# Mobility and sound mediation in the urban space

Simone Pereira de Sá

## Summary

O trabalho aborda práticas de intervenção e escuta sonora a partir de celulares no cotidiano dos espaços urbanos, propondo-se a discutir o papel dos sons e da música como tecnologias do *self* (De Nora), tanto quanto as acoplagens entre corpo, sujeito e mídias móveis e locativas na construção das paisagens sonoras contemporâneas. Ao mesmo tempo, problematiza o argumento de Michael Bull na obra *Sound Moves* que supõe o uso das mídias móveis para mediação sonora do espaço urbano – em especial Ipods e celulares – como ferramentas que contribuem para o declínio da vida pública.

**Keywords:**
Sound mediation. Mobility. Locative media. Sound. Music.

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## 1 Introduction

> *I have been absent-minded, can't even feel my feet on the ground.* **(Os Mutantes - Meio Desligado)**
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> *The world looks friendlier, happier and sunnier when I walk down the street with my Ipod on. It feels like I'm in a movie at times. Like my life has a soundtrack now.* **(Ipod user, quoted in BULL, 2007, p. 43)**

In his book *Sound Moves – IPod culture and urban experience*, Michael Bull focuses his analysis on what he calls the Ipod culture, taking it as a central example of contemporary sound experience.

According to the author, the Apple IPod is the first icon of the 21st century, since it represents the apex of a Western narrative of growing mobility and privatization, stemming from a "[...] sublime marriage between mobility, aesthetics and functionality; or sound and touch –enabling the users to process their auditory world in the palm of their hand" (BULL, 2007, p. 1).

Walking on the streets inside their *sound bubbles* that their soundtracks constitute, users move

to the rhythm of their track, rather than to the rhythm of the city; they are locked inside a sound zone of immunity and safety.

Hence, according to the author, the IPod provides the best acoustic metaphor of hyper-post-Fordist consumption, since the consumer uses products developed by the cultural industry to isolate him or herself while at the same time reacquiring control over the public space.

In parallel to this trend, Bull also analyzes the use of cell phones in a similar way, since they connect remote users with friends and family in a customized manner, avoiding the need to face the chaos, polyrhythm and sound disorder of the metropolis.[1]

In sum, the author's argument is that, through the use of IPods and cell phones for acoustic mediation, the individual acquires control over the auditory space to the detriment of openness to the cultural diversity that characterizes the soundscape in the city, which used to be the hallmark of the cosmopolitan citizen. He walks in the city disconnected from urban sonorities to exactly the same extent as he plugs himself to the earphones of his private sound.

This argument strikes a chord with a tradition of thinkers that understand technological mediation as yet another element contributing to apathy, social enclosure and decline of public life, raising

issues that deserve to be discussed in depth.

Yet three aspects of Bull's analysis in particular seem to be very problematic. The first one, of an epistemological nature, relates to his anthropocentric view, which links the use of IPods and cell phones to a reinforcement of the position of a self-centered, isolated and consumerist subject. The second one, of a methodological nature, is that the author extrapolates conclusions obtained from an ethnography done with people he characterizes as *heavy users* of these devices in European and American cities, and proposes a universal – or at least Western – model of use of mobile media of sound mediation. Thirdly, the experience of listening to music through a device does not seem to be considered.

In a different perspective, Lemos (2007, 2010), one of the authors that have, in Brazil, been pioneers in seeking to understand the relationship between mobile/locative media and urban spaces, highlights the importance of reflecting on the re-signification of space by these devices – notably the cell phone.  He argues that we are living a "spatial turn" in communication studies. Hence, while the first stage of our relationship with cyberspace was one in which "place did not matter" – since we could connect from anywhere, disembodied, dematerialized and anonymous – locative medias have supported the view according

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[1] When Bull did his research –in the first half of the 2000s – there was still a distinction to be made between MP3 players and cell phones, since the latter had only limited resources as music players. However, developments in the following years mean that currently cell phones are increasingly used to play and store music and sounds. Hence, this paper will not maintain this distinction.

to which place, space, territory and context do make a difference and have once again become "subjects of communicative action" (LEMOS, 2010, p.2).

The phrase "locative media" highlights this "turn", since it refers to devices or services that have a location function – such as smart phones, GPS devices, wireless networks, augmented reality, radio frequency labels etc – in which the "communication flow occurs locally, identifying the user's position" and offering services suitable for the place (p.1), among which the "listening modes", which produce a sound-related reading of the space, are noticeable (p.5).

