

Musical travelling:

Mediated music listening on public transport

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ABSTRACT

Listening to music through technological mediation has become part of everyday life in our modern societies. It is a highly accessible type of listening as it only requires a pair of headphones and the smartphone we all carry in our pocket. This article focuses on this widespread phenomenon in the context of public transport, in which listening to music produces a unique musical event, mediated by the space in which it occurs as well as the time over which it takes place. To understand how this happens, we use a model of analysis that brings together Marc Augé's concept of *non-lieu* (*non-place*), Alan Merriam's triangle and Georgina Born's approach to music analysis in relation to sound and space. Additionally, we followed Michael Bull's numerous studies on *mediated listening* to conduct the fieldwork. This was based on interviews with university students who, while perhaps not a representative sample, allow us to reflect on and pose certain counterpoints to Bull's ideas. The purpose of the analysis was to find out whether there is an awareness of the acoustic and social isolation produced when listening to music on public transport.

I try to imagine the cacophony that would invade the train if dozens of music-loving young people put aside their headphones for an instant to share with us their musical emotions. With a gaze that is lost and yet alert, watching the parade of stations, they are otherness itself. (Augé, 2010)

The politics of music listening

Music listening is one of the most talked-about phenomena of our time, as well as being widely discussed within sound studies. This article addresses the issue of listening via technological mediation using a device – usually a smartphone, although iPods or MP3 players can still be found – and headphones that allow private *soundscape*s (Bull, 2010, p. 56) to be created. As shown by Michael Bull's work, this musical event, as Josep Martí terms it (2000, p. 57), has had a significant impact on daily life in Western societies. For this reason, we believe that this phenomenon is a very powerful prism through which to identify the current social and power relationships of our spaces. The aim is therefore to help shatter what has been a visually based epistemological obsession in the West for the past few years. In 2003, Michael Bull and Les Back argued that “in short, we claim that a visually based epistemology is both insufficient and often erroneous in its description, analysis and thus understanding of the social world” (p. 3). We therefore firmly believe that a broad in-depth study of technologically mediated listening, as well as an analysis of how we live with sound day-to-day, can provide a crucial window into contemporary society.

This field of study is vast, so for the purposes of this article we have confined analysis to this musical event on public transport. We will therefore address the possibility of creating private *soundscape*s in a space such as this. Could this space, which appears to be – and is – completely ordinary and banal, be a situation in which social and political dynamics play a vital role? Our assertion that studying technologically mediated music listening has huge critical potential is not without precedent. Reflecting on the notion of art 14 years ago, Jacques Rancière said that, “in both cases [‘relational’ art and the aesthetic of the sublime], art consists of exercising a new distribution of material and symbolic space. This is where art is related to politics”¹ (Rancière, 2005, p. 17). If there is any everyday activity that allows material and symbolic space to be distributed in a new way, it is technologically mediated listening. The ability of this type of listening to do this, as with art, is consequently entirely political.

Understanding the politics of music listening on public transport

Technologically mediated listening on public transport takes place in spaces within our modern-day cities that are *shared* in two senses: *shared* as a routine and often-visited place for many, and shared as a place of social co-presence. The question is how can we study the interwoven social and individual experiences that emerge from music listening in these contexts? As this is clearly a complex issue, we have chosen to work from a specific conceptual structure to carry out the analysis in a more consistent way. Moreover, we will construct this model taking into account that the fieldwork uses a qualitative methodology based on interviews.²

1 All translations are the author's own.

2 To avoid providing a long justification of this methodological decision, we can say we adhere to the approach used by the leading scholar on technologically mediated listening, Michael Bull, in his work on the subject: interviews and their qualitative analysis.

This structure, which is presented below, is of an interdisciplinary nature and was conceived specifically for this study. On the one hand, we use basic anthropological concepts on what the space studied is and entails in contemporary society, and on the other, our theoretical basis is taken from classical ethnomusicology. These two viewpoints are combined to create an analytical model that allows us to study music listening on public transport. Finally, the third element could fall under sound or media studies and is essentially based on Michael Bull's work on technologically mediated listening.

Space and public transport

The idea of space running throughout this work is that proposed by the sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre, known for the phrase "l'espace perçu, conçu, vécu" (Born, 2013, p. 23) Space, then, is a place that is perceived, conceived and lived. This might seem to tell us little but the consequences that emerge are very interesting, as noted by Stuart Elden when he says that "just as the social is historically shaped, so too is it spatially shaped. Equally the spatial is historically and socially configured" (Elden cited in Born, 2013, p. 23). We believe this short explanation of Lefebvre's three-dimensional conception of space is very useful, as it enables us to define what space and time entail in relation to music and sound by changing a single word. If we accept that music can only be as a result of social interactions (Merriam, 1964, p. 27), then it would be possible to substitute Elden's concept of social for *musical* or *sound*. In this way, we can reformulate the idea above by saying that sound or music is spatially mediated in addition to being historically mediated, in the same way that space is mediated historically and also through sound/music.

