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Singing the Critical Life: Folk, Place, and the Palimpsest of Rhythms in the beat of the city

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8 ***Singing the Critical Life: Folk, Place, and the Palimpsest of Rhythms in the beat of the city***
9 **Introduction**

10
11 This paper is based on a participant-observation insider account of a contemporary scene-based
12 music venue, using the method of thick description, and centring on the affective use of space
13 and time in a locale dedicated to creative performance (V. Marrewijk and Yanow, 2010). The
14 theoretical framing derives from Lefebvre's dictum that there may be "nothing inert in the
15 world, no things: very diverse rhythms, slow or lively (in relation to us)" (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 17).
16 Lefebvre notes that "Wherever time, space and an expenditure of energy coincide, there is
17 rhythm (Lefebvre, 2004 p. 15). Lefebvre's core theoretical stance derives from a Marxian frame
18 of alienation and illuminate "the dialectics of power and resistance that transpire in urban set-
19 tings, particularly in the interrelations between music, the body, and urban life." (Moore, 2013,
20 p 62) Lefebvre sees the capitalist spirit infecting all areas of social and civil life, restrained by
21 rituals such as festivals (Lefebvre, 1991, p127) that break the pattern of structures and permit
22 transgressive behaviours in limited socio-temporal opportunities that offer "a reprieve from
23 work and disciplinary power" (Moore, op.cit. p 65).

24
25
26 "Ethnography is the disciplined and deliberate witness-cum-recording of human events" (Willis,
27 2002: 394) or "an attempt at a textual rendering of a social world" (Abu-Lughod, 2000, p261)
28 while recognizing explicitly that "discourses/ideologies cannot be treated as if their constructed
29 contents can be equated with lived outcomes" (Willis and Trondman: 2002: 395). But the lived
30 outcome has to be inhabited before it can be studied and this paper represents a "performance
31 ethnography" as the author is an effective member of the set of performers and the social role of
32 performer pre-dates and over -writes that of ethnographer (Morten, 2005).

33
34 The writer did not enter this scene for the purposes of study or seek elevation as a "blushless
35 Promethean observer" (Boon, 1982, 47) but there is no state of nature here: it is a constructed
36 space. This paper is partially auto-ethnographic in that the writer is a participant in the activity
37 described and the work is subject therefore to the legitimate critiques of this genre (Delamont,
38 2006, Ellis and Bochner, 2000, Jones, 2005) but is presented here as an example of a "tale from
39 the field" (van Maanen, 2013) intended as accurate and not too self-regarding, as a "realist"
40 rather than a "confessional" story. The experience of this scene as a participant predates by a
41 considerable time the work of ethnography (van Maanen, 2011).

42
43 The evolution of this urban space encapsulating some aspects of liquid modernity
44 (Baumann, 2000) indicates how the iron cages (Clegg and Baumeler, 2010) of genre and
45 typology are transgressed in practice, and hints that the espoused agnosticism of Clegg and
46 Baumeler towards some of the negative implications of Baumann's thesis at least partially
47 justify a rather more optimistic stance.

48
49 This venue is one that appears open and available for free access as the location is in principle a
50 public place, but in fact the use of space here for the time-bound events described is strongly-
51 determined and quite powerfully regulated, with informal sanctions against contravention of
52 norms. Haspelmath notes that "Space and time are the two most important basic conceptual
53 domains of human thinking. Neither space nor time are part of a more basic conceptual domain,
54 and neither can be reduced to the other" but points out that nonetheless in most cultures simi-
55 lar adverbials and adjectivals may be equally valid in both discourses (Haspelmath, 1997). May
56 and Thrift's proposal about Time and Space that ".these dimensions do not exist singly, but only
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3 as a hybrid process " (May and Thrift, 2003) and so this scene is bounded temporally with " so-
4 cial and symbolic boundaries" (Antonius and Robben 1989, p 576).

5
6 The style of research employed is similar to that of Laurier, Whyte and Buckner's et al's (2001)
7 ethnography of a neighbourhood café in aiming to return to "just what the life of a particular
8 café consists of, and in so doing re-specify a selection of topics related to public spaces"(Laurier,
9 Whyte and Buckner, 2001, p 195), and is thus in Lorimer's terms a "small story" (Lorimer,
10 2003) that is not intended to imply any over-arching theoretical weight or reach.

