



# The Walkman and the Primary World of the Senses<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

People who use tiny earphones in public to listen to music of their own choice have become a familiar sight in the last decade. Although in itself this new technique of entertainment is not mysterious at all, there is still something strange about the phenomenon. Like many adults, I was not interested in thinking about Walkman users when I came across them for the first time in the early 1980s—though I admit to having been irritated by them. Rather than investigating the new phenomenon, I justified my irritation with a negative evaluation of the state of mind of the (usually young) users of the Walkman. In that I was not alone. In fact, such an attitude toward the instrument and its users seems widespread even today. In critical essays on the decline of intellectual culture in modern society the Walkman often figures as a self-evident illustration.

I began to question the meaning of my own irritation and that of other observers of the new habit when I became acquainted with the work of Erwin Straus. His attempts “to decipher the unwritten laws of everyday life” (1966a, p. xi), and in particular his thoughtful analysis of the sensual aspects of our being-in-the-world, encouraged me to inquire into the strange world of the Walkman.<sup>2</sup>

## Considerations of Method

My inquiry must take into account both the “outside” and the “inside” perspective of the Walkman world. That is, the investigation is concerned both with the impression that Walkman users make on “normal” passersby and with the changed appearance the surrounding world presents to the Walkman users themselves.

The outside perspective was familiar to me when I began to explore the phenomenon. My almost immediate reaction was: “How narrow-minded these kids are!” I realized that I would have to suspend this judgment and ask instead: “What do I actually experience and why do I judge young people whom I do not know at all in such a negative fashion?” I also realized the need to explore the outside experience of other observers as

reported to me by them. By doing so I would ensure that my somewhat phobic attitude was not just an idiosyncratic reaction, and by creating distance from my affective involvement I would ensure objectivity of my findings.

As for the inside perspective, experiential sources had to be explored. One of these was the experience of regular users of the Walkman. Interviews and questionnaires with open questions offered themselves here. Another means of exploration was for me to take on the role of an "earphone being." Finally, some subjects, with or without previous inside experience, were involved in experiments such as walking a certain distance with and without earphones. Afterward, they recorded their experiences in writing or described them in interviews. A variation in the recording of the experience was the use of dictaphones during the walk. Another variation was the taking of photographs by the walkers to serve afterward as cues to the experience at the moment the photo was being taken. The material on the inside perspective gathered through these experiments served as a basis for a vivid description. Of course, each method has its specific shortcomings, but by using all the methods in combination one obtains a fairly comprehensive portrayal of the situation. Some more details of methodological problems are described below.

No doubt the mere presentation of the verbally reported perception of the inside view of the Walkman world will not give a "phenomenological" description in the full sense. Whoever has worked in the field of phenomenology is aware of the paradoxical task: In order to grasp the essence of immediate experience we have to refer to verbally reported descriptions even though we know that these reports denature the "primary world of senses" (Straus, 1963a). At the same time, we know that it is only by thought, by explicit reflection, that is, by "multiplication" of verbal effort, that the preverbal ("presentational" in Straus' terminology) can be illuminated. Straus has formulated the problem clearly:

Indeed our whole investigation is somewhat burdened by the possibility of objectifying expressive characters.... The difficulties involved in obtaining knowledge of sensing are the same, in principle, as those involved in grasping that which becomes in its becoming. In this case knowledge reaches beyond itself and must burst its own forms.... Formulating knowledge of becoming leads to the edge of paradox. (p. 317)

In the original German text (Straus, 1956) two sentences (missing in the English edition) follow. Translated they read:

Of course, without this possibility of objectifying expressive characters our inquiry also would not be “possible” at all. For after all we are speaking of expression, are speaking of sensing. (p. 334)

Is it coincidence that these sentences were omitted in the English version, or does their omission point to the ambivalence that Straus felt standing at the “edge of paradox”? Probably the latter is true, for what he says here must be seen in the context of his critique of the use of experiments in psychology:

Statements and judgments (judgments of comparison) by experimental subjects play an essential role for psychology. But sensing cannot be explored or tested by means of judgments. (1963a, p. 362)

Straus is right, of course, insofar as in mainstream psychology, statements by experimental subjects are mistaken for the experience itself. But the difference between sensing and perceiving (“perfective” knowledge) remains a puzzling problem. The phenomenologist is aware of this problem but cannot solve it either. The question is why, for example, should “judgment of comparison” for the formulation of knowledge about “the primary world of the senses” be excluded a priori? It seems to me that Straus, in his defense of the primordial task of phenomenology, erected artificial borders in a realm of fluid transitions which he himself described so convincingly.