Continuing with an anthropological view of space, French anthropologist Marc Augé's concept of *non-lieu* is essential to understand a place such as public transport. *Non-places* are "The installations needed for the accelerated circulation of passengers and goods (high-speed roads and railways, interchanges, airports) are just as much non-places as the means of transport themselves, or the great commercial centres, or the extended transit camps where the planet's refugees are parked" (Augé, 1995, p. 34). Knowing that *non-places* can be found in all these spots, we need to know how they are characterized. A *non-place* is essentially the opposite of a place. While a place is a space of *relational and historical identity* – as shown by the words of Elden and Lefebvre – a *non-place* is a space in which these mediations are erased (Augé, 2000, p. 83). However, as we will see here, the historic does intervene to some degree in music listening on public transport.

The question now turns to the object of our study: if we assume that the space of public transport is not a place *per se* if relational and social mediation has been damaged – to say it had disappeared would be a bold statement – then what is the role of technologically mediated listening? Does music help to create *non-places* or is it completely unrelated? Does it play a role in the eradication of social relationships, causing individuals to be isolated in spaces such as public transport?

Music, sound and space: three interdependent variables

Having presented these anthropological ideas on space, it is essential to consider an idea proposed by Georgina Born in *Music, Sound and Space* (2013) which is simple and yet illuminating and useful. Born brings to our attention the need to cultivate the relationship between music, sound and space, considering and interrelating six concepts in a multidirectional way: music and sound, space and time, subjectivity and sociality (Born, 2013, p. 19).

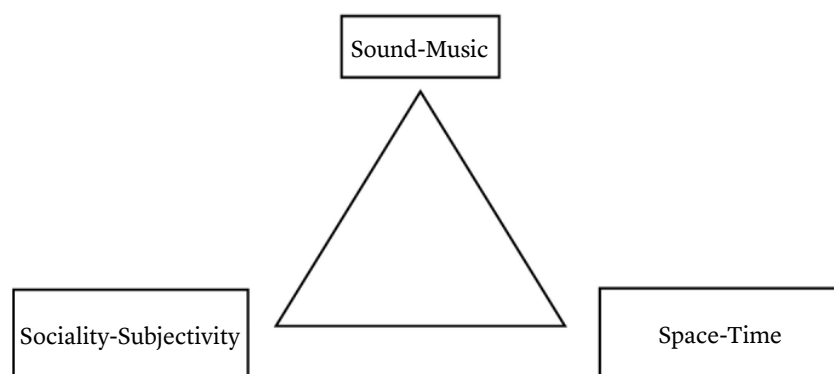


Figure 1. Triangle based on the six parameters proposed by Georgina Born for studying the relationship between music, sound and space (2013, p. 19).

We therefore consider that these parameters are essential to include in our model of analysis, because transcendental factors that affect a complex musical situation such as this would otherwise be ignored. As these six interrelated factors themselves do not provide a specific model of analysis, we have chosen to use Alan Merriam's³ analytic model as a complementary way to filter the information obtained during the fieldwork:

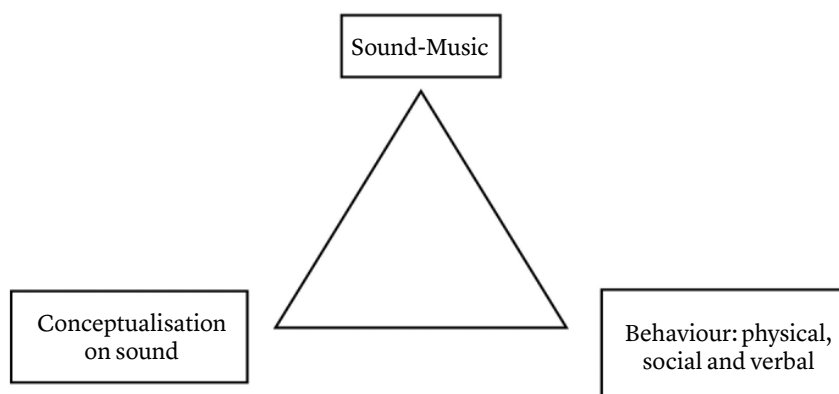


Figure 2. Merriam's well-known triangle, proposed as an analytic model in *The Anthropology of Music* (1964, pp. 17–35).

³ This analytic model, usually presented as a triangle, is explained by Merriam in *The Anthropology of Music* (1964), Chapter 2 entitled "Toward a theory for Ethnomusicology" (pp. 17–35).

