Mobile phone music : Ring tone culture and the mobile phone in Sound Art

Title	Mobile phone music
Subtitle	Ring tone culture and the mobile phone in Sound Art
Lead-in / Abstract	Mobile phone music requires a focus on sound as well as on mobile phones ? but it does not necessarily involve ring tones. A mobile phone is not only a telephone, but also a computer, able to transform any kind of data into sound. New data can be basis for artistic sound work. This development reflects current social change.
Participants and speakers	Behrendt, Frauke (DE)
Short biography of participants	Research on mobile phone music. She received the Digital Media Award from her university. Her work obtains international recognition and is published in 2004.
Full text	**What is mobile phone music?**

Ringing mobile phones are always the first association with the term mobile phone music, but ring tones are not necessarily part of sound art with mobile phones. In the art work *Tet.FM*, for eample, tet messages are transformed into a radio collage. [1] In **Wagenaar**'s *Kadoum* heartbeats, transmitted via mobile phone, are the basis of a choral performance and an installation with murmuring water. [2] Thus, a minimal definition of mobile phone music requires a focus on two components: sound as well and mobile phones. Still, ring tones are the most striking sonic impact of mobile phones, and a lot of artists include them in their work. **Levin** played with the taboo of ringing mobiles in institutions of high culture by using the audiences' mobile phones as ensemble for his *Telesymphonie*. [3] But there eist diverse other possibilities of connecting the mobile phone with sound art. Mobile phones are not

only wireless telephones, but also computers, symbol-processing machines, that are able to transform any kind of data into sound. The combination of computer and landline had enabled new forms of music: net.music. Making music together with remote people or sharing files are only some of the possibilities. Furthermore new types of data were possible sources for music, like traffic data of a server, for eample. Now, with the mobile phone, both devices "computer and telephone" merged into one. This new device is mobile in addition And mobility delivers one of the new types of data, that may be basis for artistic work such as mobile phone music. By moving around in relation to the geographical as well as to the social surroundings contet-depending data is generated. Remiing a song by walking around in town at the same time as your friends do the same elsewhere in town, with the entire group listening to the real-time mied song on their headphones is the idea of **Tanaka's** prototype *malleable mobile music*. [4] Other types of data are produced because the mobile phone is used as gameboy, walkman, diary, watch or for teting. Private tet messages or pictures can be transformed into music or included into a public screen, foreample.

Tet.FM

I would like to give two eamples of mobile phone music. In the interactive installation *Tet.FM* by the British artists **Matthew Fuller** and **Graham Harwood**, SMS messages are transformed into a sound collage and broadcast on radio. The SMS messages are being sent to a phone number, which had been published in advance. According to additional information they are transformed into speech and broadcast via radio. The mobile phone, and more specifically its medium SMS forms the interface between the participants and a traditional radio station. The piece jutaposes the old and new mediums radio and SMS, emphasizing the tension between them. Among other places, the media system has been installed 2002 in Vienna to support a local media culture institution. There, one could listen to the radio in a big tent in the city. [1] Anybody who wanted to take part in *Tet.FM* sent SMS messages with any content to a phone number. In addition etra parameters relating to the form of the message could be added. These were then taken into consideration by the speech synthesis software. This information was added to the message with a code. Firstly, one could choose a language, for eample English or German. Secondly, one could choose the voice, and thirdly the type, height and speed of the voice, each on a scale from one to ten. A computer received these tet messages, recorded them and transformed them into speech with a speech synthesis software according to the given data.

The continuously incoming messages produced an endless voice carpet which was broadcast on radio. Thus, it was possible to listen to the messages that had been sent via SMS on the local free radio. One could also listen to this sound collage elsewhere, for eample in some selected pubs.

Tet.FM is dominated by the typical sound of a computer-generated speech. The piece is constantly changing, depending on how many people participate. When many people take part, the sequences of speech are weaving an infinite carpet of words. As a background, the artists choose the chirping of birds. Just as bird do, they intended to use urban teting to mark territory by sound. [5] During more quiet periods with less participation these bird's sounds were receivable with occasional messages in between.

Ring tone culture

Ring tones "actually serving to announce a call" have become far more than this: a pop culture of ring tones has been developed. Especially for the youth it is important to keep up with the latest trends in ring tones. Sales overtook already those for CD singles. Ring tones with their (still) poor aesthetic have become a ubiquitous part of urban soundscapes. Public spaces are filled with ring tones announcing a call, a (formerly) private, intimate form of communication. Public spaces have always been colonized by private sounds. Mobile phones are the latest phenomenon in a long history of technological devices bringing private sound into the public sphere, like for eample the Walkman. [6] Sound art with mobile phones often includes ring tones, but often in an quite unepected way.

