Disruptive ambient music: Mobile phone music listening as portable urbanism

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Abstract
This article explores the use of mobile phones as portable remediated sound devices for mobile listening – from boom boxes to personal stereos and mp3 players. This way of engaging the city through music playing and listening reveals a particular urban strategy and acoustic urban politics. It increases the sonic presence of mobile owners and plays a role in territorialisation dynamics, as well as in eliciting territorial conflicts in public. These digital practices play a key role in the enactment of the urban mood and ambience, as well as in the modulation of people's presence – producing forms of what Spanish architect Roberto González calls *portable urbanism*: an entanglement of the digital, the urban and the online that activates a map of a reality over the fabric of the city, apparently not so present, visible or audible.

Keywords
Mobile listening, mobile phones, portable urbanism, sonic presence, territoriality, urban acoustic spaces

Introduction

On a Saturday afternoon, four young men are sitting in a commuter train south of Madrid. They are chatting while the mobile phone held in the hand of one of them plays a hip-hop tune. When they hear the refrain of the song, they stop talking and repeat the lyrics. In Retiro Park, in central Madrid, on a summer morning two middle-aged women sit on the grass facing each other. A mobile phone playing Romanian songs lies between them. A thirty-something man walks fast navigating the pedestrian traffic, attuned to the rhythm

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of an upbeat pop tune coming out of the pocket of his jacket. Other pedestrians just hear a few fleeting notes in passing.

Elsewhere, after school, a group of teenagers crowd together on a bench in their neighbourhood park, playing pop and dance tunes while chatting and joking loudly. A skater sits on the floor of a concrete square in the centre of Madrid taking a momentary rest. He watches his friends' moves and listens to the electronic music played by the phone by his side. A Dominican woman living in Lavapies tells me that she loves listening to music all day long and how, when taking a morning shower, she sings along with the Reggaeton song coming from the loudspeakers of her phone on the bathroom shelf.

A young man waiting for his train in Atocha station plays an electronic dance music tune, another young man passes by, stops and says to him, 'great track, what's this? I think I've heard it before in some club'. A bald man in his mid-30s, wearing a suit and a tie, gets on the commuter train at Sol station, and the mobile phone in his hand plays rock music. While he takes a seat, a young couple near me sends him disapproving glances and look at each other in disbelief: 'If he was a kid I could understand, but a proper grown up!'

These ordinary scenes are some of the many fieldwork examples of the various techniques that practices of mobile phone use bring to the acts of listening and sound-making in everyday life. These techniques include playing tunes loudly on their own or with other people, sometimes using mobile phone external speakers. They are deployed in different contexts and situations, such as using public transport, strolling through a mall, walking through the streets or sitting in a park or a square with their friends. Songs are stored in the phone, forming different playlists. They are played through different music and video apps or online sites. Smartphones playing loud music can be held in the hand, kept inside the pocket or lie somewhere among the group of listeners. Often, this mobile listening takes place while moving, walking, humming, singing, finger tapping, attuning the walk and gestures to the music or even dancing. People playing music on their phones divide their attention between the music and other activities, such as having a conversation, walking, running, cycling, daydreaming, thinking, watching a video on the same mobile phone or even kissing and caressing – as the phone also provides the soundtrack to the show of affection between lovers. Music from a mobile phone can also accompany a conversation, where people alternate between talking and humming the refrain or moving with rhythmic gestures following the tunes to which they are listening

When performing these practices in public, the tunes are not only heard by the mobile phone owners and their friends, but they are also shared with involuntary listeners who display different degrees of attention or indifference to the music and to those who play it; therefore, they contribute to the ambience of urban spaces. The mere hearing and the active listening to these sounds are part of the production of contemporary acoustic urban spaces. This form of mobile listening is part of a long history of how sound fidelity is sacrificed to portability (Gopinath and Stanyek, 2014; Marshall, 2014). Therefore, mobile phones can be considered remediations (Bolter and Grusin, 2000) of the transistor radio, boom boxes (Schloss and Boyer, 2014), personal stereos (Bull, 2000; Hosokawa, 1984) or even the boom car (Labelle, 2010: 133–261). Mobile phones remediate all these previous forms of portable music and mobile listening as ways of engaging with public urban spaces and as ways of enacting territoriality through music playing.