### **The Outside Perspective**

I am walking down a busy street. There are other pedestrians on the sidewalk. I notice them with mere incidental attention. Then I spot someone with earphones, and for a brief moment my attention focuses on that person. I remember negative judgments that used to come to my mind at such a sight. Meanwhile, I have learned that many people react the way I used to react. They judge the people with earphones to be dumb, childish, immature, silly, withdrawn, unwilling to communicate, ego-centric, narcissistic, autistic, and so forth. Since I began to reflect on this kind of creation it ceased to be self-evident for me. The negative assessments cited above have become mere quotations; they have lost their affective power. Nevertheless, I still feel slightly irritated. What, then, is the experiential kernel of this irritation, and why does this irritation tend to be expressed in this way?

A free variation of the constituents of the situation will help to figure out the essence of this experience. Which role, for instance, is played by the appearance of a head which, apart from the earphones, displays nothing unusual? Or is it important that

we can assume that the person is using the earphones to listen to (popular) music? As for the first question, let us imagine that another aspect of a person's appearance, for instance, his or her pink hair, attracts our attention. This may also seem strange to us, and we may attribute negative traits to that person. As we saw, the xenophobic attitude evoked by earphones is often expressed in a specific way: The strange being with earphones is not just "different" but "isolated." It is the separateness, the isolation of the earphone being that makes him or her strange. Now another question arises: Are not separateness and isolation typical of the relationship between people who pass by each other on urban sidewalks? Why does isolation in our case appear as a deviant trait rather than as something normal in urban social life? Obviously there is something wrong with the judgment, yet there is an anthropological truth in it.

We take a step in the direction of this truth when we try to answer the second question which concerns the musical entertainment viewed from the outside perspective on the Walkman world. Imagine a passerby carrying a large portable tape recorder turned on at high volume. Perhaps we are pleased to be able to listen to the music resounding in our ears. More likely we resent the invasion of noise. In the first case no aversive attitude toward the music maker is likely to arise. In the second case we consider him or her as an antisocial being. But, in contrast to the earphone listener, the music maker is breaking down invisible walls of separateness rather than erecting them. We see the earphone user as living in a private acoustic world which we are unable to share. This seems to interrupt a form of contact between "normal" people in a shared situation, even if there is no explicit communication at all. People with earphones seem to violate an unwritten law of interpersonal reciprocity: the certainty of common sensual presence in shared situations.

So far our attempt to grasp the essence of experienced irritation in the face-to-face encounter with an earphone user illustrates what Schütz (1971/1962) calls "the general thesis of the reciprocity of perspectives" (p. 14). Schütz points out that this reciprocity is a prereflective property of the "natural attitude" (p. 12) and that any experienced contradiction to the "idealisation of the interchangeability of standpoints" (p. 13) may lead to the conclusion that the subject whose perspective cannot be taken over cannot be "human" or "normal" (Schütz & Luckmann, 1975, p. 75).

## Forms of Spatiality

In his formulation of the “general thesis” Schütz does not differentiate between specific anthropological aspects within “the spectrum of senses” (Straus, 1963a). We must do so. We must ask what difference it makes whether the interchangeability of the acoustic or of the optic perspective is blocked. I shall not discuss examples at this point; I shall only report results of the anthropological inquiry.