In his reflection, the author proposes the notion of an "informational territory" to circumscribe the reconfiguration of urban spaces through technologic mediations. The informational territory is the hybrid, moving space that arises from the intersection between cyberspace and urban space through the mediation of mobile and locative media. "For example, an area in a park covered by Wi-Fi networks is an informational territory, different from the physic space *park* and from the electronic space *internet*. When someone uses this Wi-Fi network to access the internet, he or she is in an information territory that overlaps with both the physical (and political, cultural, imaginary and so forth) territory of the park

and the space of telematic networks." (LEMOS, 2007, p. 128). Informational territories configure themselves as social activities that produce symbolic, affective and economic belongings, which in turn are articulated to "physical" places and territories through complex relations.

I would like to add to this "spatial turn" a further "material turn", since attention has also been paid to the materiality of communication devices, as well as to the central role of the body as a means of communication, mediating communicative processes –especially in the case of sonorities. The "rediscovery" of the Toronto School, especially the work of Canadian author Marshall McLuhan, the Theory of Materialities  - which supports the idea that "the observer inevitably becomes aware of her bodily constitution" as a complex condition of her own perception of the world (GUMBRECHT, 1998) – and other theoretical matrices as different as the Actor-Network theory and discussions on the anthropology of consumption all help us identify in the more thought-provoking reflections of communication a growing interest in the sensorial and affective aspects of communication, as well as in the body as a central mediator in communicative processes.[2]

As De Nora (2000) observes, in a reflection of the interaction between music and body, this is a paradoxical category since it demarcates

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2   I further develop these discussions in the section Couplings. For McLuhan's thought, see Pereira (2002); for the Theory of Materialities, see Felinto (2001) and Felinto and Andrade (2005); for an approach to the Actor-Network theory relating to locomotive media see Lemos (2010), among the works of other authors. I thank my three colleagues for their generous interlocution, which went beyond the works I mention here.

the interstices between nature, culture and technology. In the case of mobile and/or locative media, which we analyze here, it is the agency that takes place between bodies and devices that allows not only the re-signification of urban spaces, but also of corporal, mental and psychic dispositions through the use of music.

Hence, using examples that allow us to perceive the multiplicity of practices of intervention and sound listening stemming from the use of mobile phones in the daily life of the city, and at the same time establishing a dialogue with authors that help us build a sophisticated theoretical framework to address this issue, this paper proposes an initial approach to the role of couplings among bodies, subjects and mobile and/or locative media in the construction of soundscapes in contemporary urban spaces, seeking at the same time to understand how music affects us.

## Music as a technology of the self

In his work *Music in everyday life* (2000), De Nora supports the premise according to which music must be thought as a "technology of the self". The phrase refers to the role of music overlapping with the body to produce certain energetic, physic or mental states, modulating moods, rhythms and attention, as well as our space-time relationship.

It is noteworthy that she focuses not only on users of mobile and/or locative media, but also on the uses of recorded music, reproduced using devices,

in daily life. In her detailed research about these uses, based on questions about situations in which respondents use music, and what kind of music they use, the author seeks to understand not what music **means** for its users, but how it **acts** on their bodies and moods, how it **produces** individual **effects** and how it **affects** people.

With this strategy, the author avoids a generalizing and hermeneutic discussion about the relationships between music and society. She seeks to understand the sensorial, psychosomatic and emotional *links* between the sound experience and daily life in a detailed, and therefore innovative and convincing, fashion.

In her argument, she proposes that music is a vehicle; it works as an important agent for the regulation, arrangement and configuration of social situations and roles.

"The vocabulary of using music to achieve what you 'need' is a common discourse of the self, part of the literary technology trough which subjectivity is constituted as an object of self-knowledge. However, the specific discourses respondents invoke as descriptors of "what they need" are not free floating: they are typically linked to practical demands of their appropriation and to interaction with others, as the discussion below of 'emotional work" makes clear. Angela, for example, an eighteen-year-old high school student in New York City says, 'If I need to really settle down and just like relax or something I'll put on slow music.'" (DE NORA, 2000, p. 50).

Also emphasizing the relaxation aspect, the author cites Monica, a twenty-one-year-old English student who describes her favorite bath time music: "Having a bath, yeah, I listen to Enya; it's really nice and peaceful" DE NORA, (2000, p. 50).