In these sonic practices, the online, the digital and the urban are entangled in what Spanish architect Roberto González (2013) calls *portable urbanism*. González discusses the implications that the use of locative media has for urbanism, for instance, media such as hook-up apps whereby intimate strangers can reconfigure their engagement with the city. He explains how these apps contribute to shaping urbanism by overlaying traditional maps with a geo-localisation dimension, making visible often-invisible features such as non-normative sexualities. These apps can be considered a remediation of the visibility and collective presence enacted by meeting places like saunas, beautifully described by writer Samuel Delaney (1988: 173–175) in his autobiography. By making sexual encounters *public*, these gay men become public and contribute to affect and produce the public, in both senses: the public as the urban public space and the public as the political. Increased visibility and perception of gay men's bodies challenge current ideas about deviance.

In the following sections, I discuss how these three interwoven aspects – making something public, making oneself public and making the public – are deployed in the uses of mobile phones as portable sound systems. Unlike the focus on visualisation and visibility of geo-localisation in the hook-ups examples, other sensory aspects of the modulation of presence are explored, such as the increase of people's sonic presence with the use of loud mobile phones, which entails a different urban strategy compared to listening to one's mobile phone using headphones.

Drawing on fieldwork carried out in Madrid, this article describes how playing music via a phone – and the consequent listening practices – is a contemporary way of engaging the city that modifies people's sonic presence and contributes to distorting and reshaping the mood and ambience of urban public places, producing what can be called 'disruptive ambient music'. This contributes to a few intersecting fields of exploration: current reflections about the sonic aspects of space (Labelle, 2010), the spatial implications of mobile media (Wilken and Goggin, 2012) and the role of sound in contemporary locative and mobile media cultures (Behrendt, 2012). It focuses on the mobile mediations of sounding and listening (Bull, 2000, 2007; Gopinath & Stanyek, 2014; Hosokawa, 1984; Licoppe, 2011; Simun, 2009; Thibaud, 2003) drawing on present debates about listening, and importantly, the signalling of listening to others (Szendy, 2008).

Fieldwork

This exploration of the auditory aspects of portable urbanism through mobile phone practice draws on both ethnographic research carried out in Madrid between 2010 and 2015[1] and online ethnography regarding different social media discussions and initiatives concerned with the controversies elicited by this practice. Observations were carried out during different periods over these 5 years, averaging 2 months every year in different places of Madrid – in parks and open-air public spaces in the city centre, such as the Retiro park; the streets and squares of Lavapies; those surrounding Sol square and the commercial pedestrian area around it; as well as in train stations such as Atocha and Sol and on public transport (commuter trains, buses, tube trains).[2] As in the fieldwork vignettes quoted above, in these observations, different aspects of music playing and listening were registered regarding the tunes, the people playing the music, their

movements and attitudes, their gestures, as well as the reactions (or lack of them) of the people in their surroundings. During these observations, informal interviews were carried out with the mobile phone users, where I asked them about their listening practice and the reasons for not using headphones.

Sound and hearing specificities set the sensory requirements of this ethnographic fieldwork. Listening is an embodied practice. We hear and listen with our full bodies, not only with our ears. Moreover, listening is always an enactment of the heard. Sometimes we can grasp this enactment in forms of performance-listening, as in dance or when we attune our step to the music we are listening to (Bull, 2000; Hosokawa, 1984; Thibaud, 2003), but other times this is an invisible enactment (Peters, 2010). Therefore, listening to how people listen entails attending to gestures, movements, resonances and situations, with the interconnection and collaboration of senses (Pink, 2009). For instance, seeing and hearing are mobilised to attend to how people listen and to account for how people and their mobiles sound. The collaboration of both senses is required to tune in to how these different sounds and ways of listening contribute to the configuration of public spaces, which are acoustic spaces as well. As part of the ethnographic work, one must listen to space – which is to sense the presence of an ambience made of atmospheric attunements (Stewart, 2011) – considering the temporal, temporary qualities of sound in its unfolding as well as in the listening experiences.