11
12 The field of musical scene ethnography is currently lively and an important recent contribution
13 is Kaul's exemplary(2009) study of Irish music created and performed in an Irish village,
14 "Doolin". The genre overlaps that of performance more generally (Wulff, 2008) and we note a
15 tendency in some such analyses to first *identify* the genre and then to *describe* the location and
16 then to *seek some fit* between the two. But Kaul is clearly concerned about such notions as
17 "authenticity" and implies some dissonance between the tradition and modernity exemplified in
18 the Doolin scene. We follow Kaul in seeking to avoid the romantic narratives of "tradition" and
19 their assumed habitus of "communal relationships grounded in kinship and territoriality"
20 (Blaustein, 1993: p 271). While music is the focus in this scene and the espoused politics are
21 radical and anti-establishment, above all the central motif of this habitus is creativity
22 (Janesick,2001)

23
24
25 Studies of the use of space as "public" and "private" show how divisions between public space
26 and private space operate at different scales and take different forms in different
27 neighbourhoods, illuminating how gender and class are interwoven in demarcations between
28 public and private spaces (Goffman,1969 Bondi 1998).

29
30 Baudrillard (1983) bemoans the loss of distinction between public and private space and
31 between subject and object to the detriment of the intrinsic values of both in the context of the
32 de-sacralization of post-modern life. Acconci (1990) points to the political processes of public
33 and private space and the loss of time due to the absence of clocks, and suggests the continuing
34 relevance of public space in a "private time". Baxter and Kroll-Smith (2005) illustrate the
35 potential for buying private time out of public space for instance through taking a workplace
36 nap.

37
38 In many of these characterisations there is an implicit polarisation of the "public" and the
39 "private" and a lack of attention to the ways in which the one can segue into the other, without
40 blurring their essential distinctiveness.

41
42 Cultural activities are a key focus of urban politics and Zukin (1995) argues that notions of cul-
43 ture as ethnicity, aesthetic, and marketing tool are reshaping urban places and conflicts over
44 revitalization. In dismissing the notion that cities have a singular urban culture and the post-
45 modern trope of the many different subcultures, she contends that that cultures are constantly
46 *negotiated* in the city's central spaces- the streets, parks, shops, museums, and restaurants
47 which are the great public spaces of modernity.

48
49 Zukin indicts "gentrification" as a process, while Holt also argues that some venues are subject
50 to a process of gentrification (Holt, 2012) that may contribute to making cities both safer and
51 more civilised places to live but has its darker side, as, beneath the perceptions of "civility" and
52 "security" nurtured by cultural strategies, there exists an aggressive private sector bid for con-
53 trol of public space. Foucault proposes that such spaces are subject to processes of de-
54 authentication and become less "utopian" (Foucault (1967, 1994). Drummond (2000) con-
55 tends that the boundaries between public and private spaces are fluid and routinely trans-
56 gressed showing how private use can colonise overtly public space. Carr (1992), echoing Mum-
57 ford (1938), argues that the meanings invested by users are central to the understanding of how
58 urban space is accomplished.

We maintain that there is no inevitability about these processes and that devoid of Foucault's redundant "utopianism", there can exist cultural spaces in contemporary urban places that retain authenticity through colonising public spaces for private, even communal, intent.

The Locale

This is a small, old fashioned village pub in a narrow side street leading to what is clearly an encapsulated village in the suburbs of a major Northern city in the United Kingdom. The architecture of the street comprises mid nineteenth century artisan housing at one end leading to rather larger but still down at heel residences at the far end which leads to urban playing fields and a cricket club, and what have been at one time shops and small workshops. Many of the houses, small as they are, are clearly in multi-occupancy and there are other signs of student and multi-ethnic presence. The main road leads to the city centre past a mile and a half of urban decay. The bigger pubs on the main road are either boarded up, as are many of the shop fronts, or appear shabby and rough. There is an off-licence with resolute metal shutters.

The Real Ale guide notes that "This tiny Victorian back street local with two bars is looking a little worn and tatty in places." This is not a venue where you would take anybody on a first date. The pub consists of two rooms, a public bar and a snug. Each is small, the bar accommodating four or five on stools and one small table for two. Most drinkers are standing. From the back of the bar are steps down to the cellar. By the side of the bar is a door closing off stairs to the living quarters above. A door leads to a basic pub toilet.

