the early designers were wrong: People did prefer to use the Walkman as an individual, rather than a shared technology. du Gay et al. (1997) point to the removal of the second headphone jack as an example of consumers’ influence over the design process of a technology, a change that carried through to the design of CD players and now iPods.

The unpopularity of the second headphone jack says a great deal about how people understood the purpose of the Walkman. The Walkman was a personal form of media, one that individuals wanted to experience by themselves. While some might highlight the ability to share the personal stereo by using one earbud while a friend uses another (Hosokawa, 1984), that is relatively rare. The Walkman works as a personal interface to public spaces that individuals use to control their experience of the public. Like with the book, this control does not lead to a complete privatization of the public, but instead it foregrounds the complex relationships between the two because people use the technology as a means of managing the co-present situation by listening to music. Walkman users feel more in control of the public space around them, a feeling generally associated with private spaces.

Nonetheless, some critics of the Walkman have argued that it led to the privatization of public space (du Gay et al., 1997). As Sterne discusses in the context of earlier auditory technologies, headphones represent a type of interior listening that is private, which has led to major questions about the Walkman’s effect on public space. Critics asked whether a public space was still public if everyone was listening to their own music (Bloom, 1988; du Gay et al., 1997). They feared that public space would be turned into the equivalent of a huge reading room, with everyone sitting in a row, heads down, reading different material, and losing the awareness of the shared experience. For example, Alan Bloom, the great protector of the “traditional” canon of great Western literary works, criticized the Walkman for contributing to an atomized society of individual actors who

did not experience the shared traditions of society. Bloom (1988) wrote, “As long as they have their Walkman on, they cannot hear what the great tradition has to say” (p. 81). Bloom was not alone in criticizing the Walkman for its effects on society. Describing these criticisms, du Gay et al. (1997) write that the Walkman

Triggers off many themes associated with late modernity as a distinctive way of life: The lonely figure in the crowd, using the media to screen out the routines of boring, everyday life; the emphasis on mobility and choice; the self-sufficient individuals wandering alone through the city landscape—the classic Walkman person seen so often in its advertisements, the urban nomad.

(p. 16)

The larger question to which du Gay et al. point is whether the public life of the streets can even be considered public if it is filled with mobile individuals filtering out public sounds with an individualized soundscape. As we have seen in the last chapter, the Walkman does represent a greater trend to turn away from public life and toward the private experience that Sennett identifies. But these criticisms reveal a certain technological determinism: When they criticize the Walkman for its negative effect on public life, they fail to identify the trends Sennett had already recognized, that is, the decline of urban sociability, and the private encroaching upon the public. The “impersonal codes of conduct” that had long defined public life had already begun to wither; the use of Walkman in public was a reflection of that trend.

Whether public space is adulterated by the experience of mobile technology use, however, depends on the definitions of public and private one is using. In the citizenship model closely associated with Arendt (1958) and Habermas (1989), the public is the site of political deliberation and democracy. If we adopt that version of the public, then yes, the public does suffer if people are using mobile technologies. Someone with headphones in her ears is unlikely to debate important issues with the other people she is sharing that space with or be exposed to differing viewpoints. As we discussed in the previous chapter, people often use mobile technologies to interface the way in which they engage with others, and that often results in using them to avoid socializing with others. From the citizenship perspective, the lack of engagement with others may represent a full-scale invasion of the public, political realm by the private. However, as we pointed out earlier, the citizenship model is only one way to understand the public/private continuum. According to the sociability model, for instance, public spaces are spaces where strangers congregate. Although strangers share the same public space, they do not necessarily socialize with each other.

Earlier in this chapter we discussed how so many of the ways in which people traditionally divide the private from the public have been blurred into hybrids. For example, Western societies have an economy that has blurred the

private of the market with the public of government. The public sphere in a political sense is often now enacted from the domestic, private space of the home through Internet chat rooms. When we understand the public/private continuum not in absolute fixed terms but instead attend to the complex intricacies of their always shifting boundaries, it is hard to support a wholesale takeover of the public by the private; consequently, Walkman use cannot fully privatize public space. If public spaces are spaces filled with strangers and difference, then using mobile technologies in public does not make that space private because the spaces are already filled with strangers with whom people do not intend to socialize. They do, however, allow individuals to exert types of control over experience typically associated with private spaces. It is this combination of control and co-present heterogeneity that leads to private-in-public hybrids.