To grasp the controversial meanings and reactions elicited by this listening and sounding practice, ethnographic observation took place online as well, where social media discussions and complaints about this mobile phone use have taken place for a decade, such as in a multiplicity of Facebook pages. This online observation covered comments and visual materials posted in six Spanish Facebook groups and pages, such as the ironic initiative called movement MEMPEC (Spanish acronym of '*Métete el Móvil por el Culo*' which could be translated as 'Shove your mobile up your ass') which created a Facebook page with this same name, and a logo intended to be shared in personal blogs, social media profiles and web pages to visualise the collective annoyance and rejection of this form of music listening. Other Facebook pages observed are '*Odio a la gente que cree que el móvil es un radiocassette*' ('I hate people who believe that the mobile phone is a radio-cassette player'), as well as proposals asking for the ban of such practice '*Que se prohiba escuchar música sin auriculares en el transporte público*' (Ban listening to music without headphones on public transport). Another initiative mixing humour with vernacular creativity is the YouTube video Auricumán made by the Spanish director and screenwriter Helio Valero. It shows a superhero travelling on the Barcelona subway on a mission to prevent the use of mobile phones as sound systems enforcing the use of earphones (*auriculares* is the Spanish word for earphones). The content of the video and the comments posted in YouTube were also part of the online ethnography.[3] The analysis of discourses in those digital platforms uncovers some critical reactions to the practice and displays arguments that could not always observed in urban public places. These kinds of discourses can also be found in commercial media articles about mobile phone etiquette and about the more annoying features of mobile phone use (as the British article on 'sodcasting' quoted below).

The names of these web spaces clearly reveal the intensity of the emotional rejection elicited by this practice. All these online discourses, exchanges and initiatives support

the claim made in this article that this particular way of mobile listening constitutes a form of disruptive ambient music.

Mobile phones as portable sound systems: engaging the city through music playing and listening

Portable urbanism relates to the notion of spatial self (Schwartz and Halegoua, 2015), explored in other contributions of this journal issue, a notion that stresses the link between location, digital devices and subjectivities. This spatial self is also shaped by how we signal, perform, preserve and share our territories of the self in mobile media practices. In this form of mobile listening and music playing, the spatial self also relates to our augmented sonic presence in public and can be addressed through the following questions: How do mobile practices contribute to the making and un-making of territories? In which territorial controversies are they engaged? What is their role in signalling, performing, preserving and sharing territories of the self? Which disturbing and comforting aspects of urban territoriality emerge?

Goffman's (1971) notion of territories of the self and Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) views on territory as an on-going dynamic between the making and un-making of territories can help us understand this mobile music practice as a way of engaging the public and the city. Territory is acquired by repetition, habit and rituals. De-territorialisation can be understood as the loss of certain habits that cease to be repeated and the weakening of ties between meanings, senses, practices and places. Nowadays, mobile media – and specifically this way of music listening in public – are involved in both aspects: the repeated habits and rituals of everyday life and the withdrawal of previous habits, senses, meanings and practices associated with certain places. Territorial dynamics are specifically deployed by auditory experiences, such as those afforded by mobile phones. These experiences may consist of a combination of intensity and ephemerality, where sound may create a relational space that also incorporates the dynamics of interference, noise and transgression. Acoustic spaces give rise to processes of acoustic territorialisation. These processes are political because power relationships are deployed and because the experience and definition of the public and its norms, as well as the modulations of public presence, are at stake (Labelle, 2010). In this form of mobile listening, this is achieved by making one's music taste public and increasing sonic presence, thus configuring and defining the urban public.

The territory of the self is a temporary, situated and personal space. Its variability is socially determined, according to power, rank and privilege, among other features. Goffman (1971) describes how the territory of the self is the ground of a ritual idiom around will and self-determination, embodied in choreographies of interaction and different forms of attunement and negotiation in public. Territorial dynamics reveal the paradoxical aspects of sociability: avoiding contact is a way of keeping respect, whereas making contact is a way of establishing bonds. Thus, bonding requires rejecting some of the limits and barriers that usually separate individuals' territories which can be perceived as a lack of respect. The implicit invitation to listen to the music selected by mobile phone players in public can help to make contacts and encounters. For example, a fellow bystander may ask for the name of the tune being played, or a tune listened to

by a group of friends is then shared around by sending it from one phone to another. But this implicit invitation to music listening can also be perceived as sound aggression and lack of respect for the strangers within hearing range.

