

# Place-Temporality and Urban Place-Rhythms in Urban Analysis and Design: An Aesthetic Akin to Music

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*ABSTRACT* Places are temporal milieus, and the tempo of a place is inherently rhythmical. In an urban place, the patterns of people's movements, encounters, and rest, recurrently negotiating with natural cycles and architectural patterns, merge into expressive bundles of rhythms which give a place its temporal distinctiveness. This paper investigates the aesthetics of place-temporality, focusing on its expression and representation; it explores its principal attributes, experience, and significance. And, building on an analogy with musical aesthetics, the paper brings forward a conceptual framework for the understanding and analysis of temporality in urban space, with a focus on place-rhythms and the triad of place-temporal performance, place-tonality, and sense of time. These are the principal aesthetic processes through which place-temporality expresses and represents itself in urban space.

*Keywords:* place-temporality; sense of time; rhythms; everyday; place; urban analysis; urban design

## Introduction

Cities are often experienced with vivid and contrasting senses of time, as “fast” or “slow”, and on a smaller scale, so are particular places within cities. Fast cities are usually described as complex, busy, and agitated; their everyday social life is portrayed as repetitive, accelerated, and homogenized. Slow cities are viewed as somewhat easier to understand. They are described as quiet and ordered, and their everyday social life as patterned, slow, and distinct. Some places within cities are perceived to be “fast” because they form hectic hubs of activity and movement, where everyday life is performed in a hurried and restless manner. Other places are “slow” because social activities and movements intertwine harmoniously and are performed in a calm and leisurely manner. Slow places are often experienced as temporary halts in a city, as breathing spaces; they offer moments of silence and encounters.

These experiences suggest the sense of time is both inter-subjective and location-specific—and also, sensory and meaningful. In cities, time is experienced and performed collectively; it is jointly perceived and shared. And, as the tempo of everyday urban life accelerates and home-to-work distances increase and affect personal and social time, time becomes a conscious and collective object of concern.

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The experience of time appears to vary according to the social and spatial-temporal attributes of places; as such, the sense of time is a principal attribute of cities and urban places.

This paper focuses on the temporal aesthetics of everyday places in a city. It asks the question, "What time is this place?"<sup>1</sup>, investigates how time is expressed and represented in everyday urban spaces, and highlights the importance of understanding the sense of time in the fields of urban place-making and design. The focus is on place-temporality and its experiential attributes, and the relationship between the sense of time and social and spatial-temporal attributes: *place-rhythms* of everyday urban spaces. Overall, it examines how the sense of time varies and expresses itself according to places' distinctive aesthetics.

The dialectic of time as both a sense and a process is apparent in the phenomenological theories of Heidegger (1962) and Merleau-Ponty (1962), and also in the later work of Lefebvre (2004), who explores time through everyday-life rhythms. Reflecting this dialectic, the paper first deepens understanding on these two facets of place-temporality (as a sense and as a process) in everyday urban space, first introduced by Wunderlich (2010a). Focusing on place-temporality as a sense, it discusses its sensuality, performance, and aesthetic significance; and focusing on place-temporality as a process, it reflects on aspects of its expression and representation in urban space. Here, the paper draws upon a year of fieldwork in various urban spaces in London, particularly at Fitzroy Square, where original methods and forms of representations of the aesthetics of time and its rhythms are revealed. Following from this, the paper identifies and builds on analogies between the aesthetics of place-temporality and the aesthetics of music, and offers in this context a new theoretical and analytical framework for research on the aesthetics of urban temporal environments. It offers a new terminology and conceptual framework for the expression and representation of place-temporality in urban space based on the notion of *place-rhythm* and the triad of *place-temporal performance*, *place-tonality*, and *sense of time*, and enriches the spatial disciplines with tools for urban analysis and design.

## Aspects of Expression and Representation

### *An Aesthetic experience*

Place-temporality can be conceived as an aesthetic experience. It is a form of representation of time in urban space, which is sensuous, represented, and expressive. It is a *sensuous* object revealed by dynamic and resonant corporeal gestures and bodily movements (Ingold 1993, 160) but also by other complex temporal articulations of nature and physical space. Place-temporality is *represented* through sensual rhythmic structures one perceives and engages with in urban space. And lastly, it is *expressive* in that it incites care, enjoyment, and imagination. These attributes define place-temporality as an experience of aesthetic significance (Duffrene 1973, cited in Silverman 1975, 464). Specifically, place-temporality is the temporal aesthetic experience of urban space.

Place-temporality is not an intellectual understanding of time. It is instead a distinctive temporal experience. It involves the immediate and the sensory, and a feeling or a "certain affective quality" (Duffrene 1973, cited in Silverman 1975,

464). This is not a mere emotion but instead a meaningful (both sensual and affective) appreciation which defines our relationship to an urban place.

*Four sensuous attributes*

Place-temporality as an aesthetic experience is defined by four sensuous attributes and meaningful experiences: a vivid sense of time; an experience of flow; a distinct soundscape; and rhythmicity.

Literature on the experience of the environment and the sense of time, along with first-hand observations of various urban places and ethnographic fieldwork at Fitzroy Square in London (Wunderlich 2010b), informed the focus on these four attributes as those that most distinctly characterize place-temporality in urban space.