More than any other scholar, Michael Bull (2000, 2001, 2004b) has examined the different ways in which individuals use the Walkman to control their experiences of public spaces. He argues that the Walkman allows for a more advanced form of what Raymond Williams (1975) calls "mobile privatization." As we discussed above, Williams initially used the term to refer to broadcast media and one of the great paradoxes of Modern society: "An at once mobile and home-centred way of living" (p. 19). Through the broadcast medium of television, individuals could experience increased virtual mobility even as life became more and more centered in the private space of the home. Bull (2004a) disagrees with Williams' definition of mobile privatization, arguing that Williams relies far too much on a visual epistemology. For Williams, whether the mobile privatization occurs through the screen of a television or the windshield of a car (Williams, 1988), it is typically the act of looking that is held up as primary. Bull argues that using sound technologies to move through the city is a much more literal form of mobile privatization. Williams discusses how people withdraw into "shells," whether they be tight-knit family units or comfortable automobiles. According to Bull, for the Walkman user that "shell" is constructed on a more personal level by the soundtrack she chooses to compose her experience of the spaces she moves through. Bull's analysis, however, too strongly emphasizes the death and disintegration of public spaces caused by the use of mobile technologies. He writes that for many Walkman users "Public spaces are voided of meaning and are represented as 'dead spaces' to be traversed as easily and as pleasurably as possible" (p. 79). He later says that "Public space in this instance is not merely transformed into a private sphere but rather negated so as to prioritize the private" (p. 79).

Concepts such as mobile privatization suggest that mobile technology use in public space empowers users to transform public space into a private setting, and that this leads to the death of public spaces. We do not deny that using a Walkman helps people feel more familiar with public spaces by experiencing a certain form of control over that space. But they are still using the technology in public, in a place full of strangers, unpredictability, and anonymity (Lehtonen & Mänpää, 1997). In order to deal with the heterogeneity of public spaces, users seek to

colonize them through the soundtrack of their music in part as a way to interface with the public on their own terms. The desire to mediate our relationship to public spaces existed before the Walkman, and that desire will not disappear anytime soon. Acknowledging this desire for control and the always mediated experience of public spaces is very different from the privatization of space that Bull uses as a lens through which to analyze Walkman use.

Bull is only operating from one conceptualization of the public, the conceptualization that "good" public spaces are spaces where there is active co-present interaction. As we have seen in the last chapter, this view is not new. Urban scholars such as William Whyte (1980) have already highlighted the importance of interaction among strangers as one of the desirable components of good urban spaces. But in reality, people are often anonymous and fairly indifferent in public spaces. If we think of the public as the site of heterogeneity and co-existence rather than just a site of actual co-present interaction, then the public is not negated by Walkman use. Rather, Walkman use becomes part of the fabric of public spaces, and indeed an interface that helps users manage their interactions with the public. Walkman users still belong to public spaces, even though they might seem indifferent and anonymous. We saw earlier in this chapter in our discussion of Lehtonen and Mänpää's (1997) concept of street sociability, in which they argue that anonymity and indifference are necessary to survive the stimulation of urban spaces. Few would argue, however, that people who remain anonymous do not occupy a public space. Rather, following Georg Simmel (1950), anonymity is a required component of urban spaces. The individual anonymity, along with all types of psychological and technological *blasé* attitudes, are necessary interfaces to participate in the public. They construct it, rather than eliminate it. They make the experience of public space desirable in a way that is substantially different from just transforming it into a private space. The public then can be understood as a space that may include many individuals who are engaged in more private activities and not actively interacting with each other, but it is not "voided of meaning." The meaning of public instead is shifted as it is made more complex by the "private-in-public" activities of individuals. The Walkman and the iPod, as we discuss below, work much the same way. People listening to headphones still occupy public space, even if it is not the idealized type of public space that some critics envisioned.

From Sony to Apple

Almost everything we have said about the Walkman can also be applied to the Apple iPod and other MP3 listening devices. Like the Walkman in the 1980s, the iPod has become one of the defining cultural icons of our time (Coleman & Gotze, 2001), even though it has begun to be replaced in the cultural consciousness by smartphones. The iPod certainly has more processing power than the Walkman, but it provides a similar experience of public space. Individuals

still use them as a tool for civil inattention, just like they did with the book and the Walkman. Like the Walkman, iPods also allow users to take a practice previously confined to specific places (listening to music) into the streets of the city. The shift with the iPod is the larger database of music that users are able to carry with them and the increased functionality, which gives them the ability to more precisely match their favorite soundtrack to the space they move through. With the Walkman, one's portable music library was restricted to the number of cassette tapes one carried, but the iPod lets the listener access an entire music library while mobile. The ability to control the choice of music is not a minor shift in understanding how iPod use complicates the boundaries between private and public.