Deleuze and Guattari's (1987: 310–350) considerations about the *ritornello*[4] can be helpful to analyse the territorial aspects of this type of mobile music listening. The *ritornello* is defined as a set of materials of expression that draws a territory. According to these authors, it evolves in territorial motives and territorial landscapes in three different ways, which can be found in this mobile phone practice. First, the tune helps to create a centre within the chaos, a hint of stability, for instance, by singing along to a song when we are not at home and want to give ourselves courage and comfort. People I talked to explicitly acknowledged this territorial motive by stating that they find comfort and company in the familiar sounds of their favourite tunes when they move around the city. Second is by singing to ourselves at home, moving within our territory, organising the space and leaving the chaos outside, as well as building a wall of sound with the help of records, radio, TV, computers or smartphones. This is illustrated by the example of mobile listening while taking a shower described above or by youngsters who, through their online and mobile practices, arrange a personal connected space within the family home. Third, the *ritornello* helps to open the circle, the territory, the personal space, either to let someone in or when we leave home and go out. The first two aspects could be found in traditional uses of personal stereos and mp3 players with headphones, whereas the third is specific to playing music loud achieving both: mixing the music played with the city sounds and sharing our listening with other people, contributing to shape the public.

The desire of listening to both the chosen music and the city sounds at the same time is one of the reasons not to use headphones; according to the people interviewed, the other main reason is to share the music listening with their companions. They do not want to isolate themselves from the surrounding acoustic space. They insert themselves through the music selection and playing into the sonic signature of the urban streets, which is a mixture of human-made, machine and natural sounds (Labelle, 2010: 97). They achieve comfort and sustain their territory by not isolating themselves from the urban sound space, as in the case of headphone users, but by willingly, and sometimes wilfully, taking part in the sonic choreography performed in the streets, by adding their chosen music to the sonorities of the place.

These three territorial ways described by Deleuze and Guattari, and found in our ethnography, align with Christian Licoppe's considerations about musical ringtones as a precedent use of mobile phones to play music. Besides being summons, musical ringtones are an 'invitation to be listened to' and are signals of the mobile owner's music taste. Both cases are a form of self-expression that projects an individual's preferences into the public sphere, as well as auditory 'treats' increasing comfort and pleasure (Licoppe, 2011), whereas for the involuntary listeners, this treat can turn into annoyance. Thus, the musical invitation of mobile users, a 'deliberate strategy of affiliation' in Licoppe's terms, can be perceived as territorial violations; as forms of sonic intrusion, obtrusion and interruption; and as a clear illustration of the sociability paradox signalled by Goffman. In the case of musical ringtones, the brevity of the music sounding is one of the keys of the pleasure, or the treat, proposed as this strategy of affiliation. In the use of

mobile phones to play music, this fleetingness can be encountered in people walking past while carrying loud mobile phones, but not on public transport, for instance, or in other public places where the involuntary listeners feel forced to listen for a longer time. These are the situations that elicit more controversy and anger as observed online in the social media complaints and evaluations of this practice. Occasional displays of annoyance by some fellow commuters and bystanders were also observed during fieldwork. These displays are often silent but not always. For instance, on one occasion, on a commuter train between Madrid and Aranjuez, a middle-aged White man in cycling gear and using his bike as a protective barrier was listening and watching a Metallica concert on his smartphone. Fellow commuters stared at him with discontent and disbelief. When one was getting off the train, he looked at me and said loudly and clearly, 'One has to listen to it, like it or not'.

Playing music with your mobile and listening to it in urban public spaces can be an example of what French musicologist Peter Szendy (2008) calls sharing and signing a listening: the possibility of signing our listening that stands on the ability to identify and sign a sound event that can be shared. For instance, any particular interpretation of a musical piece is a signed listening. DJ mixing, remixes and music sampling can also be considered as ways of signing a specific listening. Arranging different tunes on a playlist and sharing it can be another signed listening. Fans' forums and music discussions in social media are another way of signing and sharing our listening, by sharing music evaluations and classifications. Szendy highlights that technological mediations of musical reception – phonograph, recording and digitalisation – have facilitated and increased this possibility of signing and sharing what we listen to. These are ways of making listening audible to third parties. The boom box of the 1980s, described by Schloss and Boyer (2014), and the practice of loud mobile listening with smartphones today are not only forms of music playing but of displaying and sharing our listening. This can be a way of signing a space as well: of marking, fleetingly, a territory within the city, by mixing the sounds of the tune with the sounds of the place. Those are ways in which music lovers listen to their music, sign their listening and share it with people within the hearing range, whether they like it or not.