The snug is about 12 feet by 14 feet, with wooden chairs around the walls and four or five tables, with benches on either side of the usually unlit fire. In comfort this space accommodates a dozen or so clients for drinking and conversation. But on a Monday night after nine pm it regularly hosts twice or three times that number with the same in the bar, crowding to listen to the music and survey the performance. On some nights for instance when the folk festival is on in the city, the crowd spills out into the street and the music can be heard from the main road.

During the day, the pub is quiet, with a few regulars, notably one who seems to be there from noon to late night and is much in evidence on Monday evenings, earning his presence by clearing glasses and supporting the singers with evident enthusiasm. The host and his wife, the joint publicans, know their clientele and deserve the epithet of "old fashioned" landlords. There is no fighting or rough behaviour, and if any incomers start anything up and it appears that it is about to kick off, it is quickly dealt with. In five years, I have only seen this twice or three times. There is no loud swearing, and no nastiness.

Once was during the folk festival when some, doubtless well-intentioned visitors shouted for requests and became disappointed when their noisy cues were not acted on. Another time was when a young Italian man, accompanied by friends tried to intervene when someone else was performing, in order to offer an unwanted version of a Neapolitan ballad. In each case the publican took condign action and escorted the interlopers from the space.

The space is thus managed "by the publican and his wife and staff but this is by no means a "Smokey Joes" (Crang, 1994) "where the performance of the staff is seen to be of equal or greater value to customers" (Laurier, Whyte and Buckner, 2001: 199)

Monday night

By around ten to nine on a Monday evening, participants start to arrive, most carrying instruments. By nine fifteen, there will be music. Normally the whistle players, flautists, start off. There may be as few as two there but they will start a tune going, a reel or a jig. There will usually be one or two guitarists, and a Bodhran player. The whistle players arrange themselves

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3 on either side of the guitar player who nestles in the corner, usually next to the banjo man.
4 When the fiddlers arrive, things are usually going, and they sit further away from the guitarist,
5 closer to the door.
6

7 Two spaces down from the guitarist is a table where the singers sit if they have got there early
8 enough. Singers are not necessary and there will be evenings when there is no structured
9 singing. I usually sit with the singers, one of whom is the reason I first attended these Monday
10 sessions: he is a good singer and fair guitarist and the other regular singers are also his friends.
11 One has a very fine deep baritone and specialises in lugubrious West Country ballads. I
12 harmonize and sing in and only occasionally offer a version of "Dirty Old Town" that is usually
13 courteously received. (MacColl, 1949)
14

15 My principal role is that of "poet" and in return for being part of the ensemble, I am expected or
16 suffered to present two or three original poems every week. This earns me, in common with all
17 the performers, a round of drinks and participation in the late supper, prepared by mine host
18 consisting of sandwiches and pies, sausages and sometimes cake or jam tarts and served around
19 midnight when the music is starting to wind down.
20

21 The order of proceedings appears casual and unorganised but there is a fairly regular order and
22 structure to it. For example, the evening always starts with whistle playing and never
23 commences with a song or a poem. The style of music is traditional Irish, but later in the evening
24 other genres may be offered. The first song comes usually about half an hour into the session,
25 the first poem a bit later than that. Sometimes the poet gets a signal from the leading guitarist
26 who sits in the corner, occasionally offers some informal leadership and is clearly respected
27 though his guitar work is pretty straightforward and there are others whose work is more
28 virtuosic. This signal will come often when the players are pausing for breath and taking a
29 refreshing draught of the amber nectar.
30

31
32 One player will start a solo and others join in, developing the tune and running into variations of
33 increasing complexity, changing key and segueing into other tunes: this can go on for ten
34 minutes or so before the flutes are laid down. Often one player starts a tune and another will
35 finish, or another or two join in: like chamber musicians they hand the tune to each other to see
36 what can be got out of it. There is sometimes an undercurrent competitiveness but the overall
37 framework is that of collective combination and support. Sometimes the line is lost and the
38 player puts his or her instrument down with a regretful smile. The atmosphere is craftfully
39 collegial and the mood is one of enjoyment, though often intense and serious. Applause follows a
40 solo and also the end of a sequence. Loud talking and laughing is discouraged, if necessary by a
41 look or a gesture. Respect is shown to each performer. There are no playlists and no overtly
42 announced rules. Any one is welcome to create music provided they are talented and respectful.
43 Anyone can come in, provided they can pick up the line.
44