*A Vivid and Distorted Sense of Time*

The sense of time in urban space is subjective. Empirical evidence shows that the sense of time is influenced by the degree of subjective (or emotional) involvement with a social event and the complexity of the event (Flaherty 1999). This is also affected by sensory experiences and cognitive reactions in space, hence responding to the scale, degree of density, and complexity of an urban space (Isaacs 2001; Bosselman 1998). Thus, the sense of time varies according to people's states of mind and affective engagement with social settings, but also the design of urban space. Added to this, as introduced above, the sense of time in a city is inter-subjective and place-specific. It is an experience that is shared by many and intrinsic to both the space and time of urban places.

Phenomenological observations in four places in London on an afternoon in early summer in 2005 confirmed not only how the sense of time distinctly differs from place to place, but also how this is consistently associated with a particular aesthetics of place: an aesthetics which is sensorial and performative, but also affective and meaningful.

Piccadilly Circus, a well-known public space and important traffic node, felt like a fast place (Figures 1 and 2). Sometimes chaos seemed to govern: people and traffic moving in different directions, people rushed along with the crowd, leaping between traffic islands, tourists resisting the fast and impenetrable flow. Other times, though, all appeared to flow in an orderly fashion. The movement of people and traffic was orchestrated as it followed the layout of streets and pavements and



Figures 1–3. Piccadilly Circus (1 and 2), and Oxford Street (3). Photographs by the author, Spring 2005. (See online article for colour versions of all figures.)



Figures 4–6. Regent's Park, London. Photographs by the author, Spring 2005.

the changing of traffic lights. Groups of people were in a continuous stop-and-go at pedestrian crossings to beat the traffic lights, alternating with the vehicular flow. Oxford Street, a major shopping artery and public transport corridor, also felt like a fast place (Figure 3): the experience of the agitated walking rhythms of people rushing along packed pavements, the flow obstructed by occasional window shopping, the constant in-and-out at shop entrances, the crowds waiting at bus stops, the intermittent stop-and-go of traffic and the movement of throngs across the street. Both Piccadilly Circus and Oxford Street were fast places, and also large-scale spaces: busy, dense, and complex.

In stark contrast, only a few minutes' walk to the north, Regent's Park felt slow (Figures 4, 5, and 6). People were strolling slowly along its paths or across the grass. Nature imposed its temporal order, and that slowed people down. People played and socialized on the lawns or relaxed in the shade of trees. No sign of conflict. Regent's Park felt quiet, calm, ordered, and safe.

Not far away is Fitzroy Square, a formal space with a central round garden and large plane trees, defined and enclosed by Georgian house frontages. Here too, time is perceived in a distinct way. Fitzroy Square is a slow square (Figures 7 and 8). Arriving at Fitzroy Square from surrounding streets, it feels like being elsewhere. People walk, stroll, sit, and play, seemingly in harmony with nature, the strong architectural setting, and the ordered place design. The place feels slow and relates to experiences such as calm, rest and encounters, enjoyment, and a sense of belonging. A resonance and harmony between people, nature, and



Figures 7–8. Fitzroy Square. Photographs by author, Spring 2005.

physical space appear to influence the experience of this place's sense of time. Overall, the square is a place of aesthetic significance, heightened by a vivid and contrasting sense of time.

Fitzroy Square was initially part of a comparative study and subsequently became the subject of extensive fieldwork and ethnographic studies. These studies comprised on-site personal narratives, both registering and reflecting *in situ* on how time was experienced. A diary was kept with narratives on various days, times of the day, and seasons. The extract below illustrates how the sense of slowness and resonance is associated with particular repetitive events, ordinary experiences, and routines of everyday life.

As one enters Fitzroy Square things seem to come to a halt. They don't freeze, however. People, pigeons, dogs, nature seem to synchronise in a slow dance... social life unfolds at a different pace, different from anywhere else, and nature imposes its cycles which are much appreciated. People and nature seem to perform harmoniously according to a different 'tempo', influence the Square's pace. People stop or reduce their tempo as if it were a place of arrival or of such sensual significance, a visual and aural haven, that it is impossible to ignore. This pace is sometimes interrupted by groups of people walking faster, joggers, or by nature, when there is a sudden downpour or chilly wind causing everyone to vanish... Yet these moments of temporal conflict are fleeting and the usual pattern of life soon returns, that is, harmony is quickly restored to Fitzroy Square's people, nature and space. This pace is contagious for after only a few minutes I start to feel calmer and walk slower. Subconsciously, I become sensually involved with the rhythms of the square. (Extract from the author's place-diary, on-site narrative, 20 April 2005, 15:30)

Conversations with local residents and people working in the square confirmed that time in the square is indeed collectively experienced and perceived as unique and slow.

I feel as if I have been transported back in time. Fitzroy Square has a magical effect, it ... helps to slow down the pace. (Oliver, 1 June, 2005)

It feels tranquil and very pleasant, a place of rest even if I am only passing through. By contrast, if you walk down nearby streets things are just passing you by. But when you come into this open space you pay attention to what is happening, focus on everything, view the central garden, the trees, and take a deep breath. It triggers a positive feeling, almost of happiness; it is elevating, a counterpoint, before I go into my office. I always have a feeling of anticipation before entering the square. People may be walking at their normal speed but everything seems to be in slow motion. And, if you walk into the central garden when it is open, you appear to lose your sense of time, as if on holiday. The square is like a magical barrier and work seems unreal. (Matthias, 1 June 2005)

These field studies suggest that people similarly experience a distorted sense of time in particular places. Typically these places have an experiential and performative character and a unique architectural and socio-spatial aesthetic which distinguishes and characterizes its place-temporality.