Discussing Walkman use, Bull (2000) introduces the idea of filmic experience, in which one engages with public space as if other people are acting out roles to match the soundtrack playing through one's Walkman. Extending that idea, it is possible to think of the iPod as a remote control to the filmic experience. With filmic experience, the listener views the public life as if people are acting out roles in a movie, with the music playing through the headphones as the soundtrack to the actions of the other. No one can change the channel like on television and introduce an entirely different cast of characters, but by changing the music to the film, iPod users can change their experience of the public space, personalizing it even further. Note that through the filmic experience, iPod users are not disconnecting from the public space around them, but actually experiencing that space in a different, more controlled way. The people and things present in the physical space are necessary elements of the filmic experience, just as the music is. The elements of the physical space cannot be changed, but the music can. So for someone walking by a library, a couple engaging in a private conversation under a tree can seem very different depending on the song the listener chooses to play on her iPod. A love song can make the couple seem romantic, a break-up song can make them seem tragic. The couple remains under the tree regardless of what the iPod user does, but the iPod user can choose how she views the couple through the music she feels is most fitting to the experience.

Because of the larger size of its music database, the iPod was marketed as empowering users to control their experience of public spaces in ways not possible before. This theme of control is represented in the influential advertising campaign used to promote the iPod. More than maybe any other tech company, Apple has created advertisements that are immediately recognizable and memorable (Stein, 2002). While Bull (2000) can argue against the importance of Sony's early Walkman ads, there is little doubt about the importance of Apple's iPod campaign, which received the Media Lion Award for best international advertising campaign and the EFFIE award, the highest award bestowed by the advertising community (Cooper, 2009; Jenkins, 2008).

The early iPod advertisements clearly focused on the idea that mobile technology use detaches people from the space they move through by depicting

iPod users as a "silhouette" over an empty (although colorful) background. This now iconic "silhouette" campaign became so popular that it was later parodied extensively by both competing companies and anti-war groups (Jenkins, 2008). Troy Cooper argues that the iPod advertisements extend the free-thinking ethos Apple constructed in the Macintosh 1984 advertisement by promoting individuality and freedom and are effective in part because of their simplicity. They also represent the idea that mobile technologies can lead to a fully private experience of space. They feature five basic elements: "the dancing silhouettes, a uniform neon backdrop, upbeat music, the white iPod, and a small amount of text and logo" (Cooper, 2009, p. 475). These five elements combine to emphasize the freedom of the dancing figure who uses the earbuds to carve out a private space, moving to the beat through the headphones as if nothing else matters. The iPod ads clearly define it as an individualizing technology, one that helps users to bear and control the otherwise chaotic experience of public spaces (Figure 2.5). Eric Jenkins' (2008) description, in his article about the iconography of the silhouette campaign, is worth quoting at length:

The experience of watching the ads, when engulfed in the 30-second moment, simulates the experience of the world through headphones. Anyone who has traversed public space while entranced in their favorite



Figure 2.5 A 2006 Apple iPod billboard in San Francisco, California. Copyright: Creative Commons license. Picture taken by Naotake Murayama.

song recognizes the experience, similar to the feeling one gets when consumed in dance. The world seems to become mute, while people appear to move in harmony with your song. The listener experiences an immediate and total noise that emanates from the inside, shutting out the panauditory experience of proliferating noise common in contemporary life. The brilliance of Apple's iconic portrayal is in bringing together so many associated elements of this common phenomenological experience. The dancing, the rhythmic music, the headphones, and the neon backdrop all reference the experience of immersion in music.

