The Polyrhythmic-scape of the City

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ABSTRACT

This paper shows the work of the 'Cosmopolitan Workshop', which is part of the Arts and Study Abroad Program (ASAP) at Tokyo University of the Arts. ASAP encourages interdisciplinarity and practical design research strategies out of the studio, the university, and the country. Especially, the Cosmopolitan Workshop explores a way for understanding and conceiving the complex connections between humans and the environment of the city, while focusing on King's Cross redevelopment area in London. Drawing on ideas by the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre, and with reference to Bernard Tschumi, the participants in the Cosmopolitan Workshop aimed to describe a series of ordinary 'direct actions' as 'rhythmanalysis' of humans, architecture, and space, through the assumption that this not only proposes different readings of spatial function, but also configures ambiguous relationships between "every being, every entity and every body, both living and non-living". With the support of Central Saint Martins (University of the Arts London) and the Architectural Association School of Architecture, the participants attempted to document human actions in everyday life that would expand the perception of time in urban space, while strategically examining the city's perimeter and its relation to urban rhythms and events.

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> *"Go deeper. Do not be afraid to disturb this surface, to set its limpidity in motion. Be like the wind that shakes these trees. Let your gaze be penetrating, let it not limit itself to reflecting and mirroring. Let it transgress its limits a little. You at once notice that every plant, every tree has its rhythm. And even several rhythms (...) Henceforth you will grasp every being, every entity and every body, both living and non-living, 'symphonically' and 'polyrhythmically'" (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 80).*

As Lefebvre elegantly pointed out, in our everyday life there are several rhythms in the relationship between living, non-living, nature, and the city. And from the point of view of the relationship between them, many disciplines have introduced human-centric perspectives to confront the mechanical view of Modernism since the second half of 20th century. All these studies, whatever their scope is, have tended to deal with our everyday life as a medium for representing the hidden symphonic-scape of the city by focusing on human movements. For instance, in architecture, Jan Gehl wrote that "Functionalism was a distinctly physically and materially oriented planning ideology" (1971, p. 9), and proposed to categorize three types of outdoor activities, which take place in-between spaces of the buildings. Similarly, in anthropology we can look into 'Topophilia' as "the affective bond between people and place or setting" (Tuan, 1972, p. 27).

However, there are not enough precedents yet, that translate these ideas into a practical transcription of everyday life and human movements, especially from the polyrhythmic-scape of the city stated by Lefebvre.

In that sense, Darko Radovic argued that "standard tools of urban research and analysis tend to be reductionist, favouring some aspects of the urban over the other" (Radovic et al., 2014, p. 10). These tools have to deal with everyday life and human movements as an inevitable process; for which the methods for practical transcription of everyday life and human movements become purposive for measuring clear chorded patterns, like a symphony (Radovic, 2014). As Gehl, Tuan and Radovic pointed out, these measurements tend to generate a gap between qualitative and quantitative aspects, a difference between participation and observation, a deficiency of the means and their purpose, and an oversimplification of the

untamable complexity of the city.

To avoid those dichotomies, in the Cosmopolitan Workshop, we try to focus on polyrhythmic aspects, that is, on urban conditions that make use of two or more different rhythms simultaneously. That might lead us not only to catch the non-measurable qualities of the city, but also to criticize the purpose of the measurements employed in it.

In the case of the relationship between 'scape' and human movements of Modernism, the notion of Purism proposed by Le Corbusier eliminated the ambiguity of Cubism, which imbricated space, time, and movements; and attached importance to the movement itself between a-scape to another-scape, dialectically.

On the site, each element – including human movement – has a given role, as they would keep an order, like the cup, the bin or the plate that Le Corbusier often drew following the principles of Purism. As his architectural notation emphasizes, the rule/patterns of human movements are 'positioned', and the process of human movement exists on the site, just as a process. It would be appropriate to say that the functionalists were influenced by those kinds of process making. And, in those cases, the functionalists had taken the control for creating symphonic-scapes composed by physical components, which subordinated human movements.

Gehl criticized this notion by pointing out that "the functionalists made no mention of the psychological and social aspects of the design of buildings or public spaces" (Gehl, 1971, p. 9). We could regard Gehl's approaches – in Lefebvre's words – as parts of an 'isorhythmia' (the quality of rhythms) (Lefebvre, 2004).

