

3.3. Sensing the City – mapping the beat. Analysing (affective) rhythms of music-making in Wellington and Copenhagen

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Abstract

Music-making in the city constitutes and is constituted by a plurality of urban rhythms, which affect the diurnal, weekly and annual experience of place and shape the musicmaker's "pathways" through the city. This paper is dedicated to present a way of capturing, understanding and interpreting the multi-faceted rhythmical layout of urban spaces. It will do so by introducing a rhythm analytical methodology, which draws on participant generated photographs and mental maps as analytical tools in order to provoke compelling depictions of musical activity in the city. Based on current ethnographic fieldwork in the urban spaces of Wellington (Aotearoa/New Zealand) and Copenhagen (Denmark), this paper proposes a fruitful technique of experience and experiment, that seeks to recognize the interwovenness of socialities, atmospheres, object, texts and images in people's everyday lives and in this way affords opportunities for attending to the multiple rhythms underlying music-making in the city.

Keywords: rhythm analysis, affect, photography, mental-mapping, music-making.

What I am presenting today is based on my doctoral research, which examines the (affective) relationship of music-makers to their local urban space. In particular it is concerned with the ways in which the musicians' 'sense of place' affects the way they participate and engage in local musical activity. I chose independent music-making in Wellington (New Zealand) and Copenhagen (Denmark) as case studies in order to work through a set of conceptual frameworks and research methods, which can more adequately describe how a sense of place is evoked through a complex array of changing rhythmic processes that characterise everyday life in the city.

In the course of my project, music-making is described as made up of an inter-related set of actors, affects, materialities, and social relations that come together in the complex unfolding of the city. Urban places are part of infinitely complex spatial networks (Massey, 1995). They are ceaselessly (re) constituted out of their connections, the "twists and fluxes of interrelation" (Amin and Thrift, 2002, p. 30) through which "multiple networked mobilities of capital, persons, objects, signs and information" (Sheller & Urry, 2006, p. ix) are brought together to produce a "particular, but ever-changing, complex mix of heterogeneous social interactions, materialities, mobilities, imaginaries and social effects" (Edensor, 2012, p. 3). Those rhythmic mixes create what David Seamon (1980) calls "place ballets", an accumulation of repetitive events expressed through everyday life regularities that involve interactions between people, and interactions between people and their urban environment — any kind of movement that evolves from physical space, people, nature and time. These regular patterns of flow make up a concatenation of rhythms which drive human activity and affect the formation of the city's ambience, its textures, its atmospheres, and, more importantly, its affective charge. Music-making in the city therefore constitutes and is constituted by a plurality of rhythms, which affect the experience of place and shape the music-maker's (affective) relation to their urban environment.

In order to capture, analyse and understand the multiple rhythms underlying the musicians' sense of place in Wellington and Copenhagen I developed a rhythm analytical methodology which

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seeks to recognise the interwovenness of socialities, atmospheres, objects, texts and images in people's everyday lives and in this way affords opportunities for attending to the concrete, physical reality of urban spaces as well as other less tangible, less readily apparent but no less significant affective aspects associated with music-making in the city. This rhythm-analytical methodology draws on various terms and concepts that offer useful provocations to think differently about how to approach music-making in the city. Key among these is Henri Lefebvre's (2004) notion of rhythm-analysis. For Lefebvre "everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is a rhythm" (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 15). In order to understand the complex rhythmical reality of the city, he introduces the idea of rhythm-analysis. Rhythm-analysis offers a way to think about the temporal choreography of a multitude of practices in the everyday. It provides an analytic lens from which to examine the interrelation of space and time by means of two different modalities of the repetitive: linear and cyclical rhythms. While cyclical rhythms stand for the cosmic, worldly or natural, linear rhythms are imposed structures, originating from human activity or social practice. This rhythmical divide neglects however the less visible, affective rhythms, intensities, moods and atmospheres which present themselves in urban spaces without actually being present. Similar to Raymond Williams's (1977) "structure of feeling", affective rhythms are "social experiences in solution". They "don't have to await definition, classification, or rationalization before they exert palpable pressures" (Williams, 1977, p. 132–133). They don't have an inherent meaning or semantic message as they "pick up density and texture while they move through bodies, dreams, dramas, and social worldings of all kinds" (Stewart, 2007, p. 3). Yet, those rhythms are crucial to the way in which attachment (or detachment) to a place gains its affective charge. In order to capture the concrete as well as the more abstract rhythms that constitute the musicians' everyday life in the city, I used a unique medley of qualitative methods, including participant observation, serial interviews, photo-elicitation and mental mapping. For the purpose of this paper, I will focus only on the latter two: photo-elicitation and mapping.

Prior to the first in-depth interview I asked each musician to draw a map of their "personal Wellington" or "personal Copenhagen". This task was unexpected for most respondents, as I did not mention it before the first meeting in order to avoid any cognitive engagement with their urban environment prior to the mapping exercise. Instead, I aimed at stimulating what Kathleen Stewart (2011) refers to as "atmospheric attunement" — an 'attunement of the senses' that would bring attention to the charged atmospheres of everyday life and in this way allow the musicians to sense out and consider more fully the multiple rhythms, valences, moods and affects constituting their musical environment. As such, the idea behind this arts-based approach to mapping is to move beyond the conventional use of maps as a graphic means for representing places. Rather those subjective drawings create an opportunity for a non-verbal articulation of lived experience in the form of "descriptive detours" (Stewart, 2011), which enables a consideration of the concrete materiality of the city as well as the more elusive aspects that shape the music-makers' everyday lives.

