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Accelerated rhythms and sonic routes: mapping the sound cultures of *bakalao*

Tom Whittaker,

ABSTRACT

This article explores the phenomenon known as the “Ruta del Bakalao”, a hugely popular dance scene that first emerged in nightclubs in Valencia in the 1980s and spread across the whole of Spain in the early 1990s. In particular, the article provides an archaeology of the subculture and its music by considering the distinctive ways in which it appropriated time and space. It focusses on the significance of the accelerated rhythms of the music and the irregular opening hours of nightclubs, as well as the acoustic environments that were created through listening to the music in cars and car parks. In doing so, this article aims to consider the ways in which the phenomenon was in turn shaped by a political economy that was increasingly defined by speed and economic unevenness.

KEYWORDS

Ruta del Bakalao; speed; sound; dance cultures; rhythm

While there has been much valuable scholarship on the subcultures that came out of Madrid during Spain’s transition to democracy,¹ the sound cultures of Valencia have received little academic attention to date. This article explores the phenomenon known as the “Ruta del Bakalao”, a hugely popular dance scene that first emerged in nightclubs within Valencia and then radiated across the whole of Spain in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The roots of the subculture can be traced back to the early 1980s, in Valencian nightclubs such as Barraca and Chocolate, which originally played an eclectic array of alternative rock and electro music from outside of Spain. By the late 1980s, however, Valencian nightlife became more associated with electronic dance music, with DJs playing their iterations and remixes of acid house and techno, genres that had also become hugely popular in the rest of Europe and North America. The Spanish version of this electronic music

evolved into the genre that became known as *bakalao*, a more hardcore and bouncy sound characterized by its repetitive machine-like rhythm and synthetic timbre. At the peak of its popularity, tens of thousands of clubbers – known as *ruteros* or *bakalas* – would drive between various clubs around Valencia on what became known as “Ruta del Bakalao” each weekend. Under the influence of drink and drugs and deprived of sleep, many would carry on dancing from Thursday night until Monday morning, with some travelling all the way from Madrid to the nightclubs in Valencia. The phenomenon became increasingly associated with the excesses of dangerous driving and designer drugs, namely ecstasy and speed. The soundscapes of bakalao carved out their own disruptive set of rhythms and spaces, whose speed and unbounded movement provided a newfound sense of freedom for many teenagers and young people, as well as becoming the object of a moral panic that would become increasingly amplified by the media.

As has been noted, dance music scenes can be notoriously difficult to study. Jeremy Gilbert and Ewan Pearson have written that “dance and dance music have traditionally resisted or negated familiar modes of communicating either value or meaning” (1999, 3). A particular DJ set offers up no texts to study after it has happened, and most histories of dance cultures are usually pieced together by people who were involved in the scene, and who often misremember events. Through the live performance of the DJ, each night in a club offers up a distinct and unique musical experience – one which is further shaped through the technology of the sound reinforcement system (the combination of loudspeakers, amplifiers and microphones), the internal architecture of the nightclub and lighting system, as well as the interaction of the DJ with the crowd of clubbers and the types of drugs that they have taken. Gilbert and Pearson show that dance is a “transient thing” (5) and point to the work of Simon Reynolds, who sees dance music as constantly changing, proliferating and renewing itself – a music that is “creatively in no danger of stagnating or ossifying” (as quoted in Gilbert and Pearson 1999, 5). What became known as *bakalao* is a particularly rich expression of this: not only did the formal properties of the genre constantly evolve, its rhythm and textures becoming faster and more abrasive as the phenomenon spread

across Spain, but the circulation and renewal of the sound was literally dependent on geographical movement. In both its temporal and sonic articulation, the centrality of speed to bakalao thus appears to illustrate Sarah Sharma's claim that "speeding up gives rise to new cultural imaginaries as well as artistic movements" (2014, 5). This article tentatively seeks to provide an archaeology of the bakalao subculture by mapping out its accelerated rhythms and acoustic environments. By paying particular attention to the way in which its dancers appropriated time and space, the article examines the ways in which the subculture was shaped by the historical conditions of the 1980s and 1990s, when the economic and political embrace of speed in Spain brought in its wake widening social and geographical inequalities.