On the other hand, the functionalists tried to understand human movements as a part of a symphonic chord similar to the physical components of the city. On account of that, they dealt with human movements as one of many physicalized urban components, but they seemed to ignore that "the living body presents numerous associated rhythms" (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 85). Because for tackling everyday life and human movements, of course, we "need responsible planning, design, development, and management", and we also have to ensure an "optimal performance of complex urban systems" (Radovic et al., 2014, p. 12). Then, the fragile living fabric of everyday life and human movements tend to be paradoxically vanished on the process.

Through a series of workshops conducted as a part of the research project "Measuring the non-Measurable" (Mn'M), we tried to transcribe a re-creation of the urban space by a lady selling flowers at the periphery of the Banglumphu flower market, in Bangkok, Thailand (Radovic et al., 2014). One of our main aims for the Mn'M research project was to deal with some tendencies that show that "there is a corresponding reductivist and instrumentalized thinking about the urban" (Radovic et al., 2014, p. 13). And in this situation, around the flower marketplace, the lady – who seemed to be somehow exhausted by her work – not only adapted road conditions for selling flowers, but she also tactically configured a live realm on the street. Then, we found out that her situation can't be directly categorized into Gehl's 'three types of outdoor activities', which are 'necessary activities' as things that we do every day, 'optional activities' as things that we do not need to do every day, and 'social activities' with other people, but, it was dynamically overlapped with each category (Gehl, 1971).

Since Modernism, art always takes a position for exploring human movements and our everyday life as a way for composing diverse rhythms of the city. Debord directly criticized the concept 'Commuting time', that "as Le Corbusier noted is a surplus labour which correspondingly reduces the amount of 'free' time" (1957, para. 2); in opposition to this idea, he insisted that "We must replace travel as an adjunct to work with travel as a pleasure" (1957, para. 3). In architecture, and from this situationistic perspective, Tschumi tried to introduce human movements for proposing multiple ways of reading urban space, by focusing on the concept of 'event'.

In The Manhattan Transcripts, *Tschumi's transcription showed three disjoined levels of 'reality', which were the* world of objects, *composed of buildings abstracted from maps, plans, or photographs; the* world of movements, *which could be abstracted from choreography, sport, or other movement diagrams; and the* world of events, *which was abstracted from news photographs. In this transcript, Tschumi's trial was how to 'cut off' the reality on a site just as it is by focusing on 'direct action' that externalize diverse moments of the city (Tschumi, 1981).*

By juxtaposing the worlds of objects, movements, and events, Tschumi avoids creating another hierarchy that reversed the relationship between human movements and physical components of the city. If we define his approach in Lefebvre's words, by transcribing 'event' by 'direct actions', Tschumi would demonstrate a way for externalizing (or re-creating) "a disruption of rhythms:

arrhythmia that goes as far as morbid and then fatal de-synchronisation" (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 82).

Even though Tschumi's 'event' and 'direct action' sound quite strong, human movements and everyday life expressed through 'ordinary events' and 'ordinary direct actions' are often stronger than these; because, simply speaking, the reality is that things might not be always juxtaposed as equivalent elements. According to Tschumi's juxtaposed transcript, for the people on a site, 'a murder' will be surely 'an event' and the site will be located as 'the murder site'. However, it is impossible for us to considering a site as 'the murder site' for a long time, and we need to return to ordinary routine, its normal condition for humans, the community, and the site itself. From this point of view, the 'ordinary events' and the 'ordinary direct actions' should be stronger than Tschumi's 'event' and 'direct action' (Tschumi, 1981). Therefore, in order to grasp or abstract the reality, we think that it will be useful not only juxtaposing the world of objects, movements, and events, but transposing detailed objects, small movements and micro events through repetition. This will allow us to presuppose "the association of different rhythms", while avoiding techniques proper of an instrumentalised thinking (Lefebvre, 2004).

Technically speaking, the notation system that we used in the Cosmopolitan Workshop does not differentiate the worlds of objects, movements, and events as different '-scapes'. This means that we adopt hand drawing to make possible to overlap not only the necessary/optional/social activities, but also to insert the participants' own experience on the site. While using simple activity signs (X: stop, M: mobile phone, La: laugh, △: drink, □: eat, etc.), the participants can invent their own notation, and also find site-specific patterns of human movements. Thereby, this process allows participants to transpose human movements with physical components on the site.

The Cosmopolitan Workshop focused on King's Cross Redevelopment Area in central London, one of the biggest urban renovation areas in Europe. As a site 'under construction' since 2007, King's Cross comprises a mixture of permanent and temporal objects, conventional and irregular patterns of human movements, and concentric and eccentric events.