As with the mobile listeners studied by Bull (2000), this practice can be considered a strategy for managing time and experience by constructing sites of narrative and order in certain urban places and moments, as a way of negotiating urban fragmentation. But instead of doing it by filtering out the mixed flow of urban sounds and reducing their public presence, a very different modulation of presence is enacted. The implications of this kind of mobile listening are very different to the aesthetic control of public experiences and places afforded by Walkmans and mp3 used with headphones (Bull, 2000, 2007; Hosokawa, 1984; Simun, 2009; Thibaud, 2003).

This form of music listening is not a protective bubble that limits one's accessibility. First, mobile listeners in this case can hear and notice what happens in the place where they are. Their strategy consists of partaking explicitly in the urban sonic choreography, giving themselves the choice of attending to their music as foreground or background regarding the other sounds that can be heard. Second, they do not withdraw from their environment but increase their sonic presence. The aestheticisation and theatricalisation of the urban space where they operate are not secret, unlike the Walkman effect described

by Hosokawa. As Sterne (2005) reminds us, the acoustic shaping and designing of public spaces are not just aesthetic but political and ethical, a sensuous experience and a claim about what and who can make sounds, listen and be listened to.

Thus, this engagement with the city through music enacted by these music lovers and their smartphones can be understood as a way of giving a 'new tonality to the streets' (Thibaud, 2003) and a kind of atmospheric attunement, that is, an 'intimate, compositional process of dwelling in spaces' where 'things matter not because of how they are represented but because they have qualities, rhythms, forces, relations, and movements' (Stewart, 2011: 445). Playing music loudly with the mobile in public places is an example of ambient intimacy (Hjorth et al., 2012), as personal comfort provided by the phone when being on the move, afforded by the pleasurable experience of listening and of connecting the physical surroundings with the familiar loved sounds and the resonances of previous listening.

However, this phenomenon can also afford a different ambience for the involuntary listeners: noisy, annoying and unpleasant. This highlights the affective aspect of portable urbanism in connection with ordinary uses of mobile phones for affective and aesthetic purposes. This affective aspect of mobile mediated atmospheric attunements points to the augmented capacity to affect and be affected when our agency is shared or distributed with mobile phones (Lasen, 2013).

Thus, signing and sharing a listening is also a case of personalisation as a form of mutual stylisation between people, devices and places. The mobile is personalised by the tunes it plays and keeps; the owners are personalised and presented in public by the tunes their phones play (Licoppe, 2011). The urban auditory territories are challenged and reconfigured by these personal listening and sounding practices, in a clear example of what Labelle (2010) calls individual sonorities provided by boom boxes, mobile phones or personal stereos, as ways of personalising movements by adding ingredients to the regulatory humdrum of the street and its management. These sonorities reshape or supplement urban street structures and their audible shape. They enact a mediating dialogue between individual bodies and the greater structuring sounds produced in the city. This dialogue can also be a conflict, a clash of sounds, between the loud music played by the phone, the ordinary urban sounds and the sonic expectations of those in the surroundings, what they consider to be an appropriate sonic behaviour in public.

Disruptive ambient music

Ambient intimacy corresponds to the first and third examples of territorial activity described by Deleuze and Guattari, as this form of music listening is mobilised when one leaves home. It is a way to open the circle of the territory of the self, by sharing the listening with the people in the surroundings, risking falling into the territorial paradox that links bonding and disturbing: by sharing their listening with others, they are breaching the boundaries of other people's territories of the self, disrupting the conventions of the negotiation of such territories in public.