From *bacalao* to *bakalao*: Valencian club cultures

While bakalao has generally been overlooked academically, a handful of books have recently sought to explore it as an important movement in Spanish culture. In *¡Bacalao!* (2016), the DJ and journalist Luis Costa offers an oral account of the Valencian club scene, with a particular focus on its early years, while Joan Oleaque Moreno's *En éxtasis: El bakalao como contracultura* (2017) is an extended journalistic essay on the phenomenon, which was originally published in Catalan in 2004. The recent novel *No iba a salir y me lié* (2016), coauthored by Emma Zafón and the Valencian-based DJ and artist Chimo Bayo, moreover, attempts to recreate the period through a nostalgic lens. The journalist David López Frías (2016) has written that that while the Movida Madrileña and its Valencian counterpart developed almost in parallel with each other, the former has become mythologized while the latter has become demonized. While both cultures were equally a celebration of hedonism, creativity and freedom, bakalao became maligned not only because of its association with designer drugs and road accidents, but for its music that was perceived to be undiscerning and formulaic, criticisms that were in particular levelled by the artists associated with the earlier years of the Valencian scene. Luis Costa's published oral history of the Movida Valenciana, for instance, contains several firsthand accounts of the club scene, particularly in its

earlier years. Costa shows how in nightclubs such as Barraca, Spook Factory, ACTV and Chocolate, DJs played an eclectic selection of records from genres that had rarely been heard in Spain and much of Europe, such as New Wave and post-punk but also more obscure genres such as the Electronic Body Music from Belgium, Krautrock from Germany, goth rock and industrial music. Costa, however, tends to relegate the far more widespread phenomenon of *bakalao* to the margins of his narrative, a shortcoming that was not unnoticed by Oscar Broc (2016) in his review of Costa's book in *El País*. Broc calls attention to how, in using the correct spelling for the word *bacalao*, as opposed to the deviant but more commonly used *bakalao*, Costa seeks to legitimize the Valencian scene as an authentic cultural movement in its own right, emphasizing its flourishing creativity and individuality before it became associated with commercial dance music and road accidents. Costa's book tellingly excludes any contributions from Chimo Bayo, for instance, the hugely commercial Spanish dance artist who would become the profitable face of *bakalao*.

Costa's narrative of the Valencian nightclub scene is a vivid illustration of how club cultures, according to Sarah Thornton, are also "taste cultures" (1995, 3). Drawing on the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, Thornton writes that "club cultures embrace their own hierarchies of what is authentic and legitimate in popular culture", whereby "hipness" is a measure of defining oneself against the perceived inauthenticity of the mainstream and mass culture (5). In setting up a discursive distance between *bacalao* on the one hand and *bakalao* on the other, Costa's narrative reveals a similar cultural hierarchy at play, in which the earlier underground nightclub is emphasized as the "authentic" cultural movement at the expense of its more widely known yet massified other. While perceptions of authenticity in popular music have been traditionally associated with live performances, Thornton shows that with the rise of disco and club cultures, these perceptions have been called into question. She shows that in nightclubs, the concepts of authenticity and aura "came to be attributed to *new, exclusive and rare records*" (1995, 28; original emphasis) – values that were held most strongly by the DJ. In Costa's account, these criteria are explicitly associated with Juan Santamaría and Carlos Simó, DJs who were foundational figures of

the Valencian scene. Santamaría sought out the most obscure and unique records to play at the nightclub Barraca, recalling in an interview that “Yo iba a las tiendas de discos y les decía, a mí dadme lo que nadie más se quede” (as quoted in Calvo Tarancón 2017). Carlos Simó, one of the DJs at Barraca and later the resident DJ at Puzzle, travelled to London every weekend to buy new records that had not yet been played on Spanish radio (López Frías 2016). The moment that one of the songs that he would play reached the mainstream in Spain, Simó would smash the record in the middle of his DJ set “de forma simbólica” (López Frías 2016). In disowning a song at the precise moment that it had achieved commercial value, Simó’s gesture here is a performative display of what Thornton terms “subcultural capital”, an act that served to both distinguish the scene from the mainstream while reinforcing a sense of belonging and community amongst the clubbers, on that was predicated on shared cultural tastes. Simó’s ritual here therefore dramatized the loss of the record’s aura, signalling the demise of its status as a bearer of subcultural capital. Perhaps the most significant location in which subcultural capital was established was Zic-Zac, a record store that opened in Valencia in 1983, which specialized in imported music that was unique and had not reached Spain at the time. First frequented by Valencian DJs, it soon became a destination for music collectors from across the whole country (Costa 2016, 142). Significantly, it was in Zic-Zac that the term *bacalao* to describe music was reportedly first heard. Santamaría recalls how a man from Sagunto would come to the shop with a DJ friend, who while listening to a record with headphones, would say “¡Vaya bacalao!”, and then exclaim “¡Che!, qué bacalao, bacalao de Bilbao, qué bacalao. Esto sí que es un bacalao, tío” before passing the record to his friend (Costa 2016, 155). Like the record store in which it was first heard, the word *bacalao* thus emerged as a marker of subcultural capital, one which designated a status of uniqueness, authenticity and distinction.