*A Sense of Flow*

Attached to a vivid and distorted sense of time is the experience of flow. Flow is the quality of unique temporal experiences. Senses of flow are coincident with, or at least relative to, the pace and intensity of engagement with the activities being performed (Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi 1988, 30). Also, they are derived from forms of culture, which are structured and defined by fixed and coded practices (routines and rituals) (30). It is from profound levels of engagement with forms of culture and its everyday practices that vivid and distorted senses of time surface. In line with Csikszentmihalyi's study of flow, tempo, and optimal experience or well-being, this paper argues that the sense of flow is an attribute of unique temporal places; in other words, urban place-temporality is experienced as flow.

There is a direct relationship between the unique sense of time, the experience of flow, and the vibrant set of rhythmically structured events and practices one is drawn into in temporal urban places. And the experience of being drawn into (and by that sensing) flow is attractive and often nurtures senses of well-being (as expressed in the ethnographic quotes above). Csikszentmihalyi tells us that flow is attached to a sense of quality and thus it is a rewarding experience (1988, 30). The experience of flow in urban space is thus attractive and nurtures a sense of satisfaction and comfort. People not only enjoy being in flow in an urban space, but are drawn into places with a typical sense of flow; the latter is induced by the particular everyday-life practices interweaving and synchronizing at a fixed tempo. Consider, for example, places where one loses a sense of time, immersed in activities like strolling through a market, roaming around a town centre, high street shopping, or relaxing in a local park.

With this in mind, observations such as the narratives and interviews above suggest Fitzroy Square as a place that fosters flow experiences. In the square, everyday life is vibrant and people easily involve themselves with its daily practices, events of nature, and architecture. One is easily drawn into taking part (and performing) in the particular flows in the square. Everyday practices and other temporal events grab one's attention, or induce one's body to join in, adjusting its tempo and taking part in similar manner. Self-consciousness often vanishes and one performs in tune with other bodies and events; after which, a feeling of time well spent often emerges. Immersion in and enjoyment of flow in Fitzroy Square evokes a vivid and distorted sense of time, specifically a feeling of extended time, or a sense of slow time.

Fitzroy Square is characterized by a typical place-flow, defined by recurrent flow practices and events throughout the day, the week, and the season. Examples include people sitting down alone or in groups, an activity which is scattered throughout the day and increases around lunch time, with people remaining for similar lengths of time at similar locations (e.g. entrance steps to buildings and along the garden wall). On sunny summer days when the garden is open, people flock onto the lawns and sit or lie down on the grass; they enjoy the shade of trees, the slow movement of leaves and branches, the sun's rays, intermittent passing clouds and moving shadows on the ground. When the clock strikes two the square begins to empty. During the morning and evening rush hours, people walk quickly across the space, whilst at midday they slow their tempo (Figures 9, 10, 11, and 12).



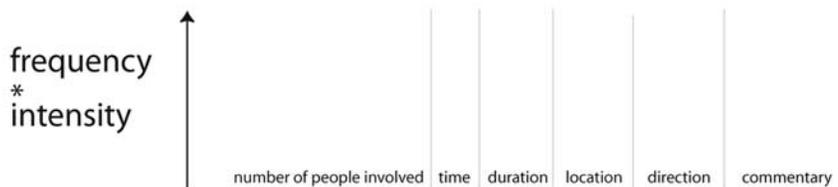
Figures 9–12. Everyday life practices inducing a typical sense of flow. Fitzroy Square. Photomontages by the author, “Freeze-time photography project”, 2008.

These are not choreographed activities or tempos. They simply unfold in a synchronized and effortless manner, making up the “Fitzroy place-ballet”. Jane Jacobs once explored this idea under the “street-ballet” (1961). Without a conscious awareness, people perform everyday life alongside others, consequently defining the order, pace, and rhythm of places, and as a result the aesthetic temporal uniqueness of Fitzroy Square.

Fieldwork was devoted to both the spatial (Figures 9–12) and temporal (Figure 13) expression of the everyday-life practices and events that induce a typical place-flow and temporal structure in Fitzroy Square.

The frequency, intensity, and duration of these practices and events during the day, over the space of a week, and at different seasons were recorded, and subsequently the rhythmicity of these practices and events was mapped in the form of spectral diagrams (Figures 14–16). These diagrams represent the rhythmical temporal structure of temporal events at Fitzroy Square, illustrating how they unfold, how they become accentuated over time, and over all how they sculpt and affect the temporality of this space. Figures 14, 15, and 16 show the spectral diagrams of walking practices, informal seating (on the pavement or

temporal expression



Figures 13. Key temporal attributes of place-rhythms.



**Figure 14.** 12h Spectral diagram for walking-past rhythm. People walking past Fitzroy Square, 7 am to 7 pm, Monday, 5th September 2005. Walking-past practices intensify (accentuate) during rush hours and lunchtime; as dominant and fast practices they influence the way time is performed and sensed in the Square at particular times of the day.



**Figure 15.** 12h Spectral diagram for informal seating rhythm. Fitzroy Square, 7 am to 7 pm, Monday, 5th September 2005. Informal seating practices on the pavement are largely confined to lunchtime; social seating (minimum two people) usually lasts longer than single informal seating practices.



**Figure 16.** 12h Spectral diagram for formal seating rhythm. Fitzroy Square, 7 am to 7 pm, Monday, 5th September 2005. Formal seating practices (on benches) intensify around lunchtime, but also cluster in the mid-morning and mid-afternoon when the Square is less busy, while they are almost absent during the rush hours when walking past rhythms peak.

steps), and formal seating (on the few benches) at Fitzroy Square on Monday, 5 September 2005. The diagrams show the typical pattern of distribution throughout the day, when activities intensify (in number) and cluster (superimpose), and also how long they endure (brief to long periods of duration marked with a gradation of warm to cold colours respectively).