45 When several rounds of music have occurred someone may offer a song and this is usually a
46 standard from the Irish repertoire, like "Down by the Salley Gardens" or "Raglan Road". The
47 former is well appreciated by the regulars. If the singers are there in force we singers will
48 sometimes offer a semi comic version of "They say old man that your horse is dead" or "Just one
49 more day on the grey funnel line". If there are particular female singers who have their own
50 repertoire, it may be The Eriskay Love Lilt or "Who knows where the time goes".
51

52 One regular usually comes in later than the others: he is a fine guitarist and good singer and
53 performs his own stuff, a cross between Johnny Mercer and Jesse Winchester. He joins in the
54 choruses of other singers and like them will harmonize where they feel like it. He will support
55 me if I do my solo of "Dirty Old Town". Once on an evening in May I said to him as we were
56 packing up "see you next week" and he replied "no, I shall be away travelling". He told me that
57 he travelled round the various summer festivals, starting at Wrexham and getting down to the
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3 West Country. I expressed jealousy of this way of spending the summer and he responded "well
4 come with me. We can share the tent or stop at B and Bs and we could get an act together. We
5 have about half a dozen things we can do now and we can build something with your poems. I
6 have a tune for one of them." It was a path not taken, rather to my regret.
7

8 One regular is a strong A Capella singer who sings from a huge book of typed up songs, mainly
9 traditional North Country ballads. He will harmonize with others if he finds it worthwhile. He is
10 well known on a wider Folk circuit and will sometimes disappear for several weeks doing
11 Festivals, and will come back with tales of performing with well-known names. He took about a
12 year to accept me, but he is very affable now with me having accepted me as a serious
13 performer. Even though he is a regular, and a practised and respected performer, he has to
14 watch his timing because he knows not to come in until the feel of the ensemble is right because
15 there is a continuing process of what Schutz calls "tuning in" (Schutz, 1970: 216-217). If you get
16 out of tune, you may find that you are out of time, along with Chris Farlowe's "Baby". There is a
17 master rhythm operating here that implicitly regulates the boundaries between words and
18 music as it offers each performer a turn at their own speciality.
19

20
21
22 One of the whistle players is very well respected; he is a legend on the scene not just as a
23 performer but as an instrument maker who has made for the very best including, reputedly for
24 James Galway. He is a quiet almost unobtrusive presence and his solos are sometimes listened
25 to in respectful silence, at other times his light lines ripple around the walls and bring
26 spontaneous combustions of celebration, but he gigs and partners with the others and gives
27 them respect also. One other soloist who often arrives without his guitar is an all-round
28 performer on the local music scene, and organizes concerts. He keeps in touch and is usually
29 arranging some event or other. He has played professionally most of his life: though his style is
30 more Jimi Hendrix than Danny Boy he gets good applause for his elaborate and pacy solos and
31 duets with anyone who can keep up with him.
32

33 Many of the instrument players will also sing along, the banjo player has a special line in
34 Republican and working class ballads from Belfast. Later in the evening a couple often come in.
35 He is a guitarist, with a depressing tendency to give it some whack very late in the night on
36 "Ghost Riders in the Sky"; while (or perhaps because) I will give him support on this and some
37 casual drop-ins will sing along, this has been known to empty the pub. She is French, and is a
38 very talented klezmer clarinetist though and her long lilting East European line once prompted
39 me to an instant poem that is not too bad and she regularly presses me to publish it in exchange
40 for the CDs she has given me. She performs solo and is well received and has her own klezmer
41 band that is famous in the North of England.
42

43 One evening a young guitarist, evidently Spanish, sat in the corner from early doors and
44 gradually got into the swing and accompanied music he was clearly not familiar with. Late on he
45 broke into a slow, luxuriantly-decorated Malaguena that lasted several minutes. He was asked
46 where he was from. He turned out to be a semi-professional player from Mexico City, who was
47 working temporarily in London. He had asked where he might sit in on a "traditional British
48 music venue" and been directed to our pub session. He admitted that the journey was rather
49 longer than he had expected.
50

51
52 One of the least successful evenings- perhaps paradoxically- came during a widely-advertised
53 city folk festival. The pub was crowded for several nights but nobody acceded to the suggestion
54 that the regular performers could come in on other nights and "put on a show". It seemed that
55 although the crowd overflowed into the street, there were too many observers, some of them
56 offering suggestions and making requests and some of the regulars opted out "until things have
57 quietened down a bit". It seems that nobody comes to this place to be looked at or questioned:
58 they come to jam with other performers.
59

Seating, Good Order and Drinking

The order of seating is pretty strict. The instrumentalists take the best places from the far corner around two sides of the room behind the two small round pub tables, the guitar man in the corner and the Bodhran man in the middle with his massive arse to the room forming a formidable barrier. Singers follow on usually around the square table. Guests, drop-ins and casuals get in where they can. The snug bar is centre stage and front of house and the public bar is a back area on a Monday night.