Straus discusses the anthropological significance of the different modalities of our senses in his article “Forms of Spatiality” (1930, 1966b) and later in the chapter “The Spectrum of Senses” in the second edition of his main work (1956, 1963a).<sup>3</sup> The chapter on “The Spectrum of Senses” Straus (1963a) ends like this:

None of the modalities plays only in a single key. But in each of them the basic theme of self-and-other varies in specific ways: in the visible the constant predominates; in the audible the actual; in the tangible sphere the reciprocal....

The modalities must, in their totality, be ordered into a broad scale which extends from the visible down to pain. In this spectrum of senses aspects vary with regard to temporality, spatiality, direction, limit, distance, movement, physiognomy, community, freedom and bondage, contact, objectivity, numerability, divisibility, measurability, forms of emptiness, possibility of abstraction, memory, and communicability. (p. 378)

At first glance this list of aspects may appear confusing. By differentiating between the visible and the audible, Straus formulates the aspects in condensed form as interwoven polarities: active versus passive, analytical versus synthesizing, constant versus actual, distance versus contact, and individuality versus community.

### Seeing and Hearing: Straus' Interwoven Polarities

#### *Active Versus Passive*

The colored object, we said, appears there, over against us, in a particular direction and at a particular limited and delimiting distance. Unlike a tone that approaches us, the color retains its place. To experience the color, we must turn toward it, look at it, actively master it....

Whether an object attracts us, i.e., invites our approach, or whether it is dreadful, i.e., threatens us with its import the tension of confrontation always remains. In seeing, we are behaving actively, whether approaching or avoiding, attacking or taking flight.

Tone has an activity all its own: it presses in on us, surrounds, seizes and embraces us. Only in a later phase we are able to defend ourselves against sound, only after sound has already taken possession of us, while in the visual sphere we begin to take flight before we have been prehended. The acoustical pursues us; we are at its mercy, unable to get away. Once uttered, a word is there, entering and owning us. (Straus, 1966b, pp. 15-16)

### *Analytical Versus Synthesizing*

Visible objects appear in the breadth of the illuminated horizon and manifest themselves as parts of an encompassing whole. Seeing is an analytical sense. In hearing, on the other hand, only fragments are present from moment to moment, fragments which, in the temporal horizon, point forward and backward to be linked into a whole with other such parts, just like the spoken words in a heard sentence. Hearing is a synthesizing sense. (Straus, 1963a, p. 377)

### *Constant Versus Actual*

Colored objects reveal themselves there in the distance in a definite direction with respect to the observer. Extended and at the same time delimited, the individual object stands out among the others in the totality of the visible space. They exclude each other, or appear next to or behind each other. Sounds, on the other hand, completely fill and penetrate space; sound does away with locational differentials, homogenizes space, and, in march or dance, forces everyone to participate in its own movement....

Sound arises, persists and fades—it is a creature of time; as such it dispenses the flow of time in its own becoming. Hearing (we are speaking here, of course, of the phenomena and not of the physical conditions of the phenomena) is simultaneous with that which is heard. Visible things, however, manifest themselves in their state and being. The monumental sculpture is a form which is indifferent to time. Time flows across great monuments as it flows across great mountains.... But sound always takes hold of me in this moment. It is present and determines the actual singularity of my Now. (Straus, 1963a, p. 376)

### *Distance Versus Contact*

Whenever you visit a cinema, you can make the test. When a film is shown without music, the pictures appear at a different remove—unusually remote; they are marionette-like and lifeless. We lack contact with what is being represented, which glides by in front of our eyes in a spiritless, barren manner. We are spectators at, and not participants in, what is occurring. As soon as the music starts, contact is re-established. It is not even neces-

sary for the music to be somehow appropriate to the images. Space filled with sound is enough to establish a connection between viewer and picture. (Straus, 1966b, p. 19)

Straus, of course, here refers to silent films and the musical accompaniment of these films.