A radio concert for 144 mobile phones

The German artist group **Ligna** combines mobile phones and the radio in their piece *Wählt die Signale!* which could be translated as *Dial the Signals!*. The German title

is an allusion to, or rather a pun on words to the refrain of the worker's song *The Internationale*. The German refrain could be translated as "Listen to the signals, you people", and the artists changed it into "Dial the signals". 7 They position their concert in the tradition of **Brecht's** radio theory. [8] The full-length title *Dial the signals. A radio concert for 144 mobile phones* [9] already tells us about the most significant parts of this piece. 144 mobile phones are lying in a closed room. Each of them has a specially composed ring tone and can be called from anywhere. The result, the ringing of these mobile phones, is broadcast live on radio.

The artist group *Ligna* formed by b>Ole Frahm, Thorsten Michaelsen and **Michael Hüners** premiered the radio concert 2003 in Hamburg, Germany. In the atrium of the gallery for contemporary art of the Kunsthalle in Hamburg, twelve times twelve, that makes 144 mobile phones, were lying on a pedestal. On every single cell phone a specific ring tone was stored, sounding when called. These inherent ring tones were composed by **Jens Röhm**. The basis for them was the room acoustic of the atrium: the harmonic structure of the ring tones was based on the room's overtone spectrum. All the audible sounds in the room were recorded during one night, like the air conditioning, the security service and so on. The emerging note G sharp became basis of the composition. [10]

Each of the mobile phones had its own phone number, which had been published on flyers and on the Internet. The audience, or better participants of the piece, could call any of these phones and let the piece develop through this. A microphone was hanging above the pedestal on which the mobiles were placed. It constantly recorded their ringing. These recordings were broadcast live on the local free radio station. On every radio in Hamburg one could then listen to how many people were calling which mobile phones.

The repertoire of sounds for the radio concert was limited to the 144 composed ring tones and their combinations. The ring tones do not resemble a ringing telephone; they are not shrill. New tetures emerge through their combination. The developing sound could be described as a minimal carpet sound.

It was not possible for the audience to actually see the mobile phones; they were lying in a closed room. The artists didn't want to create a sculpture of cell phones. According to **Ole Frahm** the aim was to make an "interactive radio concert" [10]. Neither the artists nor the participants could eactly control the development of the concert. Occasionally, during high volume of participation it was no longer possible to tell which ring tone one had initiated one self.

The mobile phone is not necessarily the input medium for audiences to participate. It makes no difference if you dial a number from a landline or from a mobile. The piece can be categorized as mobile phone music because mobile phones are called, and their ring tones build the sound repertoire of the piece. Still, the majority of participants used their cell phones. They did not call from home, but at the vernissage or at a location, where the radio concert was on air, for eample in some pubs.

The participants did not communicate with each other, as it would usually be the case in a telephone situation. Instead they "broadcast separately from each other, but collectively". [8] Thus, the associations, the sound, the community was constantly changing. The artists intended this situation: "The responsibility for incalculable effects is an allegory of the capacity to act collectively." [8] Eperimenting how the radio and mobile phones are able to interact with both, the individual and the collective, is a central aim of the piece.

The individualistic mobile phone and collective action

Collective action and the mobile phone - this association is not a common one. The mobile phone is usually labelled as a typical medium of our individualistic age, as the ideal phenomena of the individualisation of our society.

A mobile phone mainly belongs to one single person, as opposed to the traditional landline, which is usually shared, for eample, by a family. The mobile phone is personalised by choosing a specific type of hand set and ring tone. This indicates how important the cell phone has become to us. It is no longer just keeping us in touch with our friends, it itself becomes our friend. Losing your mobile phone is much worse than losing your purse, because a lot of personal data and contact information is stored on it. It spends a long time with us, and is always very close to us. Therefore you can feel the loss almost physically. Like a Tamagotschi, that needs to be fed, the mobile phone gets our attention all the time. The mobile is the every-day companion of the mobile individual.

In the piece *Dial the Signals* you can observe a totally different use of the mobile phone: it is used to produce music with others. The participants with their cell phones are scattered all over town and still they are acting in concert, doing something together. The radio concert by **Ligna** is not the only phenomenon of collective action, made possible through mobile communication. The use of the mobile phone offers diverse options for collective action and to act collaboratively.

In the Philippines, for the mass demonstrations, which eventually led to the overthrow of president Estrada, people were mobilized by SMS. The same is true for mass protests against globalisation, for eample, in Seattle. [11] Not only can the masses be mobilised and coordinated via mobile phone, for instance to flee from the police, the cellular phone transforms each of us into potential on site journalists, able to report live from our surroundings. Spontaneous mobile phone journalists already connect to networks to form mobile Blogs.

People equipped with mobile telecommunication technology spontaneously form a group, aiming to create something together, to act collectively. **Howard Rheingold** calls this phenomenon 'smart mobs': 'smart mobs consist of people who are able to act in concert even if they don't know each other. The people who make up smart mobs cooperate in ways never before possible, because they carry devices that possess both communication and computing capabilities."[12] The topos of the scattered individual, and the collective; of the individualist, equipped with mobile communication technology, acting collectively with others, is artistically realized in *Dial the Signals*. Mobile phone music draws our attention to social and cultural change brought along by this very device.

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