A multitude of everyday practices and events unfold and are experienced at Fitzroy Square. They cluster in time and space and in a synchronized manner unfold at the same tempo and pace. These events induce a typical place-flow and induce a vivid and distorted sense of time, which overall characterizes the square and its place-temporality.

Drawing from Csikszentmihalyi's theory on flow and the psychology of the optimal experience (1988), and ethnographic fieldwork at Fitzroy Square, one concludes that place-temporality is experienced as flow and is an experience with aesthetic significance. It is characterized by a sense of order and regularity and arises from being immersed in the regular movements and practices of everyday life; it is from this sensuous and affective involvement with place practices that the distorted sense of time arises. Also, experiencing place-temporality through flow is a fulfilling experience. People enjoy being in, or being drawn into, a flow, and they enjoy places with distinctive flows in the city. In this context, flow is a principal attribute and indicator of place-temporality in urban space.

### *A Vivid Soundscape*

The perception of everyday place-temporality in urban environments is privileged by the aural sense. In other words, the *soundscape* of an urban place plays a major role in the perception of temporality in everyday urban spaces (Thibaud 2003).

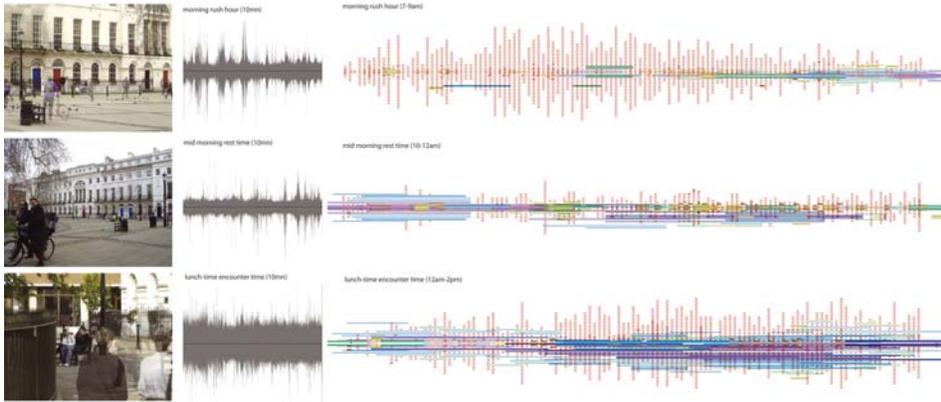
Soundscape is a recognizable and aesthetic assemblage of sounds in a particular environment, also sometimes called the *sound milieu* or *acoustic*

*environment* (Schafer 1977; Augoyard and Torgue 2005, 6). Murray Schafer explored the sound texture of acoustic environments through the concepts of low-fi and hi-fi soundscape (1977). Whilst low-fi is a blurred and hazy sound environment, hi-fi soundscape is clear and precise. Observations of various places with and without vivid senses of time in London (mentioned at the start of the paper) suggested that it is the latter—the hi-fi soundscape—which characterizes urban place-temporality.

In a hi-fi soundscape, sound “frequencies can be heard distinctively”, thus are not masked by noise or other sounds (Schafer 1977, 43). As a result, foreground and background sounds can be easily identified (Wrightson 2000, 2). These sounds intersect with each other and resonate in terms of frequency and in a perceptible rhythmic way, generating distinctive acoustic colourations, sound perspective, and horizon (11). In this way, a sonic and rhythmic balance is created, comparable to that of a “natural soundscape” (Krause 1993, quoted in Wrightson 2000, 11). Acoustic colourations are defined by “echoes and reverberations that occur as sound is absorbed and reflected from surfaces within the environment” (11); they have a defined reach (horizon) and help people to situate themselves and gain a sense of direction. Thus, acoustic colourations offer significant information on the physical nature and scale of spaces. Furthermore, as sounds emanate from places, social everyday life, and community, they express aspects of its social and cultural identity (11). Moreover, the acoustic colourations of hi-fi soundscapes are characterized by repetition and resonance. Repetition is key in the definition and perception of context; sound units that repeat make environments recognizable (Augoyard and Torgue 2005, 97). Sound resonance is an attribute expressed by a system of continuous sinusoidal moving waves and frequencies that sound and stabilize in an urban space. This resonance varies with the degree of evenness of building facades, the contours and scale of a location, and is sustained by multiple reflections off the surfaces of the buildings, objects, and walls. The acoustic colourations of hi-fi soundscapes, which in turn characterize place-temporality, offer significant information on the physical nature and scale of spaces, express aspects of its social and cultural identity, and through repetition and resonance define and enhance the experience of place-temporality in urban space.

Fieldwork observations revealed that Fitzroy Square has a distinctive soundscape, constituted by a familiar group of background sounds typically heard throughout the day—for example, rhythmic stepping as people traverse the square; murmuring of groups when they meet; talking on mobile phones; slamming of stout wooden doors as people enter and leave buildings; stopping of taxis at the corner and banging of doors as passengers are dropped off or picked up from the square. Foreground sounds are not as frequent, but accent the soundscape of the square. These include the rustling of leaves when the wind picks up before a storm or in the autumn, announcing the arrival of a particular weather event or a new season; the noisy flapping of pigeon wings when a flock collectively lifts off from the square, indicating some disruption to their calm; the music of outdoor evening concerts and residents’ garden parties announcing the arrival of summer. Foreground and background sounds resonate and alternate in patterns of intensity, duration, and repetition throughout the day, weeks, and seasons, providing distinctive acoustic colourations and a unique sonic experience in Fitzroy Square (Figure 17).