### *Individuality Versus Community*

That sound can be separated from the instrument which produces it also has its sociological effect in the possibility of effort and concord, of harmony and discord. The community of consonance is boundless. The sound that penetrates and unites space "embraces millions" (Schiller's *Ode to Joy* and Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*). In a look or in a handshake, we two meet each other individually, you and I; but jubilation can be shared by everyone. Consonance unites the listener with the actor or the singer. The polyphonic passage assigns to everyone his distinct part in the production of the whole. Pure sound, in its phenomenal appearance, draws everyone into the actuality of its movement, uniting them in community singing, in the hymn, and gives national anthems their great force. (Straus, 1963a, p. 378)

What have we gained from this extensive quoting of Straus' reflections? We can now state that in hearing we are passively involved in the actual situation and we share the situation involuntarily with others. In hearing, lived common presence in the world is experienced far more than in looking. The blind, for instance, are more dependent on others than the deaf, but they do not feel as isolated as the deaf.

The different modes of the I-world relations in the visible and the audible make us understand that an individual's "optic isolation," for example, someone reading a newspaper in the subway, does not irritate us to the same extent as someone who shuts off his ears with earphones. Nature provides us with eyelids to close our eyes but not with earlids to close our ears. Dark sunglasses, too, may irritate. But irritation in this case arises because the balance between looking at and being looked at becomes unequal (cf. Sartre, 1943).

### **The Inside Perspective**

"I feel spaced out," said a subject whose mother tongue is English and who was exploring his own experience as a Walkman user. His statement reflects an important aspect of the alteration in the subject-world-relationship of a Walkman user: Lived space loses its familiarity, that is, is somehow split into two. The familiar environment in which one lives and moves

takes on a strange character when one is separated from the acoustic part of it. The feeling of being “spaced out” is the counterpart to the outsider experience of a Walkman user as being present and absent at the same time.

The dichotomy of sensuous presence experienced “under” ear-phones is expressed in the following excerpt from an interview with a 35-year-old academic from Afghanistan living in Germany:

I have known the Walkman for quite some time. I used it for the first time when on vacation in Spain. There I ran round with that thing nearly all the time. I can only express my subjective feelings. When I wear this instrument I feel splendid, as if I were in a concert. No disturbance detracts from one’s personal concert situation. The concert takes place in one’s head; I am not feeling totally isolated. I can make contact with other people at any time, and yet I can shield myself against them also at any time.

“What does the world look like for you when you are using the Walkman?”

The world again looks magnificent, much more colorful, much more varied, much freer. It is like a panorama, like a film, like a film with a story. Reality changes. One feels as if one were outside of reality. Yet one is in reality. One takes time and space much more calmly. My perception becomes richer. Space becomes richer too. Because I see the world like a play, I think, that space is the stage where one can move freely, in particular where one can play music.

This description conveys first of all a sense of euphoria. This euphoria seems to be due primarily to the intense involvement in the music. But the music literally colors the visual world. Furthermore, the outside world profoundly alters its character; it is perceived like a film. Film as metaphor is obviously related to the feeling of “being spaced out.” The subject speaks of his feeling of being outside reality while at the same time being aware of living in this reality. When he adds that he gains a calmer attitude to time and space, he makes us understand the significance of his experience of simultaneous absence and presence. Absence does not mean that the world is no longer worth attention. On the contrary, the subject’s disengagement sets him free to enjoy the world attentively as a colorful and rich spectacle. His being-in-the world shifts from that of the participant to that of the spectator.

### **Music at High Intensity**

This assertion needs further discussion, but at this point we return to the phrase "a concert in the head." Most of the subjects involved in this investigation spoke of an unusual intimacy and intensity of the music heard over the Walkman, although the majority agreed that "live music" is a more intense experience because all senses (and even the skin) are involved and because live music as a social event constitutes a high degree of experienced togetherness. Thus, from the ear's point of "view," listening with earphones is an exceptionally intense experience, but at the same time it is more restricted in its fusion-potency. On the other hand, experiments in the field showed that at the same time as the attention to the music grows, so too does the attention to disturbing traffic noises. There may be two reasons for the common habit to play the Walkman at high volume: Earphones allow high volume without disturbing others, and loud volume, according to music psychologists, increases happiness on the part of the listener. This has not gone unnoticed by the medical profession.<sup>4</sup>

It is, however, not quite true that playing the Walkman at high volume does not disturb others. On the contrary, some of the people interviewed said that they become aggressive when they hear the sound leaking from the earphones. I assume that this reaction is not triggered by the mere acoustic effect of the perceived sound, but by the fact that one hears only the "garbage" of someone else's private acoustic world.