How to go from a state of tiredness after a work day to a state of liveliness for a party? How to deal with the feeling of anger after a family fight? How to relax after a week of intense adrenaline? How to focus on reading? How to create the right environment for an intimate encounter? How to cycle to the right rhythm? In all those situations, informers indicate the use of the "right music" as key. The author identifies this strategy as one of aesthetic reflectivity of the subject (GIDDENS, 1990; LASH; URRY, 1994), which uses cultural goods in a self-aware manner, pragmatically, to regulate the states of the self and make them suitable for situations, social roles and contexts that are extremely diverse, incongruent and discrepant, as those of the present times are (DE NORA, 2000, p. 51).

This same way of using music for the regulation of psychic states is also mentioned by Bull's informers (2007, p.29) in different moments of his ethnography.

Samantha, for example, states that:

I keep some slow music that gives me a calm, peaceful feeling when I'm in busy or chaotic settings, like on the subway. Nora Jones is a great example. Then, I also like really upbeat, dance-style music. This is good not only for the gym, but also when I'm just walking around the city - puts me in an upbeat mood. Like Britney Spears (who I normally don´t listen to) has some good new dance songs, like 'Toxic'

Joey points to the same direction when he details his use of Ipod:

> By the time I get to the subway platform I am listening to my morning mix. This mix is `80s music ranging from Eurythmics to Blondie and the Smiths. It's an upbeat and a subtle mix that wakes me up and gets me motivated for my day. I always plan what I will listen to and it reflects what I want to hear or feel at that time.

The same informer adds that the only way to focus to read in public spaces in New York City is wearing headphones and listening to some background music that helps her concentrate. "I think it's because the music is familiar and I don't get distracted by it. It is background noise, that is predictable, secure and in my control".

A third informer, Jason, believes he can change even the mood of other people using his particular soundtrack: "Sometimes, I think I can calm people down just by looking at them when I'm listening to music. And sometimes, when they look at me, I think they do 'shift', because they recognize that I'm in a 'good place'" (BULL, 2007, p. 42)

Sami, in turn, emphasizes the affective relationship between the soundtrack and the city: "I refer to my Ipod as my pacemaker, it helps me find that place. I almost exclusively travel to NYC

when not in London. I have a dedicated playlist called "NY state of mind". This includes a lot of New York rap music and NY east coast jazz." (BULL, 2007, p. 37).

And Jason emphasizes the reconfiguration of the space and of passers-by:

> My world looks better. I get more emotional about things, including the people I see and my thoughts in general. […] For example, I can distinctly remember listening to U2 'Stuck in a moment' and I was looking at some of the people standing around me in a coffee shop, with the look of anxiety on their faces and general angst. It made me want to hug them and tell them it's ok […]" (BULL, 2007, p. 41)

These quotes are relevant because they emphasize the specificity of mobile media in three fundamental aspects: firstly, they potentiate the strategies of self-reflectivity and production of the self in a daily route of their users across the city. By allowing users to carry their musical encyclopedia in the palm of their hands – thanks either to having stored music previously or to access to websites and online radios –users regulates their moods, affections and sensitivities in quite a detailed and sophisticated way.

Secondly, the sensorial aspect of a corporeal experience made possible by the player's mobility is fundamental and defines the experience itself: walk on a street in downtown New York listening to a specific soundtrack produces a specific experience, different from the experience of listening to the same soundtrack, for example, in a domestic space. In this case, it is the articulation

between the body moving in a given urban space and the sound of a given soundtrack to which it moves that makes the difference.

Finally, and as a consequence of the previous premises, we need to emphasize the affective re-signification of the urban space and of passers-by, both of which develop new meanings for the user through a particular soundtrack.

Re-discussing the aforementioned Lemos's definition of locative media, we can propose that, in our example, the communicational flow also occurs locally, since the place matters and is a subject of communicative action. Yet the vector of location, which in the examples of the author occur in the sense media-user (the cell phone locates the position of the user in space and offers a service), here also occurs in the opposite direction thanks to the coupling between body and cell phone-as-musical player, re-signifying the space while that very space "guides" the choices.