After decades of academic tradition within musicology, this model has been adjusted and revised many times.⁴ For a re-reading of this model of analysis, we have followed Timothy Rice's thesis in *Toward the Remodeling of Ethnomusicology* (2008), in which he states that Merriam's triangle is incomplete by itself and always requires secondary tools to function. We therefore propose to combine Born's six parameters with the triangle to achieve a more comprehensive model of analysis. In this way, we can see that music, together with sociality and subjectivity – which can be compressed within Merriam's notion of *behaviour* – are contemplated in both cases. But what happens with space and time? And conceptualization?

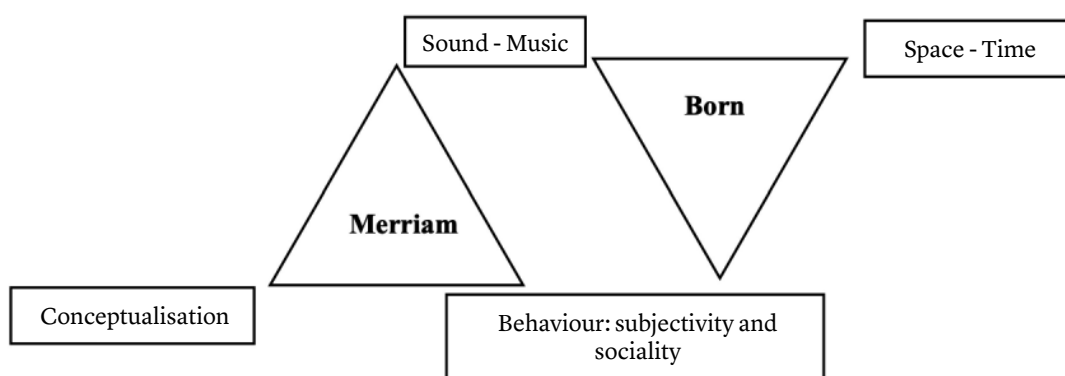


Figure 3. Combination of Merriam's triangle and the triangle using Born's parameters.

Remarking on the absence of a diachronic aspect in Merriam's model is nothing new. It was also noted by Rice, who proposes the triangle include a diachronic conception of music. To do so, Rice makes use of the reflections of anthropologist Clifford Geertz⁵ and suggests working with Merriam's triangle within three different parameters: historical construction, social maintenance and individual experience.

4 *Remixing Merriam, rethinking the prism. Alan Merriam's analytical model for the potential study of new technologically-mediated ways of listening* (Roquer, Rey, & Sola, pending publication) contains a review of some of the revisions of and reflections on Merriam's analytic model carried out to date. These include: Timothy Rice's proposal, also included in this article; the work by Anthony Seeger criticising Merriam's model as an obsolete paradigm; Ellen Koskoff's work restating the model's potential; and works by Dane Harwood and Jeff Titon, who both criticize Rice's re-reading (pp. 5-8).

5 Every symbolic system is "historically constructed, socially maintained, and individually applied" (Geertz, 1973, pp. 363-364).

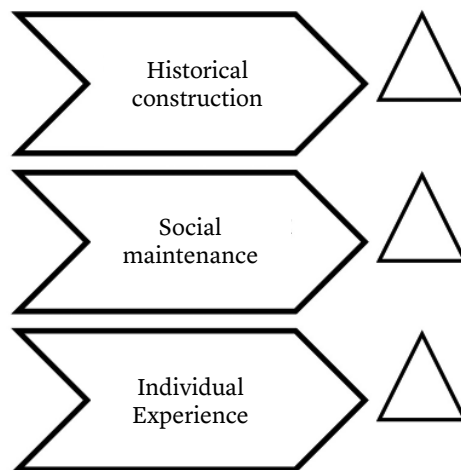


Figure 4. Rice's three levels of musical system interpretation.

The remodelled Merriam's triangle proposed by Rice is not sufficient on its own to study mediated sound with the parameters proposed by Born (individual-social, sound-music, space-time) as space is still not taken into account. Rice's contribution of adding diachrony to the triangle gives it more meaning and depth, and we propose to do the same for space, understanding it as any place (or non-place) where a music event takes place. Time will be treated as an historic construction that conditions the event and the time for which it lasts. This separation into two types of time is important, as the duration of the listening event is time that is experienced and perceived in an individual way. On the other hand, the time we refer to as historic is those inherited social, historical and cultural relationships that result in conditioning around the conceptualization and experience of music listening. We wish to make it clear that this is only a proposal for a specific case study and in no way a definitive model. It could be represented as follows:

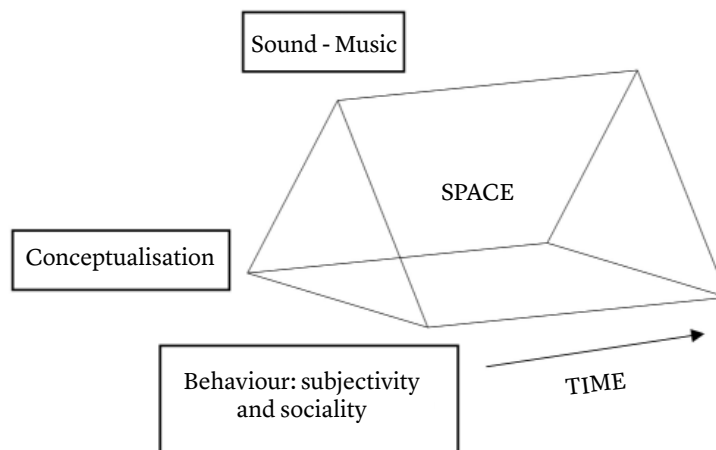


Figure 5. Proposed model of analysis for technologically mediated listening.

Michael Bull, mediated listening and private soundscapes

According to work by Michael Bull, mediated listening creates a barrier between the subject and the external world, with three important consequences: minimizing the social and the sociable, the production of *non-places* in public spaces, and a narcissistic attitude towards others (Born, 2013, p. 34). These are broadly the main points that emerge from the concept of mediated listening, but Bull's work contains many others that are pertinent to this study: solipsism, the recreation of space according to mood, denial of otherness, creation of the auditory field as synonymous with personal space, the privatization of *soundscape*, the filmic conception of these types of experience, and isolation, among others.

Since the beginning, the research has therefore been guided by the issue of the consequences that emerge from mediated music listening on public transport and the degree to which users are aware of them. With this as a guide and main purpose of the study, others were also considered. Of course, this contribution is simply an attempt to analyse one of the many potential music listening habits in the urban space, as well as an evaluation of music's ability to organize our time and social spaces. We also see this research as a proposal for re-reading the work of Bull, as this has not been undertaken for several years. Thus, based on our readings of this author and daily and non-scientific observations of (and participation in) mediated technology on public transport, we can propose a starting hypothesis: that isolation in terms of space and sociality is real but not completely conscious. Consciousness is certainly present for acoustic isolation, but it is not clear to us that social isolation is consciously sought by listeners.

Ethnographic methodology will be used as mentioned, meaning the usual difficulties found for that type of methodology presented themselves. The main issue was with the social group studied, as it was very difficult to select a specific group of people who listen to music on public transport. The widespread use of smartphones means that anyone in an urban community could potentially listen to music on public transport. This means that we are trying to study a huge and nebulous social group. As we do not have the tools to conduct a study on how many and which people listen to music on public transport, we decided to focus on the profile closest to home: university students. Although not representative of the population, this sector provides sufficient data of interest to be able to compare our results with those obtained by Bull.

The use of interviews was chosen for two reasons: to obtain qualitative information and to follow the same methodology used by Bull in his studies (Bull, 2000, 2002, 2010). In-depth interviews were conducted with nine different young people. These voices obviously cannot be presented as the reality of the music event being addressed; rather they exemplify and reflect questions already posed by Bull, as well as providing a window for enquiry into the level of consciousness discussed. This will be carried out by filtering all the information gained from the interviews through the triangle prism configured as our model of analysis. The concepts to be analysed as regards mediated music listening on public transport

are therefore as follows:

- Behaviours deriving from mediated music listening on public transport.
- Conceptualizations deriving from mediated music listening on public transport.
- The need for mediated music listening on public transport.
- Mediated music listening on public transport: the creation of private, personal spaces.
- Denying otherness through mediated music listening.
- Isolation caused by mediated music listening.

Data analysis

Behaviours deriving from mediated music listening on public transport

To begin analysing the data we will first focus on the relationship between music and behaviour for the interviewees. Activities performed in parallel to listening tend to involve certain mobile applications (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, etc.). In general, however, music listening is seen as an almost exclusive activity, with listeners only paying attention to what they are feeling and their inner world, as expressed by this interview:

Suddenly you're listening to a slow song by Txarango, but then you get a loud one by Raíz and you think: 'yeah, yeah'. [...] It's what I was saying before: La Raíz is more about social issues, Smoking Souls is more about "love" and Txarango is a mixture of "love" and social issues. So it's perfect because it makes me feel active and think too when I hear the lyrics. (Interviewee 1)

It is interesting to observe that this music associated with what is clearly a situation or context with a party mood (in the case of the three groups mentioned⁶) is being listened to on public transport. The interviewee says this type of music makes them feel more "active", but no increased level of activity is expressed in their physical or verbal behaviour. Technological mediation avoids the social participation implied by upbeat music as it involves isolation in terms of sound. We have to consider, however, that this is a result of the space. While the music is conceptualized as participative and convivial, a *non-place* such as public transport in a city almost directly obliterates social relations. Mediated music listening on public transport can therefore be seen as accompanying a disconnect from the behaviour usually fostered by the music itself and what the individual does when listening to it. The resulting experience is completely internal, as social expression is nullified through the mediation of both the technology and the space.