### **The Acoustic Environment**

Complementary to the intensity of the music listened to is the partial screening off of the acoustic environment. Thus one hears simultaneously music and relative silence. The relatively soundless scenery is sometimes experienced with a feeling of discomfort. This feeling is similar to the presocial loneliness experienced by the deaf or in artificial deafness (Southworth, 1969). The relative inability to communicate with others because of the fundamental loss of contact is experienced in different ways. Some, like the subject quoted above, appreciate the possibility to decide whether they want to communicate; some continue to talk to a friend while still using their headset, which means that communication in this situation is not altogether impossible. Others discontinue the use of the Walkman when having contact with someone for reasons other than acoustic necessity. They do so because they assume that people around them consider him or her to be out of acoustic reach. And still others prefer to listen to the Walkman only when nobody is there, for they feel ashamed of creating the impression that they

are unwilling to communicate. Thus at least some of the Walkman users are haunted by the irritation experienced by outsiders.

As we have seen, Walkman users are perceived as strangers. They, in their turn, lose their familiar relation to the world they live in. They feel “spaced out.” Their visual world appears to them “like a film.” These statements are questionable in at least two respects: Are they really representative, and what is their essential meaning? Mainstream psychologists would be inclined to concentrate on the first questions. They would be interested in getting statistical data and in defining “dependent” and “independent” variables. No doubt the phenomenologist knows that first of all the meaning of a statement has to be illuminated, otherwise statistical data make no sense; nevertheless, he or she is also interested in statistical descriptions because these again pose the question of meaning and thereby shed some light on meanings already (approximately) revealed.

Enough. I do not intend to enlarge the stock of abstract methodological discussions. The one statement of Husserl I absolutely agree with is: “to the things themselves”—even if I equally strongly disagree with his belief that we are able to bracket reality the way he pretended to do it. To be honest, not all of those whom I asked described their experience in the way mentioned previously. In what follows are descriptions and phenomenological reflections concerning the experience of simultaneous absence and presence, followed by descriptions that emphasize either that nothing has changed or that only absence was experienced. Statistical data are not provided because such data would not change the picture materially.

#### *Simultaneous Experience of Absence and Presence*

Consider now the description of the “inside” perspective given by the Afghan academic: For him the world has taken on a new appearance. This presupposes a comparison of the “new” world with the “familiar” world. The Walkman causes a breach in the familiarity on which we do not normally reflect. But what exactly is the essential meaning of this being-in-the-world which ceases when we put on earphones? Further descriptive material helps to answer this question.

When for the first time I myself moved with earphones through the staircase of the house I live in I somehow had the impression of seeing an unknown space. Never before had I perceived as attentively this familiar functional part of architecture. What had happened? When I later reflected on this question, the Gestaltist’s concepts of “figure” and “ground” came to my

mind: The staircase had shifted from “ground” to “figure.” But why?

A female student walked a route once without and once with use of a Walkman. After each walk she wrote a protocol. Here is the beginning of the Walkman-walk protocol:

I am leaving the Psychological Institute in Leopoldstrasse and I have already put on the Walkman with Beethoven's C-moll piano concerto. I become conscious of the stillness of the house only when I step out on to the Leopoldstrasse, which I take to the right. And for the first time I experience the noise of the six-lane street as unpleasant. Traffic roars past me. I have to increase the volume of the Walkman, although the first movement has no quiet parts. Later with the second movement I hear only fragments, in spite of having turned the volume to its highest setting. The first problem arises when I cross the street though the traffic lights are on red. Normally I rely on my ears and cast only a cursory glance at the street. Now, however, I must make an effort to sort out the cars turning in. Due to the Walkman the intense activity on the sidewalk becomes strangely remote and yet I am more conscious of it than without the Walkman. Shortly before I reach the Siegestor I step off the sidewalk to wind my way past the construction site. So far the walk with the Walkman seems shorter than the walk without it.