(p. 477)

For our analysis here, the immersion in music is what might be the most important part of the Apple advertisements. The silhouette advertisements showed dancing figures that literally exist in their own worlds of sounds. Through the music, they are able to detach themselves from the places they move through by carving their privatized public space, thus making it their own. The backgrounds emphasize the privacy of the experience; they are stark in their neon emptiness, highlighting the dark solitary figures alone in a world they are constructing through their movement and the music. Apple's silhouette campaign certainly positioned the iPod as a "cool" product, similar to the Walkman campaign, but the freedom of the silhouettes take the emphasis a step further, showing a world in which the listener is alone—the context of the city, an integral part of many Walkman ads, is absent from the iPod commercials. The act of dancing like no one is watching is the epitome of a private experience of space—one that, as we have shown, is common in discussing mobile technology use. By deciding to market the iPod as a technology that detaches users from their surrounding space, Apple tapped into existing anxieties about co-existing with strangers in urban centers and offered users a way of controlling their interactions with strangers and the spaces they move through. Just as Bull (2000) argued that for some Walkman users "public spaces are voided of meaning" (p. 79), Apple's advertisements literally void public space by making it a solid, empty background.

The idea of detachment from space represented by the silhouetted dancers of the iPod commercials was also echoed by some members of the popular press. Warren St. John (2004), writing for the *New York Times*, wrote an editorial about the invasion of the "iPod people," comparing them to zombies in a horror movie. He writes about iPod owners walking through the city in a daze, standing in lines with no awareness of their surroundings. They are more docile forms of the iPod silhouettes, not dancing around, but interiorized through the music blaring through their headphones. St. John's criticism is extreme, and as we have been discussing in this book, individuals used different techniques to manage their experience of the stimulation of the city long before the iPod. The iPod is just a new way to do so, letting individuals interface with public space by laying an individualized auditory layer over the space. There is still a certain amount of

co-presence and shared experience when inhabiting a public space, contrary to the empty backgrounds of the silhouette ads. To function in that shared space, the individual has to have at least some recognition of the larger social situation, regardless of what is blaring through the headphones.

The Meaning of Public Spaces

As with the book and the Walkman, the iPod has two main roles: It allows individuals to take activities that were previously confined to what is often considered private space, such as listening to music, out into the shared space of the public, and it helps individuals construct a more personalized experience of public space. These two aspects of iPod use have led to the questions about the death of public space. These questions are based on the implicit assumption that for a public space to be healthy and vibrant, individuals must be interacting in a co-present manner. But have large cities ever really had streets where strangers freely and willingly interact? Simmel argued that the increasing size of urban spaces led to a lack of interaction with strangers. Mobile technologies, then, are not simply a cause of this lack of interaction, but rather are also a consequence. Like the *blasé* attitude, they are new types of interfaces to public spaces. Reading a book or listening to an iPod are activities that generally do not directly involve others in a shared space, but perspectives that claim that these activities simply privatize public spaces miss the nuances and possibilities of the ongoing existence of private-in-public, and the constantly shifting nature of the boundaries between the private and the public. More importantly, they miss the perspective that people often expect to have a certain degree of privacy in public spaces, as well as anonymity.

To exist in public space, whether we are talking with strangers or listening to music, requires a great deal of what Robert Putnam (2000) calls *thin trust*, which is a generalized trust in others to do what they are supposed to do. Public space cannot exist without a great deal of thin trust. As Gordon and de Souza e Silva (2011) write, "public space is a collection of minor social contracts" (p. 90). We expect other people to hold up their part of the contracts, and we will hold up ours. For example, walking down the street requires a great deal of trust in others. We trust that cars driving past will not run up onto the sidewalk; we trust that other pedestrians will not shove us into the street; we trust that the man on his mobile phone is not using it to activate a bomb. Public space is made up of these different layers of thin trust whether we are directly engaging in a co-present manner with others or not. When people use mobile technologies to avoid engaging with others, public space still does not become privatized because occupying public space requires implicitly signing on to all these minor contracts. Most people reading books or listening to music remain aware enough of the public nature of the space to live up to the general level of thin trust that is required of them.