6 Below are links to the websites and music of the bands mentioned in order to verify this "party mood": Txarango website: <https://www.txarango.com/>; Spotify page: <https://open.spotify.com/artist/6XYRpegPIK9OejoVzA7PbC?si=OEqrnxkaT6SCTUvdMBPnQg>, La Raíz website: <http://www.laraiz.es/ca/inici-2>; Spotify page: <https://open.spotify.com/artist/036IY6CphXdsPiqIXdqvCP?si=iUg9orASRnG5quEoQsvWIg>, Smoking Souls website: <http://www.smokingsouls.net/ca>; Spotify page: <https://open.spotify.com/artist/6EHWcnoYjPLhtr7Grw3804?si=I2OXfGciQL2887qBS-aAFg>.

The same interviewee also says the following:

If I listen to Txarango or La Raíz I feel like I'm at one of their concerts, but because I have been. So it's like it's 'great to go back there'. (I1)

In this case, the interviewee is on their usual route to university, but listening to music allows them to “travel” in their mind to somewhere they have been in the past or would like to be. Bull explains this based on Theodor W. Adorno's concept of *we-ness*, saying: “Walkman users experience the world as a form of *we-ness*” (Bull, 2002, p. 93). This means that this type of state can “refer to the substitution of direct experience by technologically mediated forms of experience” (Bull, 2002, p. 99). The interviewee therefore enters this state thanks to technological mediation, which enables them to “experience” the social phenomenon of participating in a party atmosphere via technology.

Conceptualizations deriving from mediated music listening on public transport

The interviewee's verbal expression reveals a dichotomy in *listening to music* that runs through all the interviews:

When I start listening to music on the train, like, *listening to music* [emphatic gestures], a song comes into my head and I find it and come out of the others... (I5)

This verbal behaviour explains very little about what the listener conceives as listening to music and *listening to music*. What is clear, however, is that the interviewee is referring to an active and a non-active type of listening. This shows there are different ways of listening to music on public transport – or anywhere else in fact.

On some days I play music and don't listen to it, I just know it's there and have it in the background. So I think my own thoughts [...] It depends on the day, it's like I tune in and switch off. (I9)

It is interesting to dwell on the expression “have it in the background”. Listening to music with headphones does not imply distant “background” sounds, as the music is practically inside the body on a physical and acoustic level. This way of listening to music, which contrasts with the active listening previously referred to, leads us to think that it is often not the music itself that is the object of interest. The type of music being played is not of crucial importance, it just needs to provide a “background” that is more pleasant than that of public transport. In this way, a shared *soundscape* is substituted by a private one. The same interviewee, however, suggests that this type of space makes it easier and more comfortable for them to listen actively:

If I'm putting on make-up to go to work I put music on in the background, but because I know the songs, I get into them and start to move about and sing but I'm not really enjoying the music as such. When I'm on the bus I do because I can concentrate on it and I don't have anything else to do – I mean, looking at people or not doesn't require any effort – so I take in what they are saying and concentrate more. I connect more with the music and then I imagine what the song is describing or what made them write these songs. (I9)

Once again, we return to the idea of musical behaviour being conditioned and mediated by a *non-place* such as public transport. The interviewee's statement that active listening is easier when travelling than at home even appears to be contradictory, but other interviewees said the same. Being on public transport does not allow the individual to do much other than wait for their stop. This aside, social relationships are nullified to the extent that they find themselves in a situation that favours private and active listening.

How, then, is this active listening possible? The answer can be found in the conceptualization of music itself. The idea that music allows greater reflection and clarity of thought emerges from one of the interviews:

But I think that music is more about personal reflection, I mean, I like it because it is an easy way to switch off, to think and reflect on whatever you like. Reading, on the other hand, is not as reflective and personal as it takes me to another world that isn't mine. (I2)

In this case, guided by the interview questions, the listener compares the difference between the experience of reading and listening to music on public transport. Their words clearly indicate this: "music is more about personal reflection". This is directly associated with the music listening model that began with Romanticism, in which importance is given to how music affects the internal world of the listener and how they handle their emotions.⁷ Here we can see that these experiences – which are so individual and sensory – are not only mediated by the journey time spent on public transport but also by historic time, through inherited models of listening to and conceptualizing music.

