



Sounding Out the City: Personal Stereos and the Management of Everyday Life (Materializing Culture)

Michael Bull

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On buses, trains, and streets over the past decade and more, youths in particular but increasingly older people as well tune into their personal stereos and tune out city sounds. Why? What does the personal stereo mean to these people and to urban culture more generally? Does it heighten reality? Enable people to cope? Isolate? Create a space? Combat boredom? Far too commonplace and enduring to be considered a fashion accessory, the personal stereo has become a potent artefact symbolizing contemporary urban life. This book opens up a new area of urban studies, the auditory experience of self and place. In doing so, it enhances our understanding of the role of media and technology in everyday life. Urban, cultural and anthropological studies have been dominated by explanations of experiences drawing upon notions of visibility. But culture always has an auditory component that shapes attitudes and behaviour -- perhaps nowhere more so than in the city where sound is intensified. This book challenges strictly visual approaches to culture by proposing an auditory understanding of behaviour through an ethnographic analysis of personal stereo use. The author reformulates our understanding of how people, through the senses, negotiate central experiences of the urban, such as space, place, time and the management of everyday experience, and examines the critical role technology plays. This book will be of interest to anyone seeking a fresh and incisive approach to urban studies, cultural studies, anthropology, sociology, or media and communication studies.

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