By the late 1980s, Valencian clubs increasingly moved away from the sounds of guitar-based music and songs, and incorporated electronic dance music into their sets. The club scene gradually began to be dominated by techno and acid house, genres that originated in Detroit and Chicago respectively and that had already gained a foothold in the nightclub scenes of Belgium,

Holland, the United Kingdom and Ibiza (whose own particular inflection of these styles became known as “Balearic beat” or “Balearic house”). One of the first Valencian clubs to gradually reflect this change was Puzzle, a huge nightclub with a three-thousand-person capacity whose internal architecture conspicuously foregrounded the performance of the DJ. Javi “Gemelo” describes the layout of the club, where the DJ booth was placed the centre of the club on a high tower, recalling that music could be heard everywhere in the building, as well as outside the club (as quoted in Costa 2016, 240). Club organizers and DJs began to promote routes between the different clubs through flyers and posters, indicating specific nights for different clubs. Moreover, pirate radio stations such as Radio Funny, Radio Luna and Radio Klara (which eventually became legalized) kept clubbers abreast of the latest tracks and developments. One of the most well-known routes was the initial “Ruta Destroy”, which, as Vicente Pizcueta recalls, began in Barraca on Saturday, moved to Heaven on Sundays and then Zona on Mondays (as quoted in Costa 2016, 313). From the early 1990s onwards, however, the craze for dance music spread across the whole of the country, with revellers following the sound in clubs that opened up along several different routes: the “ruta de Andalucía”, between Málaga and Cádiz; the “ruta de Galicia”, between Vigo, Redondela, Pontevedra and La Coruña, and the “ruta de Cataluña”, which ran across the Costa Brava (Del Arco 1993, 14). Asturias also had its own route, known amongst local clubbers as the “ruta del Bonito”, outside the town of Avilés (Álvarez, 77–81).

The styles of dance music predominantly played in the nightclubs across these routes soon evolved into a harder and more synthetic sound that became known as *bakalao*. The sound of the kick drum beat and the bass line gained increasing intensity, vocals were often distorted to a higher pitch and the tempo of the songs became progressively faster as the decade wore on. From 1994 onwards, for instance, DJs began to play records at the accelerated speed of 150 beats per minute (as quoted in Costa 2016, 303). Its widespread geographical dispersal was in no small part aided by the media exposure of the subculture, which brought the sounds to a mass audience. Quick to capitalize on the craze, the record industry released compilation albums of dance hits such as the

series *Máquina Total* (1991–1998) which was extensively advertised on television. As Sarah Thornton has shown, the television-advertised compilation album of hits typically has the least subcultural credibility of all musical formats (1995, 118). Released on vinyl, CD and cassette, *Máquina Total* repackaged some of the most popular dance tracks that had been played in nightclubs and reterritorialized them for personal consumption. At the same time, however, the compilation albums sought to recreate the “liveness” of the club experience by including a fifteen-minute “megamix” of various club tracks mixed seamlessly into one another. The feeling of live performance was further emulated through the production of the vocals on certain songs. This could be heard most famously on Chimo Bayo’s “Así me gusta a mí”, a chart-topping single that also featured on *Máquina Total 2* (1992) and catapulted the DJ to international fame (most notably in Israel and Japan). Bayo utters a series of non-lexical vocables (“¡Hoo! ¡Hoo ha! ¡Hea hoo! Chiquitan chiquitan tan tan...”) over the steady techno beat of the song, his voice emulating the effect of the DJ interjecting during the music so as to elicit excitement in the crowd. Like “bacalao de Bilbao”, the phrase heard in the record shop which lent the original movement its name, the words are used for their sonic effect rather than their meaning.