These modes of music playing and listening in public entail different levels of attention to the sounds and to those carrying the loud phone. This can be considered a contemporary digital version of French composer Eric Satie's notion of *furniture music* (*musique d'ameublement*), of music that creates a background for other activities instead of being

the main focus of attention, that could be part of the surrounding noises and take them into account. Different tunes can become furniture music in certain listening settings. In this case, mobile phones and their owners acting as music selectors provide musical furniture for public places and activities. They contribute to the mood and ambience of a place during a particular time. Furniture music affords a rhythmic accompaniment to everyday chores and activities. Interviewees confirmed that mobile music listening in public allows them to enjoy and focus on the music, instead of fulfilling certain social conventions or worrying about behaving appropriately as strangers (Hirschauer, 2005) among strangers in public. This is also afforded by other mobile phone activities, such as talking, messaging or playing, which provide distraction and entertainment, allowing for specific rhythms of attention and inattention to the physical space and the auditory space generated by the phone (Bassett, 2003).

These mobile music practices produce a form of atmospheric attunement and ambient music, not because the sounds and musical parameters of the tunes emanating from the phones' loudspeakers correspond to the kind of music Eric Satie described but because of the kind of listening enacted and the ability to accommodate 'different levels of listening attention, without enforcing one in particular' (Eno, 1978). The rock, pop, hip-hop or dance tunes played on smartphones become ambient music by the way their listening is enacted. Different types and degrees of listening attention can elicit different forms of dancing, singing and humming in public. Those who carry the phones and make the choice of playing music move through different levels of attention to the music as well as to the people in their surroundings: friends, fellow commuters or pedestrians. They all produce different rhythms of attention and inattention instead of a fully immersive sonic media experience. These practices bring forth a variety of positions, views, ways of listening and moods perceived. The tunes played do not elicit the same affects in the phone owner as in the other people around. The reactions of the latter (enjoyment, indifference, approval, discontent, hostility, anger, etc.) contribute to setting the mood of the place where these sounds are heard. While a loud music playing phone owner's intention may be to make a place or journey more enjoyable and fun, it can elicit the opposite reaction in listening fellow commuters or pedestrians. For example, a couple of young Dominican women who I talked to in a square in the Lavapies area of Madrid claimed that listening to music on the subway or in the streets on the long commute to and from work is 'entertainment', a way of making a boring and time-consuming routine 'more pleasant'. They listen to their tunes keeping an eye on their fellow commuters for any reactions to the sound; they also look for less crowded places on the train. However, a third woman who took part in our conversation stated that 'this entertainment' was really a nuisance to her. Instead of providing a pleasant mood on the subway, listening to these sounds was stressful noise to her. The other women could not understand this: 'If you don't like my music, play yours'.

This example shows how mobile listening can be considered as disruptive ambient music likely to elicit controversies and territorial conflicts around what is suitable and expected public behaviour and to reveal the inherent, contentious politics of the urban public spaces, made of plural and divergent practices, concerns, tastes and sensitivities (Jaque, 2011). Several people who were interviewed claimed, for instance, that a subway security guard asked them to stop playing their music out loud. Heterogeneity and

potential for contentious politics in urban public spaces are especially evident when regarding their acoustic features as they frequently give rise to a disruptive spatiality. Acoustic space sparks annoyance and outrage while affording opportunities for dynamic sharing and for knowing the other. It is interesting to note what is considered disturbing about this mobile phone practice: not only, or mainly, being forced to listen to loud music but also the bad quality of the sound, the music style and the attitude attributed to the mobile owners.

Unlike technical mediations that intensify the bass range, such as the boom cars and the big ghetto blasters, in this case, the lo-fi sound reproduction entails the loss of the basses and a sort of *treblification* of sound or *treble culture* (Marshall, 2014). The poor quality of sound does not seem to be a big problem for those who practice this music listening as it is counterbalanced by a parallel listening. Research participants noted that the poor audio quality was not a problem because they knew the tunes well. They listen to the actual sounds produced by their mobile phones and simultaneously include sound memories of previous listening occasions. This is a form of self-deception and at the same time a completion inherent to the listening process, which highlights the enacted character of listening.

Mobile listening is a form of active listening that remembers or imagines the bass sounds that are missing. The listening enactment does not only happen in the moment but has its own history and complex temporality. These are made of ephemerality and resonances, linking this territory of the self within the public place to other personal territories of listeners' everyday life, related to the music played and to the listening situation. However, only those who know the music, play and share the appreciation of it can join in this enacted listening. This could explain why the poor sound quality is one of the main reasons this practice was described as annoying in online ethnography, when generally listening to other people's music in public was not.