In part these aspects have already been discussed. To the problem of orientation in traffic we will return later. For now, we should notice two points: the experience of growing distance from the other pedestrians, which is accompanied by an increase of “consciousness”; and the impression that time had passed more quickly than during the walk without the Walkman. Here, too, just as in my own experience of the staircase, familiar space undergoes a change which involves a shift of attention that can be described by the figure/ground metaphor. In addition we learn that lived time, too, changes.

### **A Flawed Experiment**

In order to obtain descriptions more closely related to the moment of the actual experience, some subjects were instructed to verbalize and instantly tape their impressions during the walk itself. This task turned out to be inappropriate for the purpose envisaged. To put it in the words of James (1901), the task of permanent verbalization is not adequate to the nature of “the stream of consciousness”—the “places of flight” are lost in the continuous artificial search for “resting-places” (p. 243). Nevertheless, this flawed experiment had a remarkable result: It highlighted the difference between walking with the Walkman

and walking without it. All subjects who walked without the Walkman succeeded in verbalizing and taping their impressions, even though they had a feeling of artificial gathering of merely factual aspects of their impressions. Those who walked with the Walkman struggled hard to fulfil the task. One subject apologized for not being able to speak a word—during the Walkman walk, consciousness seems to be in a restless “place of flight.” Another subject spoke during the walk and afterward about his difficulties:

What strikes me is that when I am completely wrapped up in the music and attempt to establish a link between different people or objects and the music, I am completely unable to formulate anything. And when I try to remember a few things to repeat to them afterwards in words then the music is very interfering. At that point I always lower the volume and I cannot concentrate on the music at all. Thus, to listen to music and to talk at the same time is a very contrary proceeding.

Immediately after the walk:

Well, after all it is like this: if one concentrates on the music—this is what I did again in the end—I was in no way able to formulate anything, although I had a lot of sensations. To give an example: if one sees someone who is hurrying along with an attaché case just when the Beatles are singing “Let it be” or something like that, is there any connection that makes sense? Somehow that never struck me as much when at other times I listened to the Walkman, that one always has the impression that the actual movements one sees are movements triggered by the music one hears. And through these earphones it sort of feels as though one were producing the music oneself, as though the music were within oneself. And then it feels as though one were manipulating the actual movements to fit in with the music. And I believe that this is the kind of feeling which also heightens the intensity so much. And now that thing in the questionnaire: “Is everything more meaningful or less so?”—it is, after all, somehow so that one has the feeling that it is then in some way more meaningful. The actual movements are then just adapted to the music.

Obviously the student’s involvement in the music inhibits verbalized reflection and vice versa. Nevertheless, the impression of the visual world is influenced by the music: Movements “outside” fuse with the music. The world makes sense according to the tune and rhythm of the music. But, as the description by another participant shows, silence of the scenery may also be experienced:

This poster truly hits the eye. A woman with a basket walking shakily. A man with a lady's umbrella that is broken. Along with the music all this reminds me a bit of a still life ... In a park. Two blackbirds fly into the shrubbery. I feel like listening only to the music. Everything is sort of unreal, as if the right sound had been switched off. The leaves look funny, they hop up a little in the grass so that one could mistake them for birds.

Incidentally, this transcription of the verbalizations taped while walking shows that the shift from the mood of the music to the attitude of reflection about the outside world is possible, even though the effort involved is experienced as uncomfortable. In another case this effort found expression in the course of the Walkman walk in the statement that an unusually high degree of attention was paid to the colors of things as well as to "absurd" details in shop windows and so forth.

### **Variation of Procedure by Using Photography**

The difficulties faced in the kind of experiment described above led to a variation of the procedure. In order to help the participants to reconstruct their response in the actual situations, they were asked to take pictures of visual impressions that were important to them. Afterward they were asked what had impressed them at the moment that they took the photograph. Again the findings contribute to our understanding of the inside perspective. One participant spoke about his difficulties when attempting to verbalize what he remembered; he introduced his comments on the pictures he took during the Walkman walk as follows:

As far as the pictures are concerned which I took while walking with the Walkman—it is much more difficult for me to remember, what triggered them, what kind of reason or idea might be behind them. I believe I took them much more spontaneously—at least in the case of those which I took of people whom I met in the street. I felt much more assertive and far less inhibited.