Asynchronous rhythms, liquid beats

The rapid growth of *bakalao* as a mass phenomenon reshaped the leisure practices and routines of many young people, as well as providing the opportunity for youths of different social backgrounds to engage for the first time in the hedonistic activities that, according to Víctor Lenore, had historically been the preserve of the wealthy in Spain (2015, 85). Negative accounts of *bakalao* and its perceived commercialization (the DJ Javi “Gemelo”, for instance, dismisses *bakalao* outright as a “rollito ‘mascachapas’”, a derogatory term similar to *poligonero*) arguably reveal anxieties surrounding perceptions of the well-worn association of mass culture with working-class people, whose leisure practices are stereotypically considered to be indiscriminating, unthinking and conformist (as quoted in Costa 2016, 322). Indeed, Lenore has commented that “una de las cosas

que más molesta de la Ruta era que los que se divertían fueran de clase trabajadora” (as quoted in Calvo Tarancón 2017). While much of the music became increasingly commercialized as the 1990s wore on, it was nevertheless heard within spaces and during times that were anarchically out of synch with the dominant social rhythms of Spanish life. The hedonism of the *bakalao* culture, in which revellers sought to live for the present moment, is borne out through the striking absence of standardization of opening hours of nightclubs during this period. Costa recalls how different village and districts across the province of Valencia had their own particular regulations for club hours, with each nightclub opening during the hours that suited them (as quoted in Villuendas 2017) – a pattern that could be found across the rest of Spain. Described by Juan Gamella and Arturo Roldán as “*bailar sin fin*” and “*non-stop party*” (1999, 145), the ritual of *bakalao* frequently depended on the constant deferral of the end of the party, as borne out by the proliferation of “*after-hours*” (“*los after*”, for short). In an inversion of the usual rhythms of a nightclub, “*after-hours*” were establishments where music would continue to play during the daytime, well into the afternoon hours. Gamella and Roldán write that “*algunos ‘fiesteros’ no ven la luz en muchas horas, permanecen desentendidos del tiempo exterior*” (1999, 114). These extended stretches of frenetic dancing without sleep were an integral part of the *habitus* of the subculture, one whose internalized rhythms can be grasped through the dancing bodies of *bakalas* – both while the music played, as well as after it had ended. Luis Costa recalls how, in the period after a nightclub turned off its music while it prepared to reopen for the “*after-hour*”, the clubbers sought to extend the rhythm of the music by using their own bodies as percussion, banging their hands against the walls, stools, columns or whatever they could find (as quoted in Rivera 2016). The immersive and mutually reinforcing relationship between body and music, subject and setting, and time and space illuminates the extent to which these rhythms were deeply ingrained in the *habitus* of *bakalao*.

The way in which *bakalao* carved out its own spaces and temporalities can be further explored through Henri Lefebvre’s writing on rhythm. For Lefebvre, rhythm is always simultaneously spatial and temporal: thinking rhythmically thus enables us to understand both space

and time and, most crucially, consider how the two are intertwined. Through his method of “rhythmanalysis”, the temporal shape of modernity can be read through the lens of the rhythm of the body. He writes that “this human body is the locus and seat of interaction between biological, physiological (nature) and the social (often called ‘the cultural’) and each of these areas, each of these dimensions, has its own specificity, and thus its space-time: its rhythm” (Lefebvre 2004, 81). The rhythms of the bakala’s dancing body similarly alert us to the biological (through sleep deprivation and the confusion of circadian rhythms), the physiological (the effect of designer drugs – first mescaline, but then increasingly MDMA, ecstasy and speed, with the effect of the latter to stimulate the nervous system and accelerate the heartbeat) and the social (the formation of the subculture). Through the interaction of the biological, the physiological and the social, the rhythms of bakalao radically broke with and resisted the dominant social rhythms of Spain. Indeed, the discordance between the specific rhythms of the subculture and the standardized routines of everyday life was part of the transgressive appeal of bakalao. Its rhythms vividly illustrate how

[t]he citizen resists the State by a particular use of time. A struggle therefore unfolds for appropriation in which rhythms play a major role. Through them social, therefore, civil time, seeks and manages to shield itself from State, linear, unirhythmical measured and measuring time. (Lefebvre 2004, 149)

Bakalao gained great popularity at precisely the same time that the Spanish state signalled the nation’s official entry onto the international stage as a global capitalist country, marked symbolically through a series of celebrations during 1992 that sought to inscribe contemporary Spain within a linear narrative of modernization. The Olympic Games were held in Barcelona, Madrid was chosen as the European City of Culture and the quincentenary of Columbus’s discovery of the Americas was celebrated in Seville’s Expo of that year. Bakalao arguably distinguished itself from this narrative through its particular use of time. By carving out its own choreography of

