



# Sound and Safe: A History of Listening Behind the Wheel

Karin Bijsterveld

Arts and Social Sciences, Technology & Society Studies, Maastricht University, Grote Gracht 90-92, the Netherlands

## Abstract

Many people enjoy listening to music while driving, and to sing along—it is their auditory break in the hustle and bustle of everyday life. But how has the car, noisy and open as it was at the beginning of the twentieth century, developed into a space for celebrating auditory privacy? This lecture unravels the history of the sonic ideals and acoustic practices of automotive engineers, marketing departments and consumers. It shows how drivers learned to shift their auditory attention from the engine to the car radio, and how car sound design helped to sustain the visual ideal of the cinematic drive and the illusion of freedom on the road.