POLYRHYTHMIC-SCAPE 1: RED CAPS

"An extraordinary piece of London", "There is something for everyone at King's Cross", "Clean and safe at all hours of the day and night" (Argent King's Cross Limited Partnership, n.d.). Like other similar areas in the world, the whole zone of King's Cross redevelopment aims to be recognized as a sophisticated place. An enthusiastic and dedicated team called Red Caps is committed to keep clean and safe conditions: "24 hours clean and safe" is on top of its agenda.

Figure 1 shows the movement of Red Caps (red lines) and visitors (blue lines) in a specific day at the whole area. Red lines overlapped blue lines, especially on the central axis (middle part, along the main street), were almost all the red lines included a specific activity: talking (T). Figure 2 illustrates one of the highest traffic points of Red Caps' movement, where different lines overlapped between them. We realized that Red Caps created a series of small virtual spaces from the proximity between people when they chat around this area. By analysing Figure 2, we could categorize 4 degrees of proximity which are drawn as differently sized circles: a 7 meters area circle for recognizing each Red Cap, a 4 meters area circle for talking to visitors, a 2.5 meters area circle for reacting to close incidents, and a 1 meter area circle for collecting garbage.

As Red Caps are like stage assistants whose role is keeping a live realm in clean and safe conditions for visitors, the workflow of Red Caps keeps a symphonic-scape and an "eurhythmia (that of living body, normal and healthy)" (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 83) because they are directly related to the maintenance of the whole area. Therefore, Red Caps create another live realm from their workflows, which becomes a sociogram, a visual representation of the relationship between individuals and the Red Caps' community. This situation is depicted on Figure 2, which we would like to regard as a part of polyrhythmic-scape of the city. By doing that, it might be possible for us to discuss not only the cleanest/safest reality but also lived/diverse real conditions of the city.

POLYRHYTHMIC-SCAPE 2: SCAFFOLDINGS

In the previous case, Red Caps seemed to link with the world of human movements and events. And, in the case of the world of objects, wirepullers for constructing that world are literally the construction workers at King's Cross redevelopment area.

Figure 3 draws a workflow focused on studying the scaffolding' assembly activity at a construction site of King's Cross redevelopment area during a day. On the other hand, Figure 4 shows a choreographic map of a small park 'sandwiched' between construction sites, with a combination of movements from construction workers' (blue lines), Red

Caps' (red lines), and visitors' (black lines). In the workflow for scaffoldings' assembly, the record between 10:00 am and 11:50 am shows that construction workers brought and collected moving fences, and covered them with hoardings around the south gate of the small park. Figure 4 shows that overlapped vectors between red, blue, and black lines emerged alongside the small park and the alley, between it and the construction site. But, more specifically, by comparing the workflow and the choreographic map, we could see that construction workers not only kept systematic movements alongside the site but kept chatting with each other, with Red Caps and, sometimes, with visitors, and stayed around the back side of the covered hoardings at the south gate of the small park.

In this case we assume that a scaffolding is a key object for controlling the perimeter of each construction site, as well as for assembling an intermittent interface that interacted with the three different groups. Every seven or eight minutes, construction workers reassembled the scaffoldings, what lead us to study how a series of temporal public spaces can appear and disappear around each perimeter of the construction sites. This condition links two different time scales, a systematic workflow as "the time of everydayness, subordinating to the organization of work in space", and an interactive flow as the time of the perceptual, the biological, and the habitual in space (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 83).

POLYRHYTHMIC-SCAPE 3: MOBILE PHONE

Figures 5 and 6 show perspective sketches that transcribed movement patterns from different pedestrians around the open space at the central zone of King's Cross redevelopment area. This space is articulated by pathways shaped by a series of curved lawn-planted plots. Figure 5 shows that while following the curved plots, people were chatting and smoothly crossing the open space, while others were lying on the lawn. However, specific movements with mobile phones shown in Figure 6 look like more freely, indicating that neither human-centric view nor conventional urban/landscape design consider specific movements related to the use of mobile phones. Technically, human-centric view and urban/landscape design tend to deal with human movements as linear trajectories. Then, we thought about how to change the lines smoothly. On the linear trajectory, we constructed a series of viewpoint fields, which mainly consist in the foreground and the background. This composition resembles a picture. But, in a funny way, activities like the use of mobile phones seemed to create the continuous ultra-foreground on the linear trajectory, which just focuses on the proximity between our eyes and the screen of our mobile phones.