rhythms and spaces, it did not conform to the spatial linearity of time presupposed by this narrative. Yet at the same time, *bakalao* appeared to embody the speed and acceleration on which Spain's political economy increasingly depended – a vivid illustration of how subcultures resist some elements of the dominant culture yet at the same time reproduce others. Indeed, speed was very much the motif of Spain's new modernity, symbolized that year by the official opening of the Ave high-speed railway route from Madrid to Seville. In his excellent article on José Angel Mañas's 1994 novel *Historias del Kronen* and its 1995 film adaptation directed by Montxo Armendáriz, whose narrative is focalized through a group of disaffected youths during the summer of 1992, Santiago Fouz-Hernández writes that acceleration "comes to mind if we consider the last thirty years of the country's history" (2000, 84). The capitalist desire for speed can be read through the rhythmic bodies of the *bakalas*, something that was borne out not only by the increasingly accelerated tempo of the music, but materialized through the increasingly reckless driving of cars when travelling between nightclubs along the various *rutas* when under the influence of drugs. Just as this speed was articulated through the rhythms of *bakalao*, the materiality of these rhythms in turn contributed to the dominant tempo of the historical period, one that was defined by velocity and acceleration.

The frenzied rhythm on which Spain's new political economy depended took place against a backdrop of economic recession and growing social unrest. Helen Graham and Antonio Sánchez write that the "breathtaking speed" of many of Spain's recent changes partly explains the "uneven results and the 'schizophrenic' tendencies in contemporary Spanish culture" (1995, 407). This unevenness was particularly felt in regions of Spain that were left behind by the recent influx of capital. Valencia, as Spain's third city, was a case in point. Journalist López Frías writes that graffiti with the message "Espanya 92 – Valencia 0" could frequently be seen on the walls across the city that year (2016). These geographical inequalities were cast into sharp relief when Spain, like its European neighbours, fell into a recession in 1990 that lasted for four years. Between 1991 and 1993, the level of unemployment increased dramatically, reaching 23 percent, a rate that had not

been seen before in Spain (Navarro 1997, 208). The causes of this employment crisis can, to an extent, be attributed to the process of “reconversión industrial”, or deindustrialization. The Reconversion and Reindustrialization Act, one of the first acts passed by the PSOE (Partido Socialista Obrero Español) government, facilitated the reduction of employment in Spain’s state-owned heavy industries (namely steel, coal, shipbuilding and textiles) – industries which, to varying degrees, depended on rhythms of bodily labour. As Vicenç Navarro shows, these austerity measures were justified as necessary for the reduction of the public deficit and inflation, and to better prepare the country for its entry into the European Economic Community (now the European Union) in 1986 (1997, 205). In addition to an all-time high level of unemployment, the percentage of precarious jobs (with no fixed contract) at the end of the 1980s stood at 38 percent, the highest rate in the whole of Europe – itself a reflection of a highly flexible labour market, whose roots go back to the Moncloa Pacts of 1977 and the subsequent deregulation of employment rights (Navarro 1997, 208).

Nightclubs on the several *rutas del bakalao* were frequently located in industrial spaces (or *naves industriales*), or former industrial spaces. A newspaper article from 1993 situates the emergence of the dance scene of the so-called Ruta del Bonito in the ship-building town of Avilés within the broader context of the economic crisis in the area, following the closure of the national steelworks company Ensidesa (Álvarez 1993, 80). It reports how nightclub owners, in the wake of noise complaints from neighbours, moved their establishments from the centre of the city to the outskirts, where many of the industrial buildings were located. Businesses that had once provided repairs for machinery for Ensidesa were now selling these buildings to nightclub owners, who were turning them into “after-hours” (Álvarez 1993, 80). The repurposing of the buildings from spaces of production into spaces of consumption, from those of labour into those of leisure, reflects the broader socioeconomic transformations ushered in by *reconversión industrial* in certain Spanish cities. In this regard, the article also mentions a bar in the town called La Nave, its name an ostensible reference to the historical legacy of shipbuilding in the area (Álvarez 1993, 80).² If areas

such as Avilés were once governed by Fordist rhythms of industrial labour, the emergence of *bakalao* signalled a definitive break with these rhythms – and more crucially, with the social structures to which such rhythms gave meaning. While the Valencian economy has been historically more dependent on agriculture than industry, the legacy of industrialism nevertheless informed the iconography and aesthetics of the scene. In tracing the origin of the “Ruta Destroy”, DJ Joan Oleaque recalled how the word *Destroy* was originally taken from a brand of clothing that was “tipo posindustrial or prenuclear” (as quoted in Costa 2016, 313). The legacy of manufacturing, moreover, can be found in “música máquina” or simply “máquina”, a term that was sometimes used interchangeably with “*bakalao*”. The origins of the name are debated, with some attributing it to the electronic music technology that had made the sound possible: namely the Roland drum machines and TB bass synthesizers, machines that had similarly been instrumental in the sound of Detroit’s techno. Others trace the term not so much to the production of the music, but to the spaces in which it was consumed, pointing to the pattern of nightclubs frequently opening up in industrial parks on the edges of cities, where lorries, cranes and other machines could be found (López Frías 2016), such as Radical, an enormous nightclub located in the *polígono industrial* of Alcalá de Henares. From the mid-1990s, the spelling of *máquina* changed to *mákina*, a term that became associated for a while with club scenes of Catalonia. Much like the repurposed buildings in which the music was heard, the original function of industrial-style clothing, originally meant for labour, was here recontextualized for the purposes of style and leisure