In addition, we must acknowledge that we have seen even more significant shifts in the nature of the public with the advent of online communities. The public must be more than people engaging in co-present interaction or else it would be difficult to conceptualize how online communities formed around personal social networks could be considered publics. Many of these “networked publics,” as danah boyd (2007) calls them, do not feature the levels of heterogeneity desired by some of the thinkers we have outlined in these two chapters and they are a more controlled experience than walking down a busy city street filled with strangers; however, these networked publics are new forms of publics in which people learn how to engage with others and practice social skills. They also involve the layers of thin trust that are necessary for the existence of physically located public spaces. In her analysis of the networked publics of social networking sites, boyd discusses the changing dynamics of the publics many of today’s teens grow up in. Teenagers are often restricted from enjoying public spaces in the ways they desire, and they instead participate in social life through wall posts, private messages, and status updates. As boyd (2007) writes, “by doing this, teens are taking social interactions between friends into the public sphere for others to witness” (p. 124). Social networking sites offer these teens their best opportunity to exist in an unregulated public, free from the gaze of adults, and it is through these public experiences that many people live their social lives. This is a more controlled form of engaging with the public, just as an iPod user engages in a more controlled experience of shared space, but it still must be considered the public for the concept to retain much meaning. People still must rely on trust and there must be expectations of how others will behave, just like the publics of the city. Like with mobile technology use, networked publics represent the changing nature of the public, not the death of it.

Now, with the emergence of dialogic mobile technologies, such as mobile phones and location-aware technologies, we witness yet another change in the way we understand public spaces. It is as if the idea of networked publics is brought into physical spaces, redefining the borders between online and face-to-face communities, digital and physical spaces. As we will see in the following chapters, physical spaces become clustered with networked connections, in what Gordon and de Souza e Silva (2011) call *net locality*. Contemporary accounts of urban public spaces need to take into consideration both face-to-face and remote connections. In this new logic of public spaces, “the purview of what is near has expanded beyond that which is right next to you, and paying attention to an anonymous user at a neighboring street corner, visualized on a mobile map, is just as likely as paying attention to the stranger across the street” (Gordon & de Souza e Silva, 2011, p. 86). The idea that both remote and co-present interactions are now interfaced via mobile technologies fundamentally redefines how we understand public spaces and the character of locations.

Notes

- 1 Private spaces are only controlled spaces in comparison to public spaces. Inside private spaces, people have differing levels of control, as feminist theory has so productively shown.
- 2 For a sample of Sony’s early Walkman advertisements, see the following sites: <http://www.grayflannelsuit.net/retrotisements-rip-sony-walkman-1979-2010/> and <http://gizmodo.com/5305177/great-sony-walkman-tv-and-print-ads-of-the-1980s>.

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NESS, "REALITY," AND THE MEDIATED HABITUS FROM TELEVISION TO THE MOBILE PHONE

ouldry

ss should be interpreted as a development
media history as a whole. ... At the base,
ed to connect oneself, with others, to the
s events, is central to the development of
modern nation.

(Bourdon, 2000, pp. 551–552)

ong to the history of the progressive organi-
social life across space and time: Media, in
ds, are part of governmentality, which is not
hat they have many other dimensions too
xpression, pleasure, and imagination). From
1 onwards, sociology has been concerned
social order is enacted, in part, through cat-
f perception and thought. Liveness can be
od as a category crucially involved in both
ng and reproducing a certain historically dis-
type of social coordination around media
from which images, information, and narra-
distributed and (effectively simultaneously)
across space. This general context is helpful
rstanding the persistence of "liveness" as a
d some of the tensions currently surrounding
better, understanding mediated "liveness" in
links media debates to wider questions about
media-saturated societies, social "order" is
to the extent that it is; in particular, it links to
sibility of rethinking one concept of ordering,
Bourdieu's "habitus," for mediated societies, a
which I return.

s approach questions the way "liveness" in
studies debates is generally seen as an issue

specifically about media texts and the changing
conventions and interpretations embedded in media
production. It insists that larger questions are at
stake, confirming that the curiosity of media scholars
in "liveness" has been well-placed, but at the same
time detaching that term from an exclusive
application to one specific media technology (usually
television).

The Forms of Liveness

An important earlier argument which connected tele-
vision's liveness to wider sociological questions was
Jane Feuer's paper on "The concept of live televi-
sion" (1983). Feuer was interested in the ideology of
television as a social technology, not the way other
types of ideology (political or commercial) might be
transmitted through television: specifically the "ideol-
ogy" that television connects us "live" to important
events, so that we see things as they happen. However,
Feuer's article ended (1983, pp. 20–21) with a ques-
tion about how that ideology is socially reproduced in
audiences' use of television texts that remained unan-
swered. Perhaps this is why analysis of the ideological
implications of televisual form ceased, for a while, to
be central to media studies in the 1990s (there were
other factors, of course, to do with the rethinking of
"ideology" itself).