The research revealed that hi-fi soundscape and its overall sonic experience significantly characterizes urban place-temporality with its unique, clear,



**Figure 17.** Sound spectrum diagrams juxtaposed with place-rhythm spectral diagrams combining travel and social rhythms of Fitzroy Square at three different times of the day: morning rush hour (7–9 am), mid morning rest time (10–12 am) and lunch-time encounter time (12 am–2 pm). They show a direct link between the soundscape and the (frequency, intensity and duration of) rhythmic events; unique constellations of place-rhythms shape distinct soundscapes at different periods of the day in the Square.

rhythmic, and harmonious acoustic colourations. Aesthetic assemblages of recurrent and resonant sounds of social activities, movements and interactions with space, and cyclical events of nature, juxtaposed in a single location, define the aural experience of place-temporality.

### *Rhythmicity*

Soundscape studies highlight the importance of rhythm, repetition, and resonance in determining the sonic experience of place-temporality. Expanding on this, what follows will argue that not only the soundscape but the overall sensorial experience of place-temporality is rhythmic and resonant, defined by everyday temporal patterns of events in urban places.

The patterning of social space by routines of everyday life has been acknowledged by a range of scholars. Torsten Hagerstrand focused on the repetitive everyday-life activities that meet, interweave, and shape a temporal location in time-space (see Karlqvist, Anders et al. 1975; Pred 1977). Anne Buttimer spoke of event-routines that synchronize within a time-space framework, and referred to social space as a “multilayered dynamic complex” constituted by time-space rhythms (1976, 287). Both Jane Jacobs (1961) and David Seamon (1980) referred to social space as a temporal choreographed whole of body-ballets and time-space routines—in other words, as constituted by synchronized patterns of human gestures and everyday activities. Zerubavel (1981) explored social life as repetitive, ordered, and essentially rhythmic.

This social rhythmicity of the everyday is perceived in urban space. Lefebvre suggests urban places are polyrhythmic fields of interaction, shaped by repetitive social practices and other events that are overlain and harmonize in time and space (2004, 16), and that rhythmicity shapes and affects urban senses of time. Lefebvre briefly touches upon aspects of rhythmicity and the aesthetics of everyday social life when referring to music, and hints at forms of rhythm in the space of the city.

However, everyday-life rhythms can be perceived not only aurally but also visually and haptically. And everyday social life is linked to architectural space and the natural environment, both temporal and rhythmic entities in their own right. An aesthetics of temporality in urban space, and with it senses of order and tempo, will be shaped not only by the rhythms of society but also by the rhythms of nature and physical space. Places are about not only the social or the architectural form, but over all the intertwining of events of nature, space, and society; they are temporal milieus.

Place-temporal milieus are hubs of recurrent stimuli of different kinds, and a multiplicity of rhythms can be sensed and tangibly engaged with in urban space, e.g. everyday social routines, patterns of movement and other sensory practices, circadian and seasonal cycles of nature, and visual and haptic patterns of physical space. These rhythms are place-specific and unique in the way they resonate with one another—in other words, as they superimpose temporally (Wunderlich 2007, 2008).

Particular urban places resemble what could be described as a “symphony of events”. As in music, groups of unique place-rhythms imbue spaces with a temporal structure, metrical order, and pulse. As such, they organize time, and set and characterize the perceived tempo of a place (Wunderlich 2008). Also, as in music, place-rhythms are sensual and affective. They shape aesthetic rhythmical continuums and offer sensorial and meaningful temporal distinctiveness to urban places. In this way, they shape the timescape of urban places (Figures 18, 19, and 20), and define the unique aesthetics of place-temporality. As a result of place-rhythms, everyday place-temporality is characterized by a sense of pattern and rhythm, a sense of balance and resonance.

Fieldwork at Fitzroy Square reveals this place as, on various levels, rhythmically rich and distinct. Firstly, it is a rhythmic architectural environment. Its Georgian architecture provides the square with symmetrical facades of regular fenestration, metal railings, and a patterned public space design (Figures 21 and 22).

Secondly, it is a square where the rhythms of nature are vividly perceived. Daily and seasonal cycles of nature are expressed in mature trees and landscaping in the square’s central garden (Figure 23).

Thirdly, Fitzroy Square has a rich socio-cultural profile and, as a result, is a vibrant social meeting place, defined by the multiple and distinctive rhythms of everyday social life (Figures 24, 25, 26). It is a place people choose to cross on their way to work, and also a destination, a place to meet up and to spend time with



**Figures 18–19.** Synchronized ensembles of recurrent movements and social practices, and other natural and physical rhythms define the everyday temporalscapes of urban places. Photomontages by the author, Leece Street, Liverpool (18) and Piccadilly Circus, London (19), Winter 2005, “Freeze-time photography project”, 2008.



**Figure 20.** Fitzroy Square has been the subject of numerous field observations by the author, seeking to identify and decipher the various place-rhythms that define its temporal milieu. Photomontage by author, Summer 2005, “Freeze-time photography project”, 2008.



**Figure 21–22.** The rhythmic patterns of Fitzroy Square’s public realm and architecture (21). South and West facades (22).