In the decline of the already weakened structures of social democracy and the subsequent embrace of neoliberal policies, the PSOE accelerated Spain’s passage into what Zygmunt Bauman (2007) has famously termed “liquid modernity”. For Bauman, the temporality of liquid modernity is defined by a “collapse of long-term thinking, planning and acting” and the collapse of the social structures that make these possible, which in turn brings about a “splicing of both political history and individual lives into a series of short-term projects and episodes which are in principle infinite” (2007, 3). Through its articulation of both pulse and flow, dance music alerts us simultaneously to

the “short term” and the “infinite”. While the fast but persistent rhythm of electronic dance music is generated through the steady four-to-the floor beat, the DJ seamlessly blends the rhythm of one musical track into the next, so that the music appears as a continuous and organically rendered whole. Indeed, Simon Frith writes that in dance music, the rhythm of the music “expands the time in which we can, as it were, live in the present tense” (1996, 157). Frith’s writing here resonates with Lefebvre who argues that “to grasp a rhythm, it is necessary to have been grasped by it; one must let oneself go, give oneself over, abandon oneself to its duration” (2004, 27). Indeed, as we have seen, revellers would lose themselves to the music over the entirety of the weekend, when an almost continuous stream of music could be heard not only in the clubs, but in the cars that ruterros drove on the various routes between them.

Sonic (auto)mobilities

Given that nightclubs were often located on the periphery of cities, cars were a necessary form of transportation for many clubbers, and the presence of the car was an integral part of the iconography of the subculture. The journalist Miguel Ángel del Arco notes that *discotecas* were strategically located on the roads as if they were petrol stations (1993, 15). The proliferation of pirate radio stations, such as Radio Klara, offered an opportunity to listen to the latest music when driving to and between nightclubs, here the car both mapping out and connecting routes that were as sonorous as they were geographical. As a mobile and sonic object, the car in *bakalao* provides a particularly rich expression of how, according to Jon Connell and Chris Gibson, music is “the most fluid of cultural forms” (2003, 9). This fluidity is both material – the transmission of sound waves moving through the air – and geographical, namely as a cultural artefact that moves with people and “maps out cultural connections at different geographical scales” (2003, 1). And through its rapid circulation and proliferation from Valencia to the rest of Spain, from *bacalao* to *bakalao*, the formal components of the dance styles changed too, pointing also to the fluid and protean nature of dance music genres.

In a phenomenon that became known as *parkineo*, clubbers would congregate in the car parks adjacent to nightclubs, often in the hours between the club closing and reopening, but also while the club was open. Here, the car stereo replaced the function of the DJ: as clubbers opened their car doors and played music at a high volume, the car speakers connected the vehicle to the greater assemblage of the crowd. Some even fixed wooden boards to the roofs of their cars, using them as makeshift podiums to dance on. López Frías notes that the Valencian nightclub that most popularized this craze was N.O.D., in whose car park paellas were even made. Clemente Martínez recalls how there was a radio link that connected DJ sessions from within the club to the car stereos, and the popularity of the car parks was such that people even came in coaches to be there (as quoted in Costa 2016, 311). In seamlessly connecting together the acoustic environments of the club and the car park, the fixed speakers of the nightclub to the mobile speakers of the car, the *parkineo* phenomenon reshaped space through sound. In his book, *Acoustic Territories*, Brandon LaBelle shows how “the temporal and evanescent nature of sound imparts great flexibility, and uncertainty, to the stability of space” (2010, xi). He writes that “sound disregards the particular visual and material delineations of spatial arrangements, displacing and replacing the lines between inside and out, above from below” (2010, xi). In addition to car parks, the proliferation of *discomóviles* (vehicles that were repurposed as bars that sold alcohol and played music on street corners) (Bayón 1995) and clubs set up in marquees further complicated the architectural divisions between inside and outside. Moving both within and through physical space, the acoustic environments created by *bakalao* are characterized by their mobile and porous nature, which appeared to dramatize the evanescent and uncontainable dimensions of sound.