The space never seems to be large enough and very occasionally people will come to the door, look in and pass on. But room is always made for any of the regulars and the atmosphere can get very dense with music and appreciation.

The culture is rooted in Irish culture and much of the music of course is Irish but good performance in other genres is appreciated on its merits and working class urban and nautical ballads as well as Scottish songs are accepted. My friend and I sometimes do a duet of a song that has both Scots and Irish Gaelic words and this works quite well. But hammed up versions of Dubliners classics like "Whiskey in the Jar" or "Black Velvet Band" are only tolerated with often some overt irony late in the evening as a collective activity but not celebrated. An insight into the facile ingenuousness of associating any type of performance to a national cultural heritage or identity came when I was sitting once with a young Irish man, a blood relative of my best friend: I asked him what was the provenance of a particular reel that had just been performed. "Jaze" he responded "don't ask me! I never heard some of this stuff before. It's not my scene. Back home some people are well into all this, though, Y'know!". I sat, rebuked for my naivety and for having committed the ultimate research analytic sin of the Ecological Fallacy (Dogan, 1969.) The fact that he was Irish did not allow him or me to accord to a cultural stereotype of "Irish". This place is not Johnny Fox's pub high on the Dublin mountains, parading its Irishism for the tourists, Begob.

Drink is of course a feature: this is a Real Ale pub and features in a CAMRA list, and the beers on the pumps are varied and well-kept, but drunkenness is very much not required and any stupid, noisy or irreverent behaviour is frowned upon, literally.

Once I was rising to deliver a poem at the invitation of the lead guitarist, while a couple of lads were laughing noisily but not unpleasantly in the corner. I could cope with that and was raising my voice to take them on and assume the high ground of performance but immediately a small man -one of the non-performing locals- rose and shouted "Quiet, Now! Good order in the House for the Poet!" When I had given my performance and sat down I thanked him and he stated "That's OK, Son. Respect! Those lads are well out of order." (I appreciated the designation of "son".)

Most of the instrumentalists will take less to drink than the singers, but four or five pints in an evening will be as much as one can be expected to take. One of these will be on the house. Some participants, three or four are regulars without ever being performers. Some of these come from at least two hours' drive away so their commitment is sincere. They become friends with the performers but sit resolutely with or near to the singers but never among the instrumentalists. If they do not perform, the house does not buy their drink. If a performer wants their seats they will move uncomplainingly.

The timings appear informal, fluid and open, with neither starting nor finishing times that can be publicly known nor announced but any one evening will follow in practice fairly predictable envelopes. The playlist appears unplanned, spontaneous and impromptu, varying from

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3 performance to performance, depending on the personalities present and the balance of
4 musical forces available but is nonetheless quite powerfully disciplined with strict rules of
5 conduct and certain themes, motifs and genres visible. The distinction between insiders and
6 outsiders is emergent and to an extent subterranean with some plausible entry opportunities
7 for new participants and some micro-political games being played.
8

9 At the end of a "typical evening it is not uncommon for regular participants to agree that
10 "tonight was different" "because it often is, reinforcing Bohman's (1991: p vii) take that "Social
11 phenomena are shot through with indeterminacy and open-endedness" .
12

13 The typical use of space in this scene is partly hierarchy-based but also performance-specific,
14 creating opportunities for participant involvement, a typical performance, the allocation of time
15 and the characteristic sequences of individual performances, and certain roles and rituals occur
16 unnoticed but if they are omitted can be missed by regular participants.
17

18 No one is *expected* to do anything and what one does do is not pre-classified into a format. It is
19 in the nature of a "session" or a "jam" rather than a performance. But respect for accepted ways
20 is very much part of the experience. It is sometimes in order for someone to ask for a request
21 but this request does not have to be honoured. Once a friend of a friend who thought he knew
22 what it was all about on his first and only visit asked our Belfast banjo man specifically for a Van
23 Morrison number but this was not appreciated. The consequent performance was massively
24 infused with ironic detachment.
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28