## Mediated cosmopolitanism

In his analysis, Bull seems to move closer to De Nora's discussion about the self-reflectivity of the subject, since he understands the musical "filtering" carried out by his informers as an aestheticization of daily life. However, in the author's argument, this aestheticization is understood as "going beyond" the multi-rhythmic reality of the streets to reach a world of fantasy and utopia inhabited by the mono-rhythmic soundtracks that entail simplification and

impoverishment of the urban experience (BULL, 2007). The author critically calls this experience a "mediated cosmopolitanism", acquired through consumption and opposed to the valorization of street face-to-face social interaction present in "traditional" cosmopolitanism.

In this sense, De Nora's analysis becomes more productive, since it points to the paradoxical character of these strategies of self-regulation that can both –and maybe simultaneously– lead to empowerment and to self-emancipation of the individual with regard to the social context and, conversely, be incorporated by advanced capitalism in its demand for order, standardization and a consuming subject. Nevertheless, faithful to her principles of ethnography, her answer to the premises is not given *a priori*, but based on specific references to real actors.

Furthermore, the author rejects any mechanistic, essentialist or deterministic relationship of music with bodies and the self. Hence, while music is an important ingredient in the organization of affections, energy, attention and social engagement, it must not be thought of as a stimulus, acting on individuals as an external agent (DE NORA, 2000, p.61).

Indeed, the "effects" of music on bodies and the self require attention to a whole extra-musical context that guides choices - which explains why the same song played in different contexts will not produce the same effect - and in which couplings with bodies have a key place. This is exemplified

by Bull's informer who says that she listens to Britney Spears in the subway, although she does not "usually" listen to her songs elsewhere.

Referring to Willis's pioneering study (1978, quoted in DE NORA, 2000) about *bikeboys* and the kind of music they chose to ride their bikes; and later deepening the analysis in the chapter about the selection and the efficacy of songs for an aerobics class, the author demonstrates that there are no songs defined for each situation "a priori"; rather, there are those that, tested for their effects on bodies, work well to produce the expected outcome –feeling of speed in the case of *bikeboys* and of a rhythmic beat in the case of the aerobics class, as well as of space-time reorganization in both cases. In this sense, the suggestion of music as transport, taking us to other emotional situations, other moments in time, becomes literal, as it transports the bodies of these informers from a state of inertia to a state of movement; and vice-versa, when the time comes to slow down. This ensures they have a rhythm, a pulsation or a set of values literally "incorporated", as emphasized by one of Willis's informers and verified by anyone who has at some point used a headphone in his or her route across the city. "You can hear the beat in your head, don't you?... you go with the beat... (WILLIS, 1978, p. 72 quoted in DE NORA, 2000, p. 7).

## Couplings

The notion of coupling deserves to be highlighted since it evokes a group of relevant theoretical

resonances which shed light on aspects of the issues addressed here.

Firstly, it evokes the discussion of Gumbrecht (1998) and Gumbrecht and Pfeiffer (1994) in the context of the Theory of Materialities. As Felinto (2001), Felinto and Andrade (2005) and Sá (2004) note, this diverts from a reflection of the hermeneutical, political and/or ideological field on the technological mediation, favoring instead the materiality or the concreteness of each of the channels of communication.

Pointing to this direction, one of its important suggestions is that the media are constitutive elements of the structures, articulations and circulation of sense, leaving their marks on the relationships that people have with their bodies, their conscience and their actions.

In the wake of such considerations, Gumbrecht emphasizes the importance of understanding the ways structural coupling occur between different systems; in other words, the way in which a new system emerges from the relationship between body and computer, for example, shaping new channels of signifiers in which the notion of rhythm is crucial.[3]

Secondly, it refers us to the Actor-Network theory, especially to Latour's discussion (1986, 1991) on the structural coupling among human and non-human actors who act within a complex

socio-technical network producing hybrids; this suggests a sociology of technique less concerned with the distinction between human and non-human actors in technological networks and more interested in discussing the **distribution or delegation** of duties within the process, as I discuss in Sá (2009).

In his perspective, any technical artifact has anthropomorphic characteristics, since it is a surrogate that conducts activities or duties designed by humans. Indeed, a technical artifact is primarily designed by humans; subsequently it replaces the action of humans, and finally it prescribes the actions of human in a way.

Such delegation, however, also occurs two ways, since the system – like any other technology - can be seen as the automation or crystallization of a social, cultural and material process that sediments social relations.