**Figure 23.** Natural place-rhythms at Fitzroy Square—four season comparison.

friends, to socialize, relax, and play. It is a residential and communal square, where residents hold daily community activities. Furthermore, it is a multicultural space, regularly frequented by groups from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds, such as members of the Indian or African community, displaying their differences through unique dress codes and rituals (Figure 27). Also, it is a place where groups of youth in their typical street garb and hooded outfits meet later in the day (Figure 28). Fitzroy Square is situated in Fitzrovia; it is a residential square and home to many professional companies, creative services, and institutions (Figures 29, 30, 31). It is a place where daily work schedules and timetables are revealed by the timed fluctuations of social activity and collective



Figures 24. Walking past place-rhythms.



Figure 25. Routine/ritual place-rhythms.



Figure 26. Play place-rhythms.

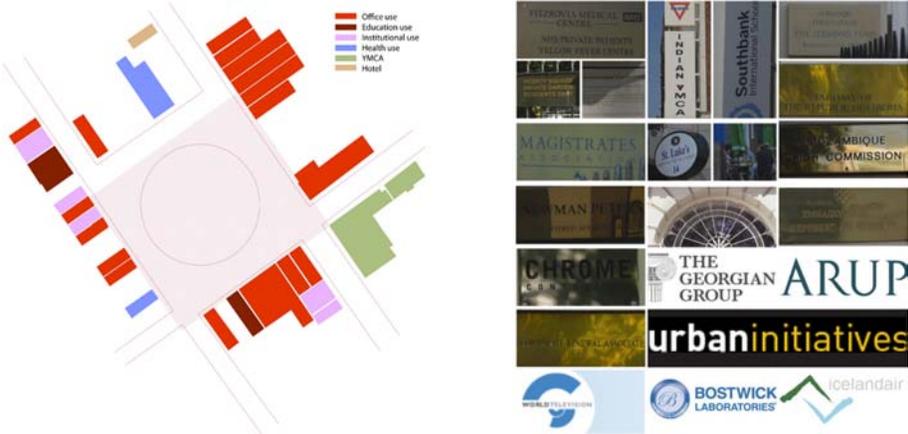


Figure 27 and 28. Cultural place-rhythms.

gatherings of white-collar workers. Lastly, Fitzroy Square is a place for organized events. It has a varied agenda of private and public events, especially during spring and summer. Unlike many other London squares, during this period the square opens its gardens to the general public. As a result, daily social life is transformed and enhanced during half of the year (Figures 31 and 32).

The rich and patterned architectural setting, the large-scale central garden that expresses natural cycles, and the unique social-cultural profile and multitude of everyday activities make Fitzroy Square rhythmically rich and distinct. It is a place where multiple place-rhythms superimpose (Figure 33), organize, and induce senses of time, and shape place-temporality in a distinctive way.

Fieldwork on the temporal expression of Fitzroy Square's everyday place-rhythms further substantiated this proposition. Four spectral diagrams (Figures 34–37) illustrate how a multitude of social (societal, cultural, and functional) place-rhythms superimpose and relate in terms of frequency, intensity, and duration, imbuing the square's daily place-temporality with a unique sense of



Figures 29 and 30. Specific institutions and offices.



Figures 31 and 32. Spring and Summer events place-rhythms.

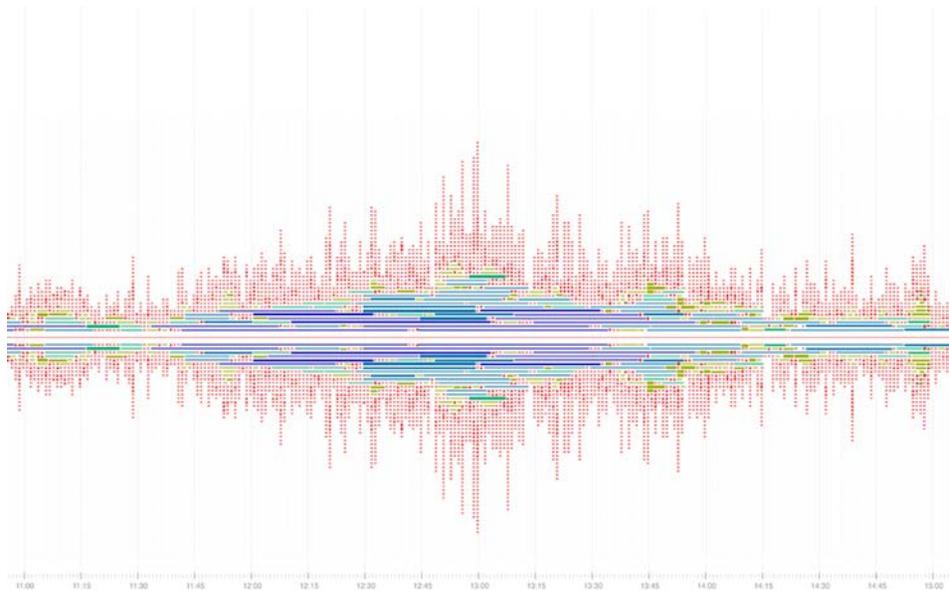
structure and flow. Each spectral rhythmic diagram refers to the same weekday in a different season. They suggest how natural seasonal rhythms influence the accentuation patterns of daily place-rhythms, resulting in distinctive summer, autumn, winter, and spring timescapes and hence affecting the changing senses of time during the various seasons in Fitzroy Square.

