



Road Radio: The Car is the Medium

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Abstract

This contribution is an audio montage made through and about the car as a medium. The montage is a retrospective narration of a series of four radio documentaries, which explore the topics of social and spatial mobilities in the U.S. The shows were recorded, produced and aired on Danish national public radio, while we the producers were travelling in a car for a month from Philadelphia to Los Angeles. The shows connected various people's research and stories about the links between being or feeling mobile and breaking out of the cultural narratives tied to "the American dream". This specific montage deals particularly with the car as an entry point for those stories and with the role our journey in a car had for the production of radio documentaries that are a mix of travel shows and science radio.



video: Road Radio <https://vimeo.com/203885016>

About the radio montage

The montage presented in this journal has been composed one and a half years after the original shows were produced. There are two main differences between this montage and the shows that were aired on national radio back in 2014. The first is the addition of a narrated focus on the methodologies of the format itself, recorded in early 2016. This layer was added to enable a shortened version of the shows specifically for Wi: Journal of Mobile Media. The second difference is the addition of video from our journey across the United States. This visual layer was added mainly to allow for subtitles to feature during passages narrated in Danish in the original shows, but also operates as an experiment with adding movement through landscapes as a component in conversations about mobilities.

Only three of the ten people interviewed for the full-length radio-documentaries feature in this montage. We hear excerpts of interviews with Mimi Sheller, a renowned mobilities researcher who helped, and still helps, mobilize the field of mobilities research (Sheller 2006; Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006; Sheller 2015; Sheller and Urry 2016). We also hear from Jody Roberts, a curator and chemical engineer at the Chemical Heritage Foundation in Philadelphia, who talks from within his exhibition on climate change awareness (CHF 2014). Finally, the montage also includes an interview with Kafui Attoh, a geographer who works with the roles of public transit, urban social movements and rights to the city (Attoh 2012; Attoh 2013). Alongside the interviews, our own sensations of and conversations about being on a journey are folded in to the montage.

Underneath and in between these narrations are several field recordings (of cars, machines, streets, neighbourhoods, animals, weather and commercials recorded from monitors at an American gas-station) and samples of music. Some of these additions are made to place the interviews in their actual context and some of the auditive work is done to dramatize certain themes taken up or add certain moods or atmospheres. In total the audio montage aims to densify the contexts and atmospheres present in research-related narratives to a degree that is hard to achieve in a linear text.

About the methodology

The production has affinity with fields of mobilities research and mobile media studies, as well as a growing number of experimental methods within the social sciences, such as 'live' methods (Back and Puwar, 2012), inventive methods (Lury and Wakeford, 2012),

creative enquiries (Montuori, 2012), curatorial sociology (Puwar and Sharma, 2012), sound ontology (Bessire and Fisher, 2013) and various forms of non-representational methodologies (Vannini, 2015). Our methodology aims to envelop scientific narratives in personal journeys, embed them in concrete material and technical settings, and imbue them with ambiences and moods of the world in which they exist (Aamot and Svejstrup, forthcoming).

As a sociologist and a journalist our approach to narratives in auditive media is to give headway to different conversations that are not only about “getting it” scientifically, but also about interpreting and discovering a range of ways to approach what “it” might be, for a wider group of people than scientists. In this way, media is here explored as an interstitial component between sciences and societies. The aim of our research with mobile media is to try to combine the development of disciplinary media-formats with discussions and communication to wider publics.

The auditive space of the radio montage can enable and stabilize unusual encounters between different approaches to the same topics. It consists of various moods or atmospheres that exist as more or less indirect components in the narration of the montage.

By stitching together and layering several types of acoustic impressions, we hope to enliven a thicker type of mediation than linguistic “representation” or attempts at neutrally “reporting on something”. This Road Radio montage is an attempt to connect

mobile media research to the present movements where it is made, in ways that bring the sensations and reverberations of the investigation into the medium that transmits it.

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