In addition this student noted that he was unable to comment on a particular picture without looking at the following ones. This was not so with the photos he took on his walk without the Walkman. Another subject made the following comments in the course of an interview. Talking about a garbage can he said:

I was surprised that something like that should be standing around there. I had seen that before, but at that moment it knocked me over.

The next photo, showing colored drapery taken with a black and white film, elicited the following comment:

Although I knew that the film was for black and white and all the rest of it: that which appealed to me I tried as accurately as possible ... and when passing a second time, i.e., with the Walkman, much more aggressively, with much more elan and spontaneity. I saw it and made for it.

Of course, I gave some thought to it: how will it be the second time around, by now I know certain things already and ... But the minute I set off thoughts like this: had I experienced that already before, were gone. That was quite new, the situation.

Up to this point music had not been mentioned. When I made him aware of this, he said:

Now that you say it: yes, there was for instance a slow piece ... I do not know, I am conscious of the situation, but not of the situation with music but rather as increased attention, heightened in a certain direction.

Later on I reminded him again that he had not yet talked about music.

Yes that is true. There was an atmosphere which I recognize very strongly in the pictures themselves. The pictures reflect that fairly well ... a certain detachment from the activity itself, actually. The situation, to be at that moment participating in an experiment or something like that, or to be taking that walk for a second time already, all that was gone from my mind. What was there was the enjoyment to the full or the discovery, the rather amused discovery of appealing small details.... This time music was less present as music but as atmosphere. Music managed to transport me into a kind of mood, where then actually I was truly ready to click the camera and all the rest of it. I also imagined myself dreamily swinging through the street; no past, no future, to exaggerate it now: just momentary. On the other hand I did not regard it as urgent to take photographs. It is true, it was more fun to take pictures ... the discoveries seemed to me far more convincing ... I cannot remember at all to have been conscious of selecting.

Asked whether he experienced a similar mood in any other situation, he replied:

Yes, but I could not say in which situation. Maybe when I was tipsy, or on the way home in the evening slightly intoxicated—that is most likely. It is frightfully difficult to describe it. There is a kind of distance. It is a kind of ... on the one hand it is almost like a kind of understanding that is not reflective ... and to be precise, that I can say that I own it, that it will remain with me. I did not understand it as something I would have to reflect upon,

but it is a picture that remains with me, an experience, a very strong experience, that was strong at the time—but which then again is one which I do not plan—as happens to me sometimes—to remember in the future or to paint.

Everyday scenery was remembered in a mood which provided an amused and, though explicitly described as prereflective, a somewhat deepened comprehension. Taking pictures was not experienced as a disturbance of the mood induced by music because in this mood the world itself appeared picture-like.

### **Losing and Reestablishing Contact with the World**

Negatively the descriptions of the inside perspective refer to the familiar man-world-relation of everyday life. Being concerned with managing practical problems we are involved in the surrounding world. In this state of “attention to life” (Schütz, 1971/1962, pp. 243) we see our environment but we do not look at it as we look at a picture (Straus, 1963b). By using a Walkman, we lose contact with the world, which becomes silent. At the same time the music to which we listen and with which we fuse reestablishes our connection with the world but in an unfamiliar way. What we see ceases to be what it used to be. Therefore, we look at it as we look at a (motion) picture. The experienced meaning of this (motion) picture is because of the music, even if we forget that we are listening to music (as we usually do when we are in the cinema).