The value of Feuer's work now, however, does not
depend on the continued acceptability of the term
"ideology"; indeed, things may be clearer without that
term. The question instead is whether "liveness" (as

applied to television and other media) is purely a
descriptive term, whose usefulness depends on mat-
ters of fact, or whether it is, in Durkheim's sense, a
category – a term whose use depends on its place
within a wider system or structured pattern of values,
which work to reproduce our belief in, and assent to,
something wider than the description carried by the
term itself: in this case, media's role as a central insti-
tution for representing social "reality." In a recent
book (Couldry, 2003) I argued that we can develop
Feuer's insight by interpreting liveness as a ritual
term – that is, a category put to use in various
forms of structured action that naturalize wider power
relationships. There are many forms of ritualized
practice in relation to media. But what follows does
not depend on that wider argument. Instead, I will
focus on the claim that "liveness" works as a category
distinction whose importance is more than purely
descriptive.

This is the best way of explaining, I suggest, some
striking features of the trajectory of the term "live-
ness" in discourses about media. I mean, first, the
substitutability of the media involved in liveness
(originally radio, then television, increasingly the
Internet and, in certain respects, the mobile phone);
second, the fuzziness permitted over how "simultane-
ous" transmission and reception have to be for "live-
ness" to be achieved (White, 2004); and third, the
persistence of the term "liveness" notwithstanding
challenges to the paradigms of liveness at particular
historical moments. These points are connected, so
let me explore them in more detail.

In television's early days, when all programs were
performances broadcast live, television was entirely a
"live" medium in the sense of being broadcast as it
was performed. As the proportion of live perfor-
mance declined, the term "live" switched its refer-
ence while remaining in use. Jerome Bourdon (2000)
argues that the reference-point of "liveness" shifted to
those parts of television which broadcast *real* events
as they happen, but this is difficult to fit in with the
continued use of "liveness" in relation to fictional or
semi-fictional programs such as soap operas or game-
docs. Instead, it is more plausible that the decisive
criterion of liveness is not so much the factuality of
what is transmitted, but the fact of live transmission
itself (Ellis, 2000, p. 31).

There is, however, a connection to real events
built into "liveness," but an indirect one. Live trans-
mission (of anything, whether real or fictional) guar-
antees that someone in the transmitting media
institution *could* interrupt it at any time and make an
immediate connection to real events. What is special,
then, about live transmission is the *potential* connec-
tion it guarantees with real events. Or at least this is
how liveness is now generally constructed. Joshua
Meyrowitz put this succinctly:

There is a big difference between listening to a
cassette tape while driving in a car and listening
to a radio station, in that the cassette player cuts
you off from the outside world, while the radio
station ties you into it. Even with a local radio sta-
tion, you are "in range" of any news about national
and world events.

(Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 90)

Liveness – or live transmission – guarantees a
potential connection to shared social realities as they
are happening.

If understood this way, it is no surprise that the
category of liveness continues even as the set of
media technologies to which it is applied expands.
Not only does television's "liveness" continue to be
emphasized as one of its key selling points more than
a decade after some argued video recording would
mean the end of televisual "liveness" (Cubitt, 1991).
Liveness now takes new forms which link television to
other media. These media include the Internet – as in
the much commented-upon "live" transmission on
the *Big Brother UK* Web site of Nick Bateman's expul-
sion in 2001, hours before edited highlights of the epi-
sode could be shown on television (Lawson, 2001)
– and the mobile phone, as in U.K. mobile phone
companies' marketing strategies during the buildup to
the 2001 summer season of reality TV:

Ultimately the [enhanced] SMS services may all
boil down to the quality of the content and char-
acters, not forgetting the giddy excitement that
can be generated from a message telling *Big
Brother* obsessives of two housemates being in
bed together – 'live on the internet now.'

(Vickers, 2001)

Because liveness is not a natural category but a constructed term, its significance rests not on technological fact, but on a whole chain of ideas:

1. that we gain access through liveness to something of broader, "central," significance, which is worth accessing now, not later;
2. that the "we" who gain live access is not random, but a representative social group;
3. that the media¹ (not some other social mechanism) is the privileged means for obtaining that access.

Liveness, in sum, is a category whose use naturalizes the general idea that, through the media, we achieve a shared attention to the "realities" that matter for us as a society.