A third resonance of the idea of coupling refers us to another tradition, that of authors, such as Miller (1994) and Mizrahi (2006), who contributed to studies of the anthropology of consumption. While this resonance has no relation with the previously discussed theoretical trends, it is also productive for our reflection, since it emphasizes the importance of understanding not only the symbolic dimension of material goods, but also the physical nature of objects or the relationship "between person and thing".

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[3] This argument is explored by Kittler (1999) when he analyzes *Nietzsche's* relationship with the typewriter and the effects rhythmic effects of this coupling on the philosopher's thinking.

As Mizrahi (2006) notes, what it at stake in his proposal is to understand not just the symbolic character of material goods, but also the acuity of given objects to translate certain particularities of the symbolic world; as well as the subtlety of differentiation processes made possible by certain material artifacts.

In this perspective, consumption is thought as a "process of objectification" (MILLER 1994 quoted in MIZRAHI, 2006) and artifacts are crucial and concrete mediators of identity affirmation and value construction processes.[4]

What these perspectives have in common is their emphasis on the need for going beyond subject-object distinctions and anthropocentric causal relations, which place the human subject at the center of the intentionalities. Displacing this centrality and perceiving the communicative phenomenon as a network built by actors, in which each agent makes a difference and changes the whole, seems to me the most important aspect of this argument for our analysis. This moves us away from Bull's premise about a subject that is self-centered, isolated and disconnected from space.

Indeed, it allows us to go beyond the subject-object and culture-technique dichotomies, challenging us to think about the articulation body-locative

media-music-urban space as creating a specific, hybrid agency, from which all elements emerge modified. In this case, as in Mizrahi's discussion about clothes and body in the *funk* party.

> Materiality and agency work simultaneously, and in an environment of non-dualism between people and things. One needs the other to bring about the effect they have when they are present. Person and thing, hence, are merged. It is the outcome of this interaction that is able to 'capture the attention'. (p.8)

It is this acuity that makes the player/ music playing cell phone a central object of contemporary music culture: as we have seen, elements such as size, mobility, headphones, convergence with other media allowing access to radio stations and websites, and music storage capacity; as well as the specific way in which it couples to the body that moves in the city space are some of the elements we must consider when analyzing the specificity of this sound experience.

## Past /memory

Discussing the different ways music reorganizes our space-time perception, De Nora looks into the issues of past and memory as these are insistently mentioned by her respondents.

One of them is Lucy, who says during the interview that the summer of 67 was marked by the hit *A whiter shade of pale*. And that recently,

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[4] In that article, the author analyzes the clothes worn by people attending a funk party. She discusses the material characteristics of clothes chosen by young men and women. Hence, the "stretch sweatpants" are important because not only it represents the *funk* girls, or the environment of desire for seduction present in the party, but because it effectively carries this power – the power of the erotic, of seduction and provocation. It is the sweatpants that have agency so that, as young women say, "when we are around, everyone will look at us".

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at 52, she heard this song in a mall shop, looked at another woman who seemed to be the same age as she is and they both agreed that song was a portal into a tunnel of time toward the past.

Other examples include the daughter who would listen to her dead father's favorite sonata in order to remember him; and the wife who had an affair whose "theme song", chosen by the two lovers, still transported her back to the past when she listened to it years after the affair was over.

These daily life uses show how songs and, more widely, the world of sounds work as "memory containers" which instantly trigger a network of associations that brings back moods, emotions and feelings, thus bringing back either the specificity of a situation, an event or a relationship or the general feel of a period of time (the sixties, for instance).[5]

Nevertheless, we should stress once more that the author is very careful not to suggest any kind of mechanistic or deterministic relationship between music and the past. The idea here is that music helps us 'recognize who we were in a certain point in time' (DE NORA, 2000, p. 65), recall the 'aesthetic layout in that moment in the past', retelling and making sense of the path we follow

in life. In this sense, the mobile and locative media once again strength the notion of technology of the self – as those are artifacts for the production of a unified and coherent, although not always dynamic, narrative of our autobiographies.[6]

This reconstruction can be individual, as we saw in the previous cases, but it can also be collective.[7] Beyond examples in the strictly musical universe, Lemos (2010) describes a number of urban space **sound note** projects, such as *Murmur – hear you are*; *Peninsula Voices* and *Define your City*, which resort to locative media to tell/listen to stories that are associated with places where users move about, which is the case of the two first examples; or to listen to the Brazilian baroque poet Gregório de Matos' texts posted in touristic spots in the City of Salvador, in Bahia, in the third example. 'Here, the place is not only the pathway, but also a 'trigger' of stories. What emanates from locations is the content created by dwellers during interviews about the place' (LEMOS, 2010, p. 12) – in the case of *Murmur* and of *Peninsula Voices*; or of '[...] creating a local strangeness and problematizing the idyllic vision instituted by public powers, mainly by tourism' in the case of *Define your city*.[8]

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[5] The discussion of orality as a thought technology was pioneered by the Toronto School – based on the work of McLuhan, Innis, Ong, etc.