29 **Barriers and Balances**

30 There are a number of subtle barriers between the different parts of this space. The most
31 obvious is between the main room, the snug or lounge and the bar, opening on to the street. The
32 first is an interior and the latter a liminal space. No one is prevented from entering from the
33 street and no one is inhibited from exiting and people do so, for instance to take a fag break. But
34 within the room, there are three quite distinct spaces, owned by the instrumentalists, the
35 singers and the drinkers.
36

37 Entry from the bar is always in principle available but usually is not possible because there will
38 be nowhere to sit. In practice it is the instrumentalists whose spatial needs take priority, and if
39 there is on any night a surplus of instrumentalists they can push the boundaries but their
40 boundaries will not be pushed. Here "regulars can be expected to share certain local
41 knowledges" (Laurier, Whyte and Buckner, 2001: 219). Incomers or onlookers or would-be
42 spectators have to take their chance and may find themselves standing in the street as the
43 instrumentalists and the singers push past them.
44

45 Occasionally would-be participants may come in without ever being accepted or their presence
46 overtly acknowledged. This happened to one person who came several times, sat among the
47 singers, clearly enjoyed himself in a somewhat distanced way, sometimes bringing a book to
48 read out of a capacious rucksack, offering interpolation rather than conversation. He was
49 gradually "cooled out" by the regulars evidencing a suggested repositioning of unrealistic
50 expectations as the dispassionate lack of affect transgressed local participation norms. (Deil-
51 Amen and Rosenbaum, 2002)
52

53 As was reported in Laurier's study "places are massively ordered", and as Sacks (1992) notes,
54 there is 'order at all points'. It is a heterogeneous order, a finely grained and lived
55 accomplishment which is spatially distributed and distributive of space (Crabtree 2000; Latour
56 1997). The order in this locale arises out of a collaborative activity that is creative and
57 structured along forms that incorporate traditional memes but are not bound in Procrustean
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bonds: much as the players in Benford et al's study demonstrate a "situated discretion" (Benford, Tolmie, Ahmed, Crabtree, and Rodden, 2012). The socio-temporal order is manifested in not one but a hierarchy of rhythms as noted in Table 1.

Table 1 Rhythms and Turns

	Actors	How regulated	Rhythm
Music and words	Musicians and poets	Agreed common structure	An evening's symphony with balanced movements
Types of Music	Whistles, strings and percussion. Singers	Starts with whistlers, moves to guitars and fiddles. Collective, with solos. First song comes in only after at least three sets of music.	Solo leads and individual entries
Performance and Participation	Playing, Talking and Drinking	Performers don't talk outside the circle. They have to go to the bar to break the circle's rhythm. One drink, self bought to start the flow: personal choice to continue One collective round, paid by the host . Supper for performers provided by the host.	No overt drunkenness, a swelling of participation moving to crescendo

Discussion

The ethnography of urban music scenes is a well-established genre, with many of the contributions being North American, often jazz-based and implicated in the discourse of ethnicity, politics and gender (Becker, 2004). Lena and Peterson distinguish distinct genre types—Avant-garde, Scene-based, Industry-based, and Traditionalist, (Lena and Peterson, 2008). Danescu characterises the Rotterdam music scene (Danescu, 2013). McQuail proposes a typology of the participants in terms of "active engagement" (McQuail, 1997) defining "regulars", "drop-ins" and "groupies". All of these are present in our scene from occasion to occasion but it is dominated by the regulars.

In this particular venue the role of "host" is also significant, indeed central to the scene. Kosby's framework is useful in depicting the "atmosphere" of a venue, varying by the nature of the participants and offers interpretations of "what works" and "what doesn't work", and proposes the perceived importance of ethnicities and "tradition" in establishing and confirming meaning and authenticity, with especial reference to the role of "grittiness" (Zukin, 2010) in the urban scene.

1
2
3 UK ethnographies are relatively few in number and for the most part are centred on folk music
4 performed at clubs and festivals, rather than the pub scene (Kosby, 1977). The English public
5 house per se is relatively well researched and Smith offers a historical overview of its evolution
6 (Smith, 1983) and argues that the pub is overdue serious sociological attention. More recently
7 there have been several studies of the well-documented decline in the “traditional” English pub
8 (Pratten, 2005). But there seem not to be many serious ethnographies of the urban pub as
9 cultural context and developmental private space.