The absence of a relationship between music and behaviour is an interesting contradiction. None of the interviewees who mentioned this specified any type of music as more or less helpful for getting into this state of reflection. As it is unclear whether listeners prefer one musical style over another in this respect, we can deduce that no music in particular is thought of as "music for thinking". For the listener, what matters is being able to take their music – that they have chosen – with them. Therefore, we find that what allows reflection on public transport is not specific music, but rather the perceived privatization of that mu-

⁷ For an in-depth look at the roots of the Romantic conception of listening, it is worth consulting a work by the philosopher and musicologist Peter Szendy: *Listen. A history of our ears* (2008). Chapter 4 in particular, "Listening (to listening): the making of the modern ear" (pp. 125–156), is very clear in this respect.

sic – any music – through technologically mediated listening.

In that sense I would say listening to music is deeper. In the end, with reading, you are going into a story you don't control and you know you won't influence, so it might be something you do more calmly or in the end it doesn't influence you as much. [...] I'm not completely in control [when listening to music], I don't feel like I'm controlling where I'm going; but yes, more than when I read. (I2)

Despite having to now encountered a high degree of listener awareness of what listening to music on public transport entails, in this fragment from the same interviewee we can see this is not the case. They say their experience is more intense and subjective when listening to music than reading, and thus they has a certain feeling of power over the situation (Bull, 2002, 2010). In the end, this power is an illusion as the listener can only control their own thoughts and internal world, as their interpersonal relationships with others on public transport are completely nullified.

The need for mediated music listening on public transport

At this point, the question needs to be asked as to whether there is a relationship between need and music listening on the part of the listeners.

Yes, I need it. Because depending on the day I think 'today I need to listen to that music because I've got more energy, I need...'. I don't know, I don't know how to explain it. [...] If I put music on, the lyrics define my feelings. So because I don't know how to express them music helps me. And if I don't have it with me I get bored. (I4)

From explanations such as this, we deduce that public transport is understood as a space for a private and personal experience. This space being a *non-place* can be taken as a decisive factor, but music is shown to be a key element that facilitates and intensifies this intimacy. The interviewee "gets bored" if they do not have music with them but, in reality, the boredom stems from not being able to create this private, personal space. Even though the journey is one they take often, and therefore of short duration, this is not a hindrance to dealing with their emotions. Music has always helped us process our feelings and emotions (Frith, 2008, pp. 420–421), but it is nonetheless curious that this is possible in such a public space. This capacity to intervene in material and symbolic space in an incisive and decisive way is where we find the politics of mediated music listening. This could even call into question the assertion that music is always the result of a social interaction.⁸ Despite being more hidden, social relationships are ultimately still there in mobile phones and applications.

8 In the *Anthropology of Music* (1964), Merriam refers to this social need for music: "There are other social characteristics of music as well. Music is a uniquely human phenomenon which exists only in terms of social interaction." (p. 27)

The need to listen to music on public transport is explained very well by the following interviewee:

There are days you go and you don't end up listening to music and it's okay, it really doesn't bother you. But the day you forget your headphones is a nightmare. It's like when you get on the train with the option of listening to music and you don't listen to music, you think 'okay, today I didn't...I wasn't in the mood to listen to music'. But if you don't have the option to listen to music it's like "I need it". (I5)

There is a conscious explanation of the tension between the listener and having the option to listen to music. There is no desire to listen to any particular music: the interviewee does not mention a group, style or specific sound; what they want is the assurance of knowing they have the ability to play music whenever they wish. The dependency created is therefore not on any musical sound, as they do not need music with any specific sound markers, but control over the sounds themselves for their ability to create a private sound environment.

The creation of private, personal spaces on public transport

So what does listening in this way mean for individuals? All the interviews revealed an idea of travelling on public transport as a time of privacy and calm. When asked if they would be bothered by a friend using headphones when travelling together, Interviewee 4 said no, because:

[...] car, train and bus journeys are for listening to music; to be by yourself. When you get off the bus everything goes back to normal, but travelling is for music. I don't feel bad. It's always like that. [...] I don't get stressed or anything: you listen to your music and I listen to mine and that's it. (I4)

The interviewee's view is clear: travelling on public transport is the time *for* music. The central role music plays in travel time for this listener cannot be generalized to everyone who listens to music, but it marks an interesting direction to continue to work on. Thus, the experience of travelling with music in a central role puts listeners into a "state of reflection":

Normally everyday things. What I'm going to do or what I did at the weekend, if something happened with someone; thinking about my life, to be honest, my everyday life. (I3)

Despite being in a *non-place*, which makes solid, comfortable social interaction impossible, listeners are transported to a plane of comfort and familiarity. This is a result of the sound isola-

tion that mediated music listening facilitates and which removes the individual's awareness of being in a public space. The few minutes spent on public transport are defined as a space in which to say "okay, I'll do nothing and just think", as the interviewee says:

It's a bit of a cliché, but you don't get time to think, or at least I don't find it. During the day, when I'm at home there's always something to do, or when I have to spend hours working at university. For whatever reason I never say 'okay, I'm going to do nothing and think'. It's not like that. Using public transport is a good excuse to do that. Maybe it's because [thinking] seems like a waste of time, I don't know. [...] I find it really difficult without music, I don't know why. I think it's much more natural. If I don't listen to music it's all silent, it's very unnatural. With music, though, a song might take me back to a time with my friends and it's much more fluid. (I2)

While it is interesting – and in some ways positive – that music can turn an uncomfortable space into one in which someone can feel at ease, it is worrying to think that in our urban societies, travelling on public transport is one of the few opportunities we have to enter our own personal, private space. As the interviewee says, this non-place is one of the last refuges where we can "do nothing". Music is therefore seen as an element that enables us to privately process our emotions, even in a space such as public transport. That said, a type of disconnect is seen between the sound-music and the behaviour and conceptualization that it entails. In reality, the type of music is not important and the private, personal space is created regardless. According to the interview data, it appears important that the music is chosen by the user themselves and not for its particular sound characteristics.

Denying otherness through mediated music listening

One of the points Michael Bull most often addresses in his studies is the denial of the *other* through mediated music listening. Now, we can move on to analysing social behaviour (Merriam, 1964) and its sociality (Born, 2012) through the verbal behaviour extracted from the interviews in order to see if this denial occurs. Bull is very clear when addressing the issue: "[the] iPod [or any device able to play music through headphones] permits users to saturate periods of 'non-communication' with their own, familiar and comforting sounds" (Ekman, 2012, p. 58). In this fragment, Interviewee 7 argues there is a need to generate periods of "non-communication":

I think I could travel without music. But I often get the train at rush hour; there are lots of people, I can't sit down, I can't look out the window and you're really stressed out. Then I do need music, otherwise I feel awful and get anxious, so... (I7)

In this case, music is used to regulate stress and social anxiety. In addition to being an isolating element, sound functions as a tool to distract attention. This inhibiting, or even an-

xiolytic, capacity of technologically mediated listening should be proven. Although it is music in this case, the individual is seeking anything that helps eradicate the stress and anguish caused by this physical contact with other people. Nevertheless, music mediated listening should be noted as surely one of the few tools that can help people feel calmer in these kinds of situations. After this short description, they clearly and briefly say: “I think it’s because you’re a bit more isolated”. There is obvious evidence of an awareness of social isolation in this case as they seek it out to reduce the feelings of anxiety and stress caused by the *other* on public transport.

Nonetheless, denials of *otherness* are not only found in situations of stress and anxiety. As Interviewee 4 says:

People talking does bother me. Sometimes when I’ve got headphones on I think ‘I wish they’d talk a bit more quietly’. But just people, the engine and things don’t [bother me]. (I4)

Although the interviewees complain about an *otherness* bothering them on public transport, they do not mention the sound generated by the method of transport itself to the same degree. They therefore accept this sound, but not that produced by people in the same space as them. Sometimes music is not enough to erase this *otherness*, even though, as the interviewee infers, that would be desirable. The most radical statement from the interviews in this regard is as follows: “[If I’m travelling without music] other people’s conversations annoy me, as they aren’t usually very nice” (I3). The interviewee does not want to hear any of what the *other* might say, as they directly categorize it as “not nice”. With this we find a dual use for mediated music listening: a more-or-less radical nullification of the *other* – which in this case is reduced to the sounds made when talking – and consequently an improved experience.

This aside, it must be said that this was not a point unilaterally shared by the other interviewees, as not all expressed the same feelings. For example, Interviewee 1 says that “if I’m with other people, I’ll have one headphone in and one out so I can hear if they say something to me” (I1).⁹ We might say that they do this because they are with people they know, but a statement from Interviewee 5 goes further:

Sometimes I just use one earphone and I start to listen to an interesting conversation. I mean, it’s a bit strange to take out your earphones and start to listen. But I stop the music, take out one earphone and now and then pretend I’m listening to music. But it’s total nosiness. (I5)

Despite the fact that the interviewee themselves admits there is an element of personal nosiness, their words indicate that not everyone uses music to deny the other. In fact, in

9 The use of only one earphone is studied in more detail by Bull in *Sounding Out the City* (2000).

this case the interviewee is “pretending” to listen to music in order to overhear what the other is saying. This tells us the listening to music with headphones sends a message to others: that the listener is not paying attention to what is happening around them, that they are being ignored. This shows how the relationship with otherness is not always to deny it, as proposed by Bull. Some individuals who have music with them may be interested in their fellow travellers, even if the music is a way to eavesdrop.