In sum, place-temporality is a sensual aesthetic, experienced whilst being in touch, listening to its sounds, performing and observing what happens in a place. It is also an experiential and performative aesthetic, perceived through the mode of praxis, relying on the involvement of the spectator (or *listener*) as performer. It relies on regular bodily involvement as the way to discover its temporal, sensual, and affective qualities. And it is an everyday aesthetic, an aesthetic of routine and ordinary experience (Dewey 1934), defined by the entangled temporalities of social life—the ballets of everyday life (Jacobs 1961; Seamon 1980), but also those of nature and physical space. An urban place comprises a multitude of complex rhythmic events that synchronize and recur over the day, the week, and the seasons, together making up its temporal distinctiveness. Senses of flow and distinctive experiences (Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi 1988; Dewey 1934) associated with the experience of urban place-temporality contribute to senses of fulfilment and uniqueness.

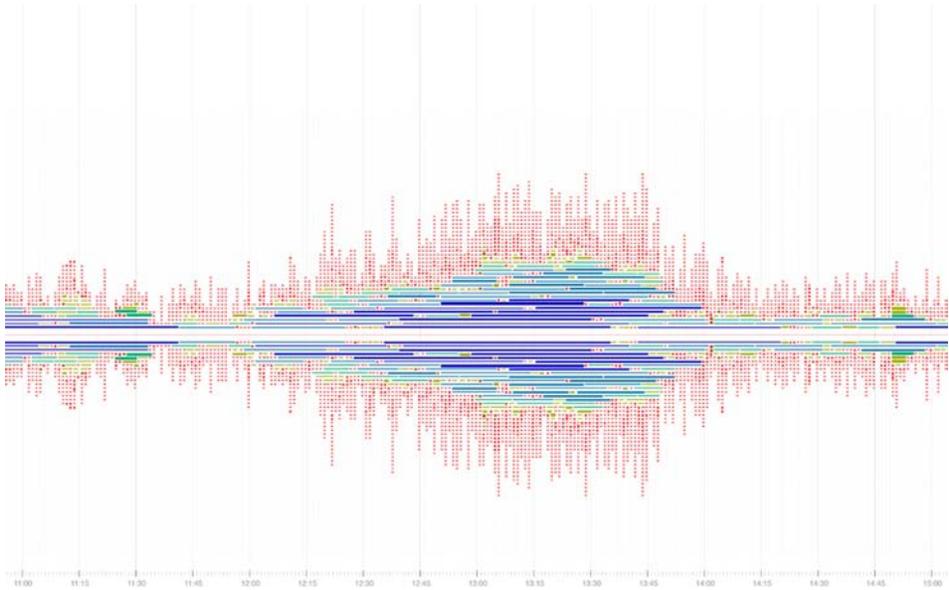
In line with its sensuality, its experiential and performative character, and its everydayness, place-temporality is best understood as “an art form”, one



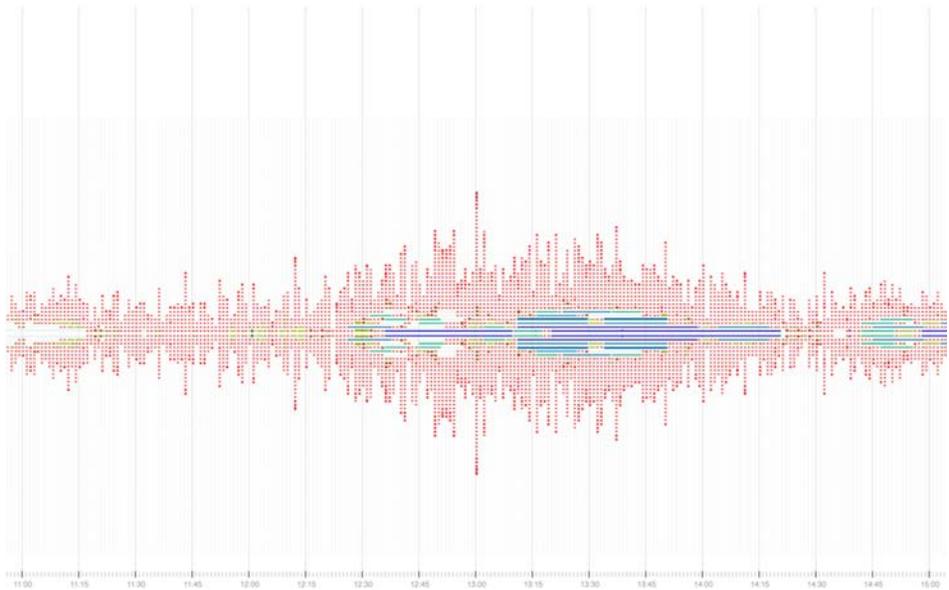
Figures 33. Place-rhythm diaries extract; site-specific writing, inspired by George Perec novels on everydaylife spaces (1998), Fitzroy Square, Wednesday, 8 June 2005 (see online article for colour version of this diagram).



Figures 34. 12h Spectral diagram combining travel and social place-rhythms, Spring weekday, Monday 31 May, 2005 (see online article for colour version of this diagram).