10
11 Symbolic meanings are invested by consumers in the pub experience (Clarke et al, 1998) but
12 there is comparatively little contemporary literature on folk or music pubs. A notable exception
13 is the proliferation of literature about Irish folk music in Irish pubs in Ireland (Kaul, 2007). Pace
14 these, this venue seems to evidence neither “commodification” nor “commercialization and is
15 far from the tropes of modernity displayed in the Riverdance experience, despite the assertion
16 that “Riverdance became a symbol for Irish modernity” (Wulff, 2003:117), but that the themes
17 of “displacement and longing” (Wulff, 2008:4) so noted by such research encounters are in no
18 way absent from this pub scene.

19
20
21 Although there are distinct and formalized relationships between “performers” and “audience”,
22 the dictum “If it wasn't for the tourists we wouldn't have an audience” (Kneafsey, 2003) does
23 not apply here, because the presence of tourists in this venue has had the effect of destroying
24 the space and devaluing the experience. But there are no perceived issues around the
25 employment status of participants (Kaul, 2004)

26
27 A common feature of the “Irish scene” in Ireland, according to Kaul and many others is the
28 “Craic” and this is sometimes elevated to an almost mystical and uniquely Irish meta-
29 phenomenon. Thus “The Craic” is a multifaceted, complex concept that describes diverse
30 things: high-quality social interactions and conversations, an entertaining night out, or the
31 character of a witty person” (Kaul, 2013, p 130) for here, music is at the heart of the collective
32 performance and as in the example studied by Kaul, “when the bow strikes the fiddle, the
33 quality of the music trumps any consideration of social status or role” (Kaul, 2013, p131)

34
35 The discourse of “authenticity” (Tetzlaeff, 1994), central to rock and hip-hop (Auslander, 1998,) and the analysis of post-colonial scenes from a critical perspective (Murphy, 2000) is less
36 relevant to this scene where the criteria for acceptance are related more to competent musical
37 or delivery performance than to conformity to a particular style or genre. As Dahlhaus remarks
38 “authenticity is a reflexive term: its nature is to be deceptive about its nature” (Dahlhaus, 1967,
39 p57).

40
41
42 But we agree with Bruner that there is no need to fall for a post-modern disdain simply on that
43 account (Bruner, 2005: 168). Like Kaul, we see considerable relevance in Keil's emphasis on the
44 experience of being a “participant” for notions of authenticity (Keil, 1994: 97-98) and echo the
45 significance for participants of the process of “tuning in” (Schutz, 1970: 216-217). During the
46 performance participants pick up, enhance and develop the musical themes initiated by others,
47 and must have the skills to do this. As in jazz scenes the ability to listen carefully and pick up on
48 musical ideas, lines and riffs are central. Sometimes but only rarely the participants fail to pick
49 up the evening's rhythms. Timing is also an evolving aspect of the process: if an evening is
50 working especially well, it may stretch well after midnight into the early hours.

51
52
53 Nonetheless, there seems little danger of the threat of “assimilation” (McLeod, 1999) in this
54 scene because this venue is part of a wider, albeit loose and weakly connected, network of
55 musicians that exists separately from the venue itself. Nor does the positioning of this particular
56 pub in the wider urban mosaic offer much promise of the generalizability of any new
57 “authenticity” based on planning or investment potential, pace Zukin (2008) because here there
58 are few young consumers or intriguingly viable back-story on which to base new products or

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2
3 cultural services. Per contra, attempts to position this experience in a wider cultural consumer
4 context as in the Folk Festival, failed because they detracted from the occasion itself. The festival
5 visitors were seen as interlopers and their presence created an uncomfortable atmosphere.
6

7 This venue and its characteristic performances do not seem to support Geertz's dictum that "it is
8 the copying that originates" (Geertz, 1986, p380). No-one comes here either to be a copyist or
9 to be "authentic" but to jam, and the expectation of creativity and neo-musicality is intrinsic to
10 the setting and the performances occurring here. Foucault's claim of the loss of *utopia* in
11 settings like this is not made by any participant but it may be that some drop ins arrive with
12 pre-determined utopian views about Irish or Folk venues.