In their expansion and multiplication of the sound source – borne out, in particular, through the live feed through the dozens of car speakers in the car park – club cultures in Spain during this period simultaneously offered up a vast array of auditory experiences and perspectives, in which the assemblage of the nightclub, the car and the crowd were folded into one constantly shifting and multifaceted soundscape. Steven Connor writes that with the development of modern sound media,

“the rationalized ‘Cartesian grid’ of the visualist imagination ... gave way to a more fluid, mobile and voluminous conception of space....Where auditory experience is dominant, we might say, singular, perspectival gives way to plural, permeated space” (2002, 206). If the circulation and consumption of bakalao gave rise to a plurality of different auditory perspectives, these perspectives nevertheless cohered around a shared tempo and rhythm, whose persistent and ritual-like beat brought dancers into proximity with one another. The centrality of the car to the subculture therefore demonstrates how sound, as LaBelle writes, “brings bodies together” in “connective moments” (2010, xxiv). Their shared experience of music therefore provides a compelling example of how sound serves “to operate as an emergent community” (LaBelle 2012), one that he says “weaves individuals into a larger social fabric” (LaBelle 2010, xxi) – here momentarily illuminating a social fabric that is an alternative to the atomization brought about liquid modernity. As a sonic object, the car was therefore central to the dimensional and intersubjective nature of bakalao. Chimo Bayo’s much maligned single, “Sube, que te llevo”, whose title alludes to giving a friend a lift to the nightclub, highlights the car as an integral part the subculture, as well as a shared social space of friendship and community. Its controversial lyrics “cuatro ruedas tiene mi coche, cuatro pastillas me como esta noche”, however, equally forge an explicit link between driving and drug taking, alluding to the increasing popularity of ecstasy during this time.

It is not surprising, then, that much of the moral panic in the early 1990s surrounding bakalao swirled around the car. News reports frequently reported on the dangerous driving and speeding influence of drink and drugs, emphasizing the threat ruterros posed to the safety of other drivers. There were 15,043 road accidents with drivers between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four in 1992, and in one weekend alone in November 1993 there were fifteen fatalities of young drivers on the road (Guardia et al. 1993, 2). Yet as Gamella and Roldán write, the proliferation of negative reporting led to the process of “deviancy amplification” (1999, 143), whereby negative publicity only serves to reinforce and further encourage the behaviour considered deviant. While the increase in road accidents was indeed a cause for concern, the media reported on the phenomenon

with emotionally charged and hyperbolic language. This was in part a broader reflection of how, following the creation of private television channels in 1990, Spanish news became increasingly sensationalist and viewer driven. Anxieties around the speed of vehicles found their parallel in media responses to the music of bakalao, where negative attention often attached itself to its accelerated tempo and repetitive beats. In an article from the same year entitled “Un descenso a los infiernos”, *Diario 16* referred to it as “un ritmo maldito”, further noting that bakalao “tiene algo de demoníaco” (Rejas 1993, 48), while *El Tiempo* defined the subculture simply as “cientos de jóvenes bailando como posesos y música machacona, eso es el *bakalao*” (Del Arco 1993, 12). Several techno acts self-consciously drew on the moral outrage as both a badge of defiance and a lucrative marketing strategy. Chimo Bayo’s song “Así me gusta a mí”, for instance, repeated the lyrics “Esta sí, está no”, a play on words that referenced ecstasy. Elsewhere, in a version of the techno group M.P.M.’s single “Sube que te llevo”, the song ends with the ambient sounds of a car crash and ambulance sirens. As Angela McRobbie and Sarah Thornton have argued, “[d]isapproving mass media legitimizes and authenticates youth cultures”, writing that “in turning mass media into news both frame subcultures as major events and disseminate them; a tabloid front page *is* frequently a self-fulfilling prophecy” (1995, 565). In a documentary on the subculture, *Hasta que el cuerpo aguante*, broadcast by Canal Plus in May 1993, a young clubber correspondingly says to the camera that “es que nos prohíben un montón de cosas y lo prohibido es lo bueno”. The well-publicized documentary brought the moral panic surrounding bakalao to a fever pitch and was followed in June of the same year by the histrionic exposé *Danzad, danzad malditos* on Television Española, as well as a flurry of news stories and reports on the subject. And while an acoustic metaphor is only implicit in the term *deviance amplification*, the car in bakalao appears to draw attention to itself literally as a spectacular site of deviancy amplification through the ritual of “car tuning”, a common practice for many bakalas. A practice whereby the appearance of the vehicle is modified by its owner, car tuning frequently involves the installation of more powerful speakers and subwoofers,

which amplifies bass frequencies. Now an urban tribe in their own right, “tuneros” enter their cars into competitions, as depicted in the opening sequence of Bigas Luna’s 2008 film *Yo soy la Juani*.