Sometimes playing music on the mobile phone in public involves some defiance when it comes to public interaction and territorial tactics, or at least it is perceived as such. It has even been labelled *sodcasting*: 'Sodcast [noun]: Music, on a crowded bus, coming from the speaker on a mobile phone. Sodcasters are terrified of not being noticed, so they spray their audio wee around the place like tomcats' (Pascal Wyse cited by Hancox, 2007). The conflict between this practice of music listening and the written and unwritten norms of public behaviours generates online and offline debate where issues about class, ethnicity and age are raised (Hancox, 2007; Marshall, 2014). This identification of the loud mobile listener with subaltern features – youngsters, lower class, foreign or/and non-White – was also found in the online ethnography. This identification is a misattribution rather than an accurate description of the diversity of loud mobile listeners I encountered during the observation in Madrid: women and men, youngsters and adults, White and non-White. Judging by most of the encountered opinions and accounts of people complaining online, this practice is generally perceived as typical of the 'other', 'the brats, '*the cani*' (Spanish word similar to *chav*), the migrants. 'This is not my music'. These complaints resonate with a long tradition of complaining about the urban noises of the lower classes (Sterne, 2005).

Although most criticism associates this mobile music practice with the arrogant attitude of people wanting to enlarge their personal territory and lacking respect for others,

this is not the intention of most loud mobile listeners I talked to (although the interview situation may have affected their response to a certain degree). Some are so keen on their music they can hardly imagine that other people could not enjoy their 'invitation' (to use Licoppe's terms) and prefer the silence or the usual noises of the urban environment. However, most people interviewed stated that they pay attention to the reactions of people around and try to adjust the volume accordingly or that they only play music in public transport when there are no people around. Some youngsters expressed the belief that in public places – such as public transport – no one has the right to be annoyed by what other people do, as these places are not ruled by personal views and considerations and one has just to put up with anything that happens. The observed progressive decline of loud mobile listening on public transport seems to indicate that defiant territorial tactics are not a common factor in this practice. Disruption can occur, but not always intentionally.

The debates and complaints reveal conflicts about music taste: which music deserves to be listened to in public, how to deal with these controversies and differences and what are the appropriate ways in which different music fans can share their listening in public. However, online inscriptions of these controversies – such as the many Facebook pages created when this practice started to be noticed – are less prevalent as this practice is less frequently found in public transport, but more so in parks, squares and streets, where the auditory requirements and expectations are different. The more or less silent ways in which fellow commuters show their annoyance, as well as the advertising campaigns of public transport companies, in Madrid and other cities, asking people to use earphones and not to play music loudly, have certainly contributed to the diminished presence of this mode of music listening. Thus, playing music on the phone has not followed the pattern of other mobile phone uses that were considered disruptive when they emerged, as they clashed with the unwritten rules of public behaviour but have become common, banal and almost unnoticed since the public use of mobile phones has become ubiquitous and widespread– such as having personal conversations on public transport, in bars or restaurants (Lasen, 2005).

The complex and controversial mobile performances described here relate to the public and the private beyond well-known modes of mobile privatisation (Williams, 1974). Private forms of music listening using earphones reinforce invisibility and diminish public presence by listening to music that no one else can hear – either at home or through the earphones of mp3 players (Bull, 2000, 2007). Thus, earphone users can pay less attention to their surroundings and worry less about their public performance. This is one of the aspects of the 'Walkman effect' (Bull, 2000, 2007; Hosokawa, 1984; Thibaud, 2003). However, listening to loud music – as in the boom boxes of the past or with mobile phone loudspeakers today – modulates presence in a different way, increasing visibility or, rather, audibility. Music lovers increase their sonic presence, 'doing being a stranger' (Hirschauer, 2005) differently: by increasing the possibilities of sharing and being noticed, increasing the ability of eliciting reactions and making encounters, good and bad. They enjoy an increased feeling of comfort through the musical aestheticisation of their everyday routines, but this comes with an increased vulnerability as they attract other people's attention (Licoppe, 2011). This is a consequence of making oneself public, of increasing our sonic presence by sharing the music we like, by making public our music taste and listening.