The connection of liveness to the media's reality-claims is hardly accidental. We could say a great deal more about the reality claims of television, especially about current forms of reality TV which (as we have seen) provide some clear examples of how the reference of "liveness" is being stretched (cf. Couldry, 2003, chapter 6). Instead, however, I want to discuss how, at the same time that "liveness" is expanding across media, its *categorical* weight is being challenged by potential rival forms of "liveness" which are not (or not unambiguously) linked to a mediated social "centre."

When I say rival "forms" of liveness, I do not mean flows of communication which are necessarily referred to as "live" (since liveness is a category, its use is embedded in contexts that are largely habitual), but rather emergent ways of coordinating communications and bodies across time and space which, like "liveness" proper, involve (more or less) simultaneity, yet not an institutional "center" of transmission. Two fundamental shifts in information and communications technologies in the past decade threaten, *prima facie*, to destabilize liveness in the sense considered so far.

The first is what we could call *online liveness*: social co-presence on a variety of scales from very small groups in chat rooms to huge international audiences for breaking news on major Web sites, all made possible by the Internet as an underlying infrastructure. Often, online liveness overlaps with the existing

category of liveness, for example, Web sites linked to reality TV programs such as *Big Brother* which simply offer an alternative outlet for material that could in principle have been broadcast on television if there had been an audience to justify it. Online liveness here is simply an extension of traditional liveness across media, not a new way of coordinating social experience. But since the communications space of the Internet is effectively infinite, any number of "live" transmissions can go on in parallel without interfering with each other: Alongside live streaming of long-anticipated events on Web sites (major sporting events) and news-site coverage of breaking news exist chat rooms on myriad different sites that link smaller groups of people. All of these involve simultaneous co-presence of an audience, but in the latter case there is no liveness in the traditional sense—that is, a plausible connection to a center of transmission. What if the latter type of online liveness increasingly dominates people's trajectories as media consumers? This "liveness" would involve no central connection mirroring Pierre Levy's (1997) characterization of cyber-culture as "universality *without* totality." It is impossible yet to assess the likelihood of this shift, as the Internet's contrasting tendencies toward fragmentation and concentration are played out. Much, including the Internet's capacity to deliver advertising audiences to fund continued media production, will depend on the outcome.

The second rival form of "liveness" we might call *group liveness* but it would not seem, at first sight, to overlap at all with traditional liveness since it starts from the co-presence of a social group, not the co-presence of an audience dispersed around an institutional center. I mean here the "liveness" of a mobile group of friends who are in continuous contact via their mobile phones through calls and texting. Peer-group presence is, of course, hardly new, but its *continuous mediation* through shared access to a communications infrastructure whose entry points are themselves mobile (and therefore can be permanently open) is new. It enables individuals and groups to be continuously co-present to each other even as they move independently across space. This transformation of social space may override individuals' passage between sites of fixed media access, as when school friends continue to text each other when they

get home, enter their bedroom, and switch on their computer. As well as being a significant extension of social group dynamics, group liveness offers to the commercial interests that maintain the mobile telephony network an expanded space for centralized transmission of services and advertising. We return here to the ambiguity of original telephony which served as a limited broadcasting system (Marvin, 1987) before it became exclusively an instrument of interpersonal communication, but mobile phone use may not stabilize toward one use rather than the other in the way fixed telephony did. Whatever happens, the result will affect the context in which traditional liveness—individual communication to a socially legitimated point of central transmission—is understood.

Liveness and Habitus

These last remarks—about how liveness's significance as a category may be changed by other shifts in how communication flows are becoming embedded in social interaction—have been speculative, but in conclusion let me anchor them in some reflections on their empirical consequences. Social categories, in Durkheim's sense, are in one way abstract (they are abstracted in analysis from the flow of social life), but in another they are quite concrete, since they only work by being *embedded* in the thought and action of situated agents. This is especially true of Pierre Bourdieu's development of Durkheim's work through the concept of Mauss, Durkheim's collaborator: habitus. For habitus addresses the level at which embodied dispositions (particularly dispositions to classify the world in social action) are generated by structural features of that same social world. Tracing how the weight of "liveness" as a social category might be changing is part of asking how the "habitus" of contemporary societies is being transformed by mediation itself.