After the mapping exercise, the musicians were given a disposable camera and the task to take photos of their 'musical environment' over the course of three to five weeks. Again, the instructions were purposely left "open" in order to avoid setting up the everyday as an object of analysis, which then had to be 'represented'. My aim was to think about photos as something other than just representations. Here I want to draw on Henri Bergson's (1988) claim that an image is a "certain existence which is more than that which the idealist calls a representation, but less than that which the realist calls a thing" (Bergson, 1988, p. 9). This implies that an image is not merely a representational snapshot nor is it just a material thing. Rather, images can be understood as "resonant blocks of space-time: they have duration, even if they appear still". They are "blocks of sensation with an affective intensity" and "make sense not just because we take time to figure out what they signify, but also because their pre-signifying affective materiality is felt in bodies" (Latham and McCromack, 2009, p. 253).

Hence, if an image is a certain existence somewhere between a representation and a thing, so also is a rhythm. The relation between rhythm and image is not one involving a relation between object and representation. Rather, those photographs may be useful in displaying valences, moods, sensations and tempos of the “affective force fields” surrounding the musicians in their urban space (Stewart, 2011). Therefore, instead of providing quantitative content for tables, charts or diagrams, such images can capture or expose the dynamism of embodied movement and the affective tonalities present in certain moments and places. In this way, participant generated photographs facilitate the development of another way of looking, a means of unfixing and altering the perspective, providing a technique for thinking through the complex and multi-faceted array of everyday life rhythms and atmospheres.

An intensive content analysis of the photographs and maps revealed different people, places, objects, events, interactions, atmospheres, fluxes and flows — a complex range of multi-scalar temporalities that make up a concatenation of rhythms, which in their varied ratios, serve to bind the music-makers to their urban space. In order to capture the spatial expression of those rhythms, I grouped them according to dominant spatial attributes. From a macro social and spatial perspective there are three primary categories of urban rhythms: social, spatial and affective rhythms. These categories can be further divided into sub-groups. Social rhythms are divided into socio-cultural and political rhythms; spatial rhythms into urban materiality and nature; and affective rhythms into ordinary affects and atmospheres. The category social rhythms consist of various social events, activities, practices and traditions as well as institutional and governmental dynamics; spatial rhythms encompass the concrete, physical reality of the city including urban nature, seasonal and annual cycles, and affective rhythms are composed of ordinary affects, sensibilities, valences, moods and sensations that constitute the charged atmospheres of the everyday.

Social, spatial and affective rhythms can further be distinguished by their *intensity* and their *direction*. As such, certain maps and photographs were dominated by particular rhythms such as the strong appearance of natural rhythms on various drawings from Wellington. Here, the most frequently drawn object was the natural harbour including the vast coastline, the hills and the surrounding native bush, which often took up half of the entire map. Even though the city of Copenhagen is graced with numerous lakes, parks, canals and the ocean as well, natural rhythms were far less dominant and took up a rather small part of the maps. Instead, the musicians drew roads, streets, bridges or cycle lanes that permeate the city, connecting different buildings, objects and places. Some of those roads cross the local border, indicating the “bridge to Sweden” or a “highway out of the city”, which expands the confined cityscape and points towards a global drive and direction. This “global direction” was reinforced by the frequent depiction of airplanes or the airport on the Copenhagen drawings, as well as the appearance of a globe, a world map, the airport or mobile media devices on the musicians’ photographs, which illustrates their desire for movement and connectivity on a global scale. Following Doreen Massey (1994) the increasing degree of mobility and the geographical stretching-out of social relations constitutes a sense of place which “includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world” (1994, p. 155). For this reason, I want to argue that this “outward” direction of urban rhythms points towards an “extroverted” sense of place.

In contrast, the main direction of urban rhythms for Wellington’s music-makers is directed “inwards”, towards the local musical community. This is illustrated by the depiction of community houses on the drawings and photographs (these are private spaces or shared flats, mostly occupied by local musicians who regularly host concerts and public events), as well as the frequent appearance of people, social gatherings and events, which highlights the dense network of cooperative links between local musicians and demonstrates the significance of community and collaboration. The centrality of community for Wellington’s music-makers suggests a sense of place, which is rather “introverted”. As such, the direction of urban rhythms indicates if a sense of place is introverted or extroverted. However, those directions are not mutually exclusive; rather, an individual’s sense of place always includes “inward” as well as “outward” looking rhythms.

As such, the rhythm analytical methodology presented here engages with the full complexity of musical practice and the polyrhythmicity of everyday life. Using visual based methods provided an opportunity to write theory through “descriptive detours”, a way to account for some of the more elusive aspects that shape the way local music-makers “sense out” and “make sense of” their urban environment. The combination of cartographic and photographic methods allowed me to better attend to an affective register that is often overlooked in studies of music-making. As such, making visible the everyday lives of music-makers, as they themselves document and reflect upon them, provoked a deeper analysis of those social, spatial and affective movements and moments, the fixity and flow which orchestrates musical activity in the city. To this end, the rhythm analytical methodology developed here, served as an analytic lens for sensing the city and mapping the beat in Wellington and Copenhagen.

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