Isolation caused by mediated music listening

Finally, we will address how mediated music listening produces isolation of the sound environment as well as the social environment. To understand what exactly that entails, we can look at the following explanation by Interviewee 1:

Travelling with music is much more fun because **you’re isolated...** I mean, you’re in **a place** [the bus in this case] **with lots of people, but at the same time you’re alone with your thoughts**, you know? **And the people around you don’t bother you** and that’s great. And also because **you’re enjoying the music**, it’s like **time goes faster**. You **look at the scenery**, you entertain yourself. **You look at someone who’s fallen asleep**, someone else who, I don’t know. (I1)

These words show a clear awareness of sound isolation brought about by mediated listening and also what this entails at a social level. The interviewee provides a perfect definition of what listening to music on public transport entails: “a place with a lot of people, but at the same time you’re alone with your thoughts, you know? And the people around you don’t bother you and that’s great.” Isolating oneself, therefore, is voluntary and desirable, not only conscious. According to this interviewee, music ultimately facilitates many issues (in bold): denying the other, an altered perception of the passage of time, aesthetic recreation of the experience and, of course, the possibility of feeling alone and isolated. This sound isolation brings about a different understanding of an individual’s own personal space:

If you have your headphones on [...] respect people’s personal space! It’s very important, really! You might be at the key part in the song and they make you pause it, I’m sorry but that’s a huge lack of respect, huge. Wait for them to take off their headphones and then you can talk. (I1)

The interviewee’s high level of awareness of the creation of a “personal space” through mediated listening is surprising. What is more, stopping someone from listening to music is considered a lack of respect. This implies that those not listening to music should also be aware of this space – according to the interviewees – and that wearing headphones and listening to music entails a voluntary isolation which must be respected. Even those, such as Interviewee 8, who do not listen to music on public transport are fully aware of this isolation:

I8: When I meet someone with headphones on and they take them out to talk to me: no, no; carry on. Because I don't want to talk either and I'm not giving them anything that music isn't.

I5: Maybe they think "they want to talk because they're not wearing headphones".

I7: Sometimes I wear headphones without music playing because I don't want people to talk to me.

Interviewer: Do you use headphones to avoid social contact?

I7: Yes, a lot!

As the interviewee says, they feel they are bothering the person listening to music, so they prioritize the *other's* enjoyment of private listening over social interaction. In this final interview, the same interviewee shows a high level of awareness overall:

[I8] I'd like to add something else. I never listen to music but it's also because I don't want to be isolated. I mean, I think it does isolate you and you think 'okay, I'm away from everything and everyone'. [Interviewer] *Why don't you want to isolate yourself?* [I8] Why don't I want to? Because...I don't talk to anyone or anything, but I look at people and that's all. I think, well, here I am. Otherwise I feel like society is crap. I don't know why.

Conclusions

The initial question has been addressed and answered based on a dual methodology model: on the one hand, the methodology proposed by Michael Bull – interviews and analysis of the phenomenon based on them – and on the other, the combination of this perspective with our own proposed model of analysis. In this way, we have been able to study the concepts that Bull outlines throughout his research, focusing them on a *non-place* that is characteristic of our urban lives: public transport. Far from attempting to prove anything, this work is a first approach enabling us to open up specific areas for future research. The results obtained have shown the relevance of two fundamental actions for future research: on the one hand, a quantitative study that could provide objective percentages of people who do or do not listen to music on public transport, and on the other, broadening the model's framework for action in terms of structured reflection. In this way, we would obtain results from a quantitative model which would allow us to talk more objectively about what is right now an intuition resulting from a first approach to the subject.

This study therefore provides some questions to be used as starting points for future research. It has been stated that mediated music listening on public transport causes concept and behaviour to separate. In other words, the way in which music is conceptualized does not imply it will produce the expected behaviour. As we have seen, this is due both to the privatization of listening and the particular implications of the public transport environment. Due to the very public nature of this space, the number of references interviewees made to processing their emotions and internal, private reflection is surprising. At first, public space may not appear to be the ideal place for this, but the sound and social isolation music listening confers and the quality of a *non-place* make it possible.

Although in many cases there is clear evidence of denial of the *other*, isolation could not create a denial as conclusive as that posed by Bull. As the interviews seem to indicate, the relationship with this *other* varies depending on the moment and the individual listening to music on public transport. However, what has been comprehensively shown is that sound isolation, and as a result social isolation, is not only conscious but also wanted and desired. All this may show that our modernity has damaged the social aspect of public spaces, such as transport, because of, or at least aided by, music. We do not know whether or not this will come to be seen as a tragedy, but it does reveal that we are facing an important contradiction: music, the mechanism and conduit for socialization *par excellence* throughout history, is – or may become – an element that aids, incentivizes and fosters our growing individualism – if indeed it can further increase. As this article suggests, the specific aesthetic of music listening gives rise to a specific type of listening that relates to itself through time. It therefore comes with a political aspect that affects our subjectivity and sociality, the spaces and time we inhabit and the music and sounds we make and listen to.

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