Conclusion

The use of mobile phones as portable sound systems can seem very different from mainstream uses such as conversation, messaging and online connections using geo-localisation. However, playing music in public through the phone has several aspects in common with those ordinary uses and practices: the use of the phone to get personal comfort when being on the move, the role of mobile phone uses in the ways we invest our attention and inattention in public (Basset, 2003), the multi-sensuous relationship with the device including touch and hearing, personalisation as a form of mutual stylisation between people and devices, the creation of a personal space or territory in public places, acting as part of public performances of self-presentation, as well as playing a role in the ways we act and interact as strangers in public.

To summarise, let us return to the questions around portable urbanism formulated in the first section of this article. The mobile media practices described enact portable urbanism through the creation of ephemeral sound spaces, which contribute to set the mood and ambience of the urban places where these practices occur. Several mediations and remediations occur in the shaping of these sound spaces, not only regarding different media but also in their meanings and practices. These collective practices involve mobile phones and their music and video apps, the tunes played, the mobile owners, people in their surroundings and the material and normative conditions of the particular urban settings. These multiple sources of agency can be considered a sort of choreography where these ephemeral sound spaces are produced. In these choreographies of spacing, territorial dynamics are deployed through shared listening and sounding. By playing music loudly on their mobiles, mixing the music they love with the sounds of the places they are in, people and their phones share and sign their music and their specific way of listening to it. This is also a way of signing a space, of signalling a personal territory within the city where they move.

However, unlike forms of mobile privatisation (Williams, 1974), the sharing aspect of this way of performing and signalling a territory of the self enhances people's sonic presence and opens the circle of their personal territory to the people around. Becoming more audible and visible increases the possibilities of exchanges and interactions, as well as the occasions for territorial controversies. Thus, the territorial aspect of this form of portable urbanism deploys a territorial paradox, as it can be comforting and disturbing at the same time. It can not only increase people's comfort in public through the pleasure afforded by listening to their music but also the possibility of upsetting current expectations and formal and informal norms of appropriate behaviour in public, annoying people in their surroundings who become unwilling involuntary listeners to the music.

This practice of engaging the city as music lovers is a clear example of the ability of sound to 'lend a dynamic materiality for social negotiation' and mobilise 'acoustic politics of space' (Labelle, 2010: xix). It is another example of the heterogeneous and inherently controversial contexts of urban dwelling and urbanism. In this mobilisation of acoustic portable urbanism, a triple articulation of public is deployed. First is making public the music tunes and the music taste and selection of the people playing the phone (making something public). Secondly, it increases one's sonic presence (making someone public). And third, it contributes to distorting and reshaping public places and ordinary urban acoustic politics (making the public).

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2. These places were chosen after a preliminary observation because of the greater probability of encountering mobile phone users, as they are popular areas in the city centre.
3. https://www.facebook.com/MEMPEC; https://www.facebook.com/Odio-a-la-gente-que-cree-que-el-movil-es-un-radiocassette-37191268745/; https://www.facebook.com/Que-se-prohiba-escuchar-musica-sin-auriculares-en-el-transporte-publico-117483858349605; Auricumán, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2HI5niIUFAM&;t=57s. Some of these Facebook pages were created 10 years ago and have already disappeared, such as '*NO al escuchar música sin auriculares en medios de transporte público*' ('NO to listening to music without earphones on public transport'), '*Niñatos que van escuchando música a todo volumen en sus móviles*' ('brats who listen to music loud on their mobile phones') and '*No me gusta que escuchen música con el móvil sin auriculares al lado mío*' ('I don't like when people near me listen to music on the mobile phone without earphones'). Similar Facebook group and pages can be found in other languages, such as https://www.facebook.com/People-Who-Play-Music-Loud-Off-Their-Phones-Arnt-Cool-129868380390911/?fref=ts or the already disappeared pages 'People who play music loud on their mobile phones on the bus/train are annoying' and 'Playing mobile phone music on buses or trains should be banned'.
4. This Italian term means 'little return', referring to a refrain or little tune, as well as to a musicological notion referring to the return of the section played by the whole orchestra in the Baroque concert.

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