[6] About the perspective of memory in permanent construction, see the discussion in Pereira (2002, p. 60), especially the concept of transmnesis.

[7] Although for Halbwachs memory is always collective and social, I follow Pereira (2002), who proposes thinking the individual memory as a pole of functioning that composes social memory.

This way, narratives can actualize or problematize the past, retell stories, create collective identities, thus contributing to sociability ties and to reterritorialization.

## The funk mobile team

Before my final considerations, I will offer one last example of intervention on urban space based on the collective mobile media, which I witnessed in a public transportation vehicle in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

About one year ago, I was waiting at a bus stop in the fancy South area of Rio de Janeiro. Beside me, three 13-16 year old boys who mentioned living in the Rocinha slum, located not far away from where we were.

We took the same bus. As soon as we had paid the bus fare and were in the relatively empty vehicle, they chose the back seats and started to play *carioca* (from Rio de Janeiro) funk music at full blast from one of their cell phones. Discussing their musical preferences and accompanying songs with a kind of hand and feet percussion, during the whole trip they ostentatiously showed they were having a lot of fun from their improvised performance that took hold of the acoustic space of the bus.

They could have chosen to listen to their soundtrack through earphones. Nevertheless,

choosing to 'open the sound' to the whole bus, they forced the other passengers to share their musical taste and interfered with the environment's soundscape, as it was impossible to ignore them due to the sheer volume not only of the sound but also of the whole performance.

I noticed that some people on the bus were listening to music from players with earphones; a few people were reading. But, whether they liked it or not, nobody complained and the trip went on smoothly up to its end, with no arguments between fellow passengers, a mix of working class and students that took the bus near the Catholic University.

If we are to understand the meaning of this episode we need to refer to the funk music context in Rio de Janeiro – it is the sound track of poor neighborhoods' (periphery's) and slums' dances, which gather thousands of low-income young people together. Whereas its origin is the American Miami Bass, its lyrics are chronicles of slum daily life and problems, including poverty, violence, drug traffic and the clash between the police and criminals, often seen in their neighborhoods, forcefully stressing territory and community.

Nevertheless, the consolidation of funk music as the expression of Rio de Janeiro poor neighborhoods and slums did not entail its wide cultural recognition (as it was the case with

samba, for instance, decades earlier). Since the 80s, when this genre was consolidated in Rio, its is a history of persecution and stigmatization by the media, by the police and by opinion makers, who repeatedly resort to moral panic arguments when analyzing this phenomenon (FREIRE FILHO; HERSCHMAN, 2003).

Thus, the way these young people use their cell phones interests me, first of all, because it is a **deviant** use, an **appropriation** that transforms the separate and individual act of listening to music into a different, collective and shared form, thus generating a sound narrative about "who they are".

Because they bring about such a transformation, I believe these boys' tactics (CERTEAU, 1990) can also be read as identity affirmation and as a reterritorialization of the public space based on the establishment of an informational belonging territory inside the vehicle: if a certain *carioca* middle class is not easily interested in visiting the slum, these boys force people to listen to some of the narrative about their daily life.

Technological appropriation, context, dispute over the senses of the sound space and the role of mobile music as an important element for reterritorialization, for building narrative, sociability and collective identity ties are once again the key words in my argument.

The same scenario also includes listening practices which are different from this first mode,

as I also observed the use of individual players by users who played their own sound track in a private, customized and immersed way, similar to Bull's respondents.

Once more, though, it seems to me that the framework of Rio de Janeiro urban experience is crucial as a framework for these practices because, as it is a metropolis with its violence and robbery, people necessarily have to keep attentive when walking on the streets. Thus, being isolated in a sound bubble, as well as showing laptops, cameras and smartphones on the streets is less usual than in other cities, as keeping alert and attentive to purses and devices is an attitude Rio de Janeiro dwellers have "assimilated".