Through 'Proxemics', Hall (1966) tried to categorize cross-cultural distances, defining them as 'intimate distance' (1 to 46 cm) for touching each other, 'personal distance' (46 cm to 1.2 m) for talking to each other, 'social distance' (1.2 to 3.7 m), and 'public distance' (3.7 to 7.6 m or more). Even though these cross-cultural distances categories may require a further discussion, it's evident that these precedents tried to deal with each distance as a fixed position, and it might be difficult to adapt those fixed positions to the current urban situations, because now we are literally mobile societies. In this sense, our activities using mobile phones seem to be critical for examining a moving/continuous intimate distance that would cross personal, social and public distance.

By considering the continuous repetition of movements in our everyday life, our activities sometimes become part of a conscious automation occasioned by a monotonous return. Even though, as Lefebvre described, "the monotonous return of the same, self-identical, noise no more forms a rhythm than does some moving object on its trajectory" (2004, p. 85), we often confuse the linear trajectory with human movements themselves, a confusion we even transfer to our designs. Compared with other activities, actions that involve the use of mobile phones tends to be more automatic and more accidental. For instance, as seen in Figure 6, a person just walked straight without caring about curved pathways or different ground levels, and when he or she reached the handrail alongside the canal, changed his vector. People tried not to crash each other by avoiding collisions in the very last second, composing a new choreography that looked like a complicated dance.

Therefore, transcription of the specific movements with mobile phones might give us a chance not only for examining a moving/continuous intimate distance, but also for inspecting the design process from the site by identifying non-monotonous returns.

POLYRHYTHMIC-SCAPE 4: BIRDS

This case leads us to see the world of animals. Figure 7 presents a series of birds' nests on Regent's Canal spread through King's Cross redevelopment area. Figure 8 represents the movement of birds and of pedestrians alongside Regent's Canal. This figure also shows that some sequential movement patterns traced by birds have an influence on pedestrians: people look up when birds

fly, make photos when birds stay afloat on the water and smile when birds stand on rocks. This combination of birds and humans composes a picturesque and symphonic-scape. However, when we carefully saw the patterns created by the movement of birds, we realized that birds collect human rubbish for assembling their nests.

As shown in Figure 7, there are at least nine birds' nests at about 500 meters distance in the area. Before the definition of 'Proxemics' made by Hall, Hediger (1955) introduced animal's individual distance, referring to 'fight distance' and 'critical distance'. Taking this in consideration, Hall (1966) realized the emergence of a tension in the space between humans and territories for animals. Despite this background, in urban space is rare to think about the spatial relationship between human territory and animals. In addition, in the case of human rubbish, a previous Cosmopolitan Workshop focused on human movements related to throwing away rubbish around the perimeter of King's Cross redevelopment area. While criticizing the relationship with the so relevant condition of being clean and safe at all hours of the day and night, we attempted to follow the humans at the level of the periphery, at "the level of human tendencies and actions – to create a new notion of architecture as the construction of a dynamic environment related to styles of behaviour" (Hashimoto, 2016).

This case might lead us to explore an overlapped relationship between the natural/artificial terrain, the human territory at the level of the periphery, and the territory of birds. From a touristic view, the overlapped relationship between them might be a part of key figures for constructing a series of viewpoint fields. And, from an ecological view, that would be a way for analysing the quality of life on/around the Regent's Canal as a series of 'ordinary events'.

In this workshop, by taking a neutral stance and by equating the relationship between objects, movements and events (and animals), we demonstrated there is a hidden trigger of a polyrhythmic-scape in the city. From Lefebvre's words, the crucial point for the Cosmopolitan Workshop was precisely to keep a neutral stance, in order to catch "approximate becoming: including houses and buildings, town and landscape" (2004, p. 80), and through exploring the 'approximate becoming' conditions. We defined the 'polyrhythmic-scape' as a combination of 'polyrhythmia' and 'eurhythmia', which is a combination of detailed objects, small movements and micro events based on diverse rhythms overlapped by half-necessary, half-optional and half-social activities, and by doing so we tried to avoid reductivist and instrumentalized thinking (Lefebvre, 2004).

The Cosmopolitan Workshop worked as an 'on-site' studio which defined a method to grasp the urban scape through drawing, by translating Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis in a mechanism to re-frame scales, objects, movements, people, and motion in a single layered image. The workshop blurred the boundaries between creative production and urban analysis, by making the drawing a crystallization of movements and spaces – rhythm and scapes – as a neutral observer of a polyrhythmic urban constellation beyond architectural conventions. In this sense, the workshop not only focused its work to design or to analyse a situation, but to discover and be witness to a hidden urban scape in the ordinary environment.

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