The increased media coverage and subsequent mistrust of the government’s ability to deal with social disorder led to the passing of the Ley de Seguridad Ciudadana, a law that was more popularly known as the La Ley Corcuera, named after the PSOE minister for interior, José Luis Corcuera. Passed in the symbolic year of 1992, the year of mobility and opening up, the controversial law made it possible for police to search premises without seeking a warrant, as well as making it much easier to stop and search people whom they believed to be under the influence of drink and drugs, with increased roadside alcohol and drug tests on the major roads of the several *rutas del bakalao*. The law was seen by many, including those within the Socialist Party itself, as an infringement on civil liberties and was modified slightly eighteen months after. Most crucially, the law also sought to draw boundaries around and contain sound, in both its temporal and spatial articulation: it sought to regulate opening hours and to ban businesses from using their establishments for purposes other than those for which they had a licence. In November 1993, the law allowed 559 arrests to take place in just one weekend (Efe 1993a). Yet evidence shows that government’s heavy-handed response only served to augment the deviancy amplification spiral. A study by the Instituto de Asistencia Psicológica de Valencia in 1993 concluded that the enforced control created “un efecto rebote”, whereby the increased presence of police appeared to attract more people to the craze “por morbo” (Efe 1993b). An article from the same year reported that, in seeking to avoid police controls, young people became more likely travel on back roads that were even more dangerous (Guardia et al. 1993, 4).

Conclusion

As the craze for the various *rutas del bakalao* began to fade in the mid-1990s as a result of increasing social control, metaphors of speed and velocity would nevertheless gain increasing prominence in Spain’s political economy. This period ushered in what became known in the

commercial sector as “Spanish high speed” (Anxo-Murado 2013), an accelerated house-building frenzy and a series of ostentatious public building projects – which was a contributing factor to the banking crash of 2007–2008. Valencia, of course, has become a particularly symbolic city for financial corruption and overspending, with many of its extravagant buildings and public projects from the boom years now lying empty, just as several of the nightclubs of the original Ruta Destroy lie abandoned. Henri Lefebvre writes that

objectively, for there to be change, a social group, a class or a caste must intervene by imprinting a rhythm on an era, be it through force or in an insinuating manner. In the course of a crisis, in a critical situation, a group must designate itself as an *innovator* or *producer* of meaning. And its acts must inscribe themselves on *reality*. (2004, 14)

If the rhythms of bakalao pointed to an emerging set of social relations in Spain, the new reality to which it gestured was one that was shaped, as we have seen, by volatility and flexibility – a political and economic system that was more concerned with the flows of accelerated capital than with the interests of most ordinary people. These contradictions of Spain’s high-speed economy, as I have shown, made the bakalao subculture possible as a cultural formation. Through a particular analysis of bakalao’s asynchronous rhythms and sonic routes, this article has examined how the subculture appropriated both time and space through sound. Through their embodiment and experience of sound, the dancing bakalas were both joyfully out of synch with this political economy of speed, yet simultaneously immersed within it.

Biographical note

Tom Whittaker is an Associate Professor in Spanish film and cultural studies at the University of Warwick. He is author of *The Films of Elías Querejeta: A Producer of Landscapes* (University of Wales Press, 2011), *The Spanish Quinqui Film: Delinquency, Deviance and Sound* (Manchester

University Press, 2020) and coeditor of *Locating the Voice: Critical Approaches and Global Practices* (Oxford University Press, 2017) and *Performance and Spanish Film* (Manchester University Press, 2016). Email: t.whittaker@warwick.ac.uk

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Notes

¹ For recent scholarship on the Movida, see Nichols and Song (2014), Usoz de la Fuente (2015) and Wheeler (2016)

² Del Arco en *El Tiempo* describes the *discotecas* where bakalao is heard as follows: "Son templos en naves industriales, o creadas al efecto o liquidadas por la reconversión, las quiebras y la crisis. Se trata de espacios gigantes, capaces de acoger a centenares de jóvenes en programas continuos de locura urbana" (1993, 12).