This is, of course, a huge topic, but I hope at least to establish some starting points. Some contextual remarks about Bourdieu's work are necessary, since it has been appropriated in media sociology piecemeal over the years rather than systematically. There are many ways of approaching Bourdieu, but one of the most promising is through a concept neglected in

almost all media sociology: habitus. For it is here that Bourdieu, following a philosophical path out of phenomenology, addresses how agents' dispositions to act are themselves *formed* out of preexisting social contexts, a question that, as Nick Crossley argues, is "one of the most fundamental phenomena that sociology can address" (Crossley, 2001, p. 4).

In recent years habitus has received increasing attention as a concept (Calhoun, 1995; chap. 5; Crossley, 2001; McNay, 1999), although it has also received a fair amount of unsympathetic criticism (Alexander, 1995). It has been most frequently applied, if at all, in media sociology in its form of class-specific habitus in connection with Bourdieu's sociology of taste (Bourdieu, 1984). This, however, is not the most interesting usage of habitus for us here. For habitus is fortunately not tied to Bourdieu's controversial belief that the taste dispositions of social classes are shaped decisively by the early differences in their material conditions of existence; it can also be used more generally to understand the *range* of "generative structures" (McNay, 1999, p. 100) that shape dispositions. Even if a problem with Bourdieu's account of class-specific habitus in the arena of taste is that it ignores how mass media have aided the de-differentiation of taste boundaries (Wynne O'Connor, 1998), there is huge scope for investigating how media might have changed the fundamental conditions under which dispositions of *all* kinds are generated.

Bourdieu's overall neglect of media has often been noted (this is a fundamental issue in assessing his account of how contemporary societies hold together [Calhoun, 1995, p. 155], but it is especially striking when we reflect on his early definition of habitus in this general sense as "a general transposable disposition which carries out a systematic universal application . . . of the necessity inherent in the *learning conditions* [of social action]" (emphasis added) (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 170). Media are clearly relevant to how children learn about the contemporary world, including its temporal and social organization, so mediation should surely be central to rethinking habitus. If we consider one of Bourdieu's best-known analyses of how habitus works in traditional societies, the analysis of the Berber house (Bourdieu, 1990), the mechanism is the structuring of domestic space. But no one can ignore media's role in structuring

domestic space, embedded in the living spaces as our "window" onto the world. What is difficult is to capture the depth and complexity of how media habitus, that is, as a "materialised system" (emphasis added) (Bourdieu, unfortunately, in his most developed writing, Bourdieu is open to the contribution of others, especially those through which he presents himself "as such" to himself (1990, of course, involve both types of structuring of the spaces in which we are subjects, and the representations in which we recognize ourselves as groups. Liveness, a category of media, marks the media's role as the access point to what is "central" to the "group," that is, the whole link of liveness to the organization of our lives passes quite naturally through the habitus.

It can be traced to all three types of liveness that are earlier. Traditional "liveness" is written in terms which embody our dependencies on others—for example, the regular watching of a news bulletin at least once every evening or many, including myself, of being woken by a radio offering the latest live news. The organized form of online liveness characterizes where new forms of public sociality may sometimes be in circumstances where the relevant "peers" themselves have to be generated through social networks (see Orgad [2004] on support groups for breast cancer sufferers), a group-based "group liveness"—and its extension to individual users' sense of themselves as available for contact—is already being embodied in forms of responsibility best described in terms of habitus. Take this quotation from a single mother living in north London:

I have my phone with me . . . and it is gone. Last week I popped out to the shop corner here and forgot my phone. Halfway down the street I turned back to get it. The shop was 10 minutes away but I still came back . . . (quoted in Crabtree, Nathan, & Roberts, 2003, p. 29)

The test in all this is to trace how categories of thought come together to organize dispositions and, through them, specific practices. Liveness, in its most general sense of continuous connectedness, is hardly likely to disappear as a prized feature of contemporary media, because it is a category closely linked to media's role in the temporal and spatial organization of the social world. The category "liveness" helps to shape the disposition to remain "connected" in all its forms, even though (as we have seen) the types of liveness are now pulling in different directions. It might seem that, by broadening our consideration of liveness this far, we have lost the specificity that made it such a compelling term in academic writing on media and in everyday media discourse. I hope, however, to have shown that the opposite is true: It is only by understanding the tangled web of social categories in which mediated liveness is lodged that we can understand, in turn, why debates about liveness in media research will continue to have wider resonances for the foreseeable future.

Note

1. On the use of "the media" to refer to those media constructed as society's "central" media, see Couldry (2000, p. 6) and Gitlin (2001).

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