13 This experience is not an exercise in the recapture of past authenticities of "folk", "nation" or
14 "class" although many of the presentations of song or rhythm could be recast in the terms of
15 such genres originating in these meta-structures. The output of the session is not commodified
16 nor is it "on the edge" (Kaul, 2009, 2013) Rather, it is a genuine current in a pervasively live
17 Stream of Stories (Rushdie, 1990). Simplistic mapping of performance as genre to location only
18 serve to map what is dynamic and evolving to a Procrustean bed of time-expired theory because
19 as in the Brazilian habitus "the hegemony of this domestic sociospatial structure is not
20 autonomous, but rather stands in dynamic interaction with the public and economic dimensions
21 of the household's reproduction in society." (Antonius and Robben, 1989, p 570).
22

23
24 The urban location of this scene is significant because it is in the diversity of cities that
25 separately-originated authenticities can re-meld into new performed realities where, so long as
26 men and women desire face-to-face contact, cities will endure in one form or another (Mumford,
27 1938). Within cities, smaller spaces of human scale provide the essential nutrients of urban life.
28 In this scene, urban life is continuously re-created in interpersonal encounter and creative
29 performance, but "authenticity" per se is neither sought nor celebrated.
30

31 In this space we see a type of "liquid modernity" characterised by a special ethic of care for
32 performance, for "Liquidity is marked by care for the other as primarily mediated through the
33 immediate self in the moment" (Clegg and Baumeler, 2010, 16). This care for performance
34 supervenes the dangerous episodic possibilities of liquidity and transcends anxiety about any
35 particular identity or putative threat to it or loss of it. Thus, "liquidity's essence is positioned as
36 openness to the future rather than a specific future as an outcome" (Clegg and Baumeler, 2010,
37 6). But the affect displayed in these performances does not rely solely or even primarily on
38 Memories of Class (Baumann, 1982) as the narrative meaning of the scene is continuously and
39 regularly recreated. The criteria for membership in this scene are competence and reflexive
40 creativity. While timing and spatial positioning are important to the social interactions of the
41 evening and the temporary structures thus created they are not imposed externally as
42 Thompson described but arise through evolving processual agreement among the performers
43 (Thompson, 1967).
44

45 There is no "abstract moral" in this scene so nobody has to bang their head to be identified as an
46 authentic member of a sub-group (Larsson, 2013) but neither is the identification in any sense
47 "ethereal" (Kinkade and Katovitch, 2009) because this place is where it is. "How the music
48 experience happens is complex" (Kaul, 2009: 161), nonetheless no claim to an "authentic self" in
49 scenes like the one described here is made by the act of narrative (Sparrowe, 2005). Affect is
50 central to participation, and *dissociated* would-be participants, however technically skilled tend
51 to be frozen out. It might be possible to characterise this scene as a type of "urban subversion"
52 (Daskalaki and Mould (2013) and in further research it could be possible to trace the rhizomatic
53 networking of participants, these particular urban transients (Chia, 1999) .
54

55
56 The space and time constraints are internally generated through the creative processes rather
57 than externally imposed in relation to some generic cultural or economic norms. This is a "jam"
58 rather than a concert. The reflexivity evolves to encompass semi-ritual as well as novel
59

elements. The only responsibility is to the craft itself, or the several crafts themselves which are of course self-consciously evolving as each session comprises old-established and new participants. Nonetheless the space is indeed institutionalised in Low's sense because "Spaces are institutionalized if their ordering remains effective beyond the action of the agent and entails normative synthesizing and spacing." (Low, 2008, p25).

When Eliot states "we shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time" (Eliot, T.S. 1942) it sounds like a valid motto for the earnest ethnographer but that dictum assumes that the place, the space, the habitus do not change even though the time does. But "who knows where the time goes?" (Denny, 1985) and this space and the performances exposed in this locus change with the seasons. No two nights are the same in this scene and it is that rather than any folklorised notions of "tradition" or "authenticity" that comprise the genius loci of this particular scene (Pomorski, 1996). Rather we argue that it is in the palimpsest of rhythms that the vitality of this experience lies. In this space as Lefebvre notes " time, space and an expenditure of energy coincide, there is rhythm (Lefebvre,2004 p. 15) This venue demonstrates in Low's terms both spacing and synthesis (Low, 2008) : moreover it demonstrates a characteristic "atmosphere" (Low, op.cit) that is constituted of both space and time. In Lefebvre's frame, these are resistant activities and there is both a cyclical and recursive structure as well as a "durability to this resistance" (Moore, 2013, p77)

It is hoped that this miniature ethnography of a scene that does not fit stereotypes referenced in the musicological, cultural or urban ethnographic literature represents a modest contribution to the genre. . Is it "authentic"? Who asks? Who says?
Will you guys find your way here to this place? I rather hope not.

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