Another characteristic that deserves attention as well is –paradoxically– the city's effervescent sociability. Leaving clichés aside, the fact is that it is quite common to talk to strangers on the streets and on means of transportation, the right to privacy –so obvious in London, where Bull carried out part of his work– is not granted, and being able to stay silent when on a queue is challenging, if not a rude achievement.

In this context, thousands of people use their players to listen to music; nevertheless, they often remove one of the earphones and chat while keeping the other in, which once again problematizes the notion of sound bubble and of an immersed attitude that ignores what is around you. On the contrary, the model that seems to best translate what is experienced on Rio de Janeiro

streets is that of overlapping multiple layers of interaction –listening to music plus chatting, plus being attentive to peddlers' shouting on the sidewalk, of car watchers' addressing pedestrians, etc.

## Final considerations

Based on our discussions, we understood the role of mobile and/or locative media as central for the reconfiguration of contemporary soundscapes based on the establishment of informational territories. Differently from Bull's argument, though, these artifacts do not necessarily isolate individuals in impervious sound bubbles that are foreign to city sounds.

Therefore, this paper aimed at relativizing the model proposed by Bull, suggesting there are uses and appropriations of mobile and/or locative media in multiple directions and based on different couplings, either in individual cell phone use as a music player device or in collective practices exemplified by the appropriation of cell phones to listen to funk music or to produce shared sound notes.

The analysis of these couplings –investigating particularly the hybrid body rhythm/movement in each situation and the network this movement generates– deserves further in-depth consideration. Nevertheless, I believe these uses have helped me establish that urban spaces are historically built; and that a city is a tissue produced by the plurality of uses and multiple

experiences in which dialogue, conflict and negociation are part of its dwellers' struggle for signification, writing their stories and inscribing themselves onto the urban tissue through their ordinary practices (CERTEAU, 1990).

Thus, we cannot take for granted the premiss – predominantly stemming from a certain European experience that was generalized to the "rest of the world"– of the decline of public space and the consequent hypertrophy of private life.

Thus, although globalization produces cities that are similar to each other and non-places such as airports and malls, it also coexists with the plurality and diversity of ways in which culture and technology are articulated, as well as with the particular way in which locative media are appropriated by different users, producing layouts that are also specific, in which the place matters very much.

As observed by Lemos (2007, p. 135):

> Definitively, as we unplug our machines, as cell phone, bluetooth, RFID or Wi-Fi networks turn our cities into unplugged and wireless communicating machines we design, paradoxically, projects that look exactly for the opposite: territorialization, anchorage to physical space, couplings to things, places, objects [...].

In the case of music and of the noisy world of smartphone-mediated sounds, this is a thought-provoking premiss whose detailed analysis is the challenge facing us after the present discussion.

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## Mobilidade e mediação sonora no espaço urbano

**Resumo:**

O trabalho aborda práticas de intervenção e escuta sonora a partir de celulares no cotidiano dos espaços urbanos, propondo-se a discutir o papel dos sons e da música como tecnologias do *self* (De Nora), tanto quanto as acoplagens entre corpo, sujeito e mídias móveis e locativas na construção das paisagens sonoras contemporâneas. Ao mesmo tempo, problematiza o argumento de Michael Bull na obra *Sound Moves* que supõe o uso das mídias móveis para mediação sonora do espaço urbano – em especial Ipods e celulares – como ferramentas que contribuem para o declínio da vida pública.

**Palavras-chave:**

Mediação sonora. Mobilidade. Música. Som. Mídias locativas.

## Movilidad y mediación sonora en el espacio urbano

**Resumen:**

El estudio aborda las prácticas de intervención y escucha sonora a través de los teléfonos móviles en los espacios urbanos cotidianos, proponiendo discutir el papel de los sonidos y la música como *tecnologías del yo* (De Nora), así como los acoplamientos entre el cuerpo, el sujeto y los medios de comunicación móviles y locativas en la construcción de los paisajes sonoros contemporáneos. Al mismo tiempo, cuestiona el argumento de la obra Sound Moves, de Michael Bull, asumiendo el uso de medios móviles de sonido de la mediación del espacio urbano - en especial iPods y teléfonos móviles - como herramientas que contribuyen a la disminución de la vida pública.

**Palabras clave:**

Mediaciones sonoras. Movilidad. Musica. Sonido. Medios locativos.

## Expediente

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