Already the loss of the sound of the natural environment works like a frame that makes the mere visual become a picture: somehow distant, strange, and interesting. But this picture, even if interesting, “glides by in front of our eyes in a spiritless barren manner” (see Straus, 1966b, p. 19, on distant versus contact). Spirit and movement are instilled into the picture if the loss of natural sound is compensated for by music. Then the picture again makes sense. But this sense is different from the familiar sense. The latter, that is, the familiar sense, results from our goal-oriented “attention to life.” Therefore, we are able to give distinct descriptions of meaningful appearances. The former is the expression of our involvement in the movement of music. Thus we comprehend what we look at although we are unable to verbalize our impressions. The time we live through in this state of mind is the time of music itself. Being synchronized with the music we forget about the distance between “now” and “then” of which we are conscious in the goal-oriented attitude. Thus the possibility of boredom vanishes.

The fact that some participants denied any alteration of their perception of the world, whereas others stated that the world

somehow ceased to exist, can now be understood. As we go on our way through everyday life with a Walkman, we are on a path somewhere in between the goal-directed attitude and the involvement in the movement of music, which is an end in itself. As I myself experienced, this somewhere may fluctuate from moment to moment. Why should not different individuals (according to their different kinds of involvement in music) have stronger or weaker leanings to one or the other extreme?

### **Music and Bodily Movement**

One last aspect must be mentioned. The Walkman is with us while we are moving. Of course, this movement can become difficult as far as our acoustic orientation in urban traffic is concerned. This point is obvious and need not be discussed further. Perhaps more surprising is the fact that in some situations, for example, walking in the dark or skiing, even the movement of our own body may be strangely affected if we lose acoustic correlates of this movement.

But both the problems of orientation and the loss of acoustic feedback of our movements do not concern the essential impact of music on the movement of our body. In moving with music we are moved by the music itself. Everybody experiences this being moved bodily: Music makes us dance. As Straus (1966b) thoughtfully pointed out: Dance is the embodiment of the "presentic" and "homogenizing" (p. 35) power of musical sound. Thus in dancing we leave bodily goal-directedness behind us: "Walking we move through space from one point to another; dancing we move within space. In walking we leave a certain distance behind; we traverse space. The dance, on the contrary, is non-directed and non-limited movement" (Straus, 1966b, p. 23).

Many of the interviewed users of the Walkman reported that often they were in the mood for dancing while they moved on sidewalks. But only a few of them dared to do so. The explanation given for the suppression of the impulse to dance: "It would be embarrassing!" This way Walkman users bodily experience the splitting of lived space and time: They themselves are walking, moving goal-directedly, but feel, at the same time, driven to give up goal-directedness. There is also the certainty that the others are unable to share their impulse to dance ("They would think I had gone completely nuts!"). Thus they tend prereflectively to find in one way or another a compromise between walking and dancing. Even bodily Walkman beings experience their stroll between two worlds.

## Notes

1. This paper is partially based on my book *Der Walkman—Eine phänomenologische Untersuchung*, München: P. Kirchheim, 1988. I am indebted to Dr. Maria Schmidt-Ihms, Edmonton, for her correction of the English manuscript and the translation of the statements by research participants.
2. There is no discussion of the topic in current humanities. The only relevant paper that I know (Hosokawa, 1984) is more concerned with an apologetic of the phenomenon than with a thorough description (for further discussion of this publication see the book mentioned in note 1).
3. I do not claim that he was the first to throw light on the anthropological sense of the senses. The way for his comprehensive analysis was paved by earlier thinkers: Rousseau (1984/1761), Kant (1983/1789), Simmel (1908), or Klages (1929/1933).

For a discussion of the work of Erwin Straus see: *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 7(1), 1976, which is dedicated to Straus; see also: *Condition humana (Festschrift "Erwin W. Straus on his 75th birthday")* Berlin, Heidelberg, New York: Springer 1966.

4. Headsets sold in the United States contain a "Safety Tip from the Electronic Industries Association." Under the headline "Remember ... Use your head when you use your headset" the user is advised: "The portable headset is one of the most exciting and innovative consumer electronics products ever developed.... But for *your* comfort, health and safety be sure to observe the following guidelines".... "Do not play your headset at a high volume. Hearing experts advise against continuous extended play.... If you experience a ringing in your ears reduce volume or discontinue use."

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