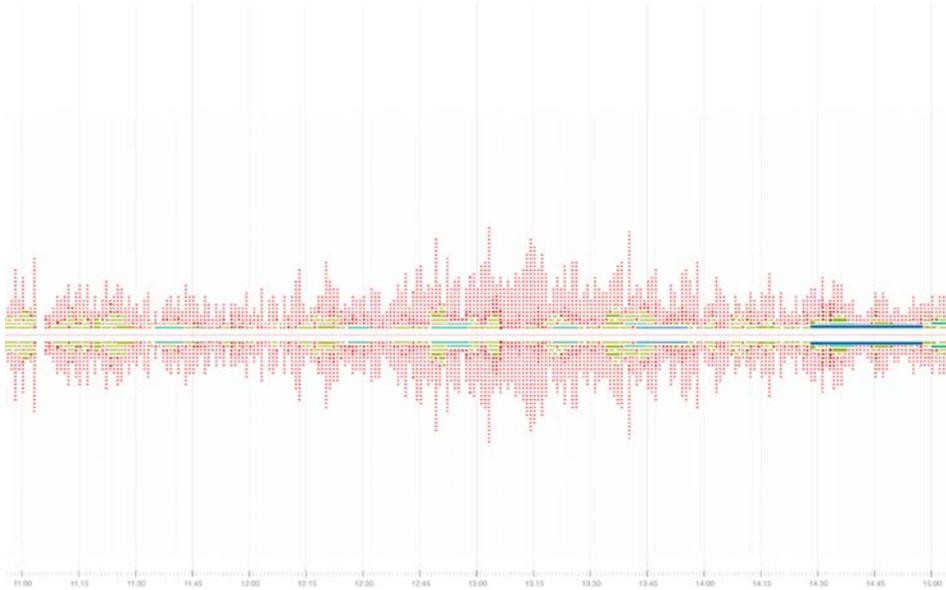


**Figures 35.** 12h Spectral diagram combining travel and social place-rhythms, Summer weekday, Monday 5 September, 2005 (see online article for colour version of this diagram).



**Figures 36.** 12h Spectral diagram combining travel and social place-rhythms, Autumn weekday, Monday 31 October, 2005 (see online article for colour version of this diagram).

whose experience is characterized by the four sensuous attributes explored above: vivid and distorted sense of time, a flow experience, a vivid soundscape, and rhythmicity. These attributes characterize urban places that “work successfully” and will as a result be temporally unique. As Jane Jacobs once put it, these urban places are “the art form[s] of the city” (1961).



**Figures 37.** 12h Spectral diagram combining travel and social place-rhythms, Winter weekday, Monday 13 February, 2005 (see online article for colour version of this diagram).

### An Aesthetic Akin to Music

Place-temporality is a quality, an aesthetic experience similar to the aesthetic experience of music. It is an experience perceived through all the senses: it involves performance, is affective, and brings meaning to urban spaces. Music also shares with place-temporality the attributes of vivid and distorted sense of time, the experience of flow, a vivid soundscape, and rhythmicity.

Place-temporality, as a meaningful phenomenological experience, relates to the understanding of “art as experience” (Dewey 1934) and “art form” (Barthes 1985). In this sense, it is defined by an aesthetics close to one of the performing arts, in particular that of music (Barthes 1985; Bowman 2006).

Traces of this relationship can also be found in aesthetics discourses on the socio-spatial complexity of city spaces, such as the socio-aesthetics of John Dewey (1934), the urban aesthetics of P. F. Smith (1980), and the everyday-life aesthetics of Henri Lefebvre (2004). These aesthetics discourses coincidentally and deliberately appropriate musical attributes such as pattern and rhythm, balance, harmony, resonance, polyrhythmia, and others as they elaborate on forms of expression of space, society, and time.

#### *Music in Urban Environment Research*

“Music and the city” has been a favourite theme in avant-garde art forms, in particular film (with its expressionist city-symphony series: Alberto Cavalcanti, *Rien que les Heures*, 1926; Walter Ruttmann, *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Grosstadt*, 1927; Mikhail Kaufman, *Moscow*, 1926; Dziga Vertov, *Man with a Movie Camera*, 1929) and music (with the *Musique Concrète* movement headed by Pierre Schaeffer [1966], within which John Cage [1961] is a reference composer). However, the musical aesthetics discourse is only gradually entering academic research on the environment. It was less than two decades ago that scholars recognized the

relationship between music and the temporality of the environment. Studies on the potential of music and soundscape research in the perception and production of the built-up environment are slowly emerging.

In environmental academic research, it was Lefebvre (2004) and Ingold (1993) who first overtly (though only briefly) referred to the relationship between urban temporality and the musical aesthetic experience. In contrast, musical research established direct links between music and the environment's soundscape much earlier, with the *Musique Concrète* treatise (Schaeffer 1966) and in the work of Murray Schafer (1977). Only recently, in 1998, was the URM, a cross-disciplinary group of researchers (musicians, architects, planners, psychologists, sociologists, and geographers), founded (out of the CRESSON and CERMA groups) to develop and disseminate research into the sensory experience of the built environment. Inspired by the *Musique Concrète* treatise and experiments, and inspired by Lefebvre's theory of everyday-life rhythms, the group's focus is the interface between sound, music, and the urban environment.

The apparent adequacy of musical aesthetics as a reference in the understanding of temporality in the urban environment inspired and encouraged this research to pursue the analogy: that between music and place-temporal aesthetics; this as further understanding on aspects of the experience and representation of time and its rhythms in urban space.

#### *Music and Place-Temporality: The Experience*

As explored in the first part of this paper, place-temporality is a fulfilling temporal experience in urban space, and a good example of "Deweyan [art as] experience". In the same way, music and place-temporality ensure "a good time": a time that is worthwhile, well spent (Määttänen 2005). And place-temporality, as with music as praxis, is an art form linked to gesture, performance, and the body (Barthes 1985).

Both Ingold (1993) and Lefebvre (2004) have suggested that the temporal experience of urban places, as perceived through the patterns of everyday life, is similar to the experience of music. Ingold writes that "music ... and its rhythms ... reflects the temporal form of social life" (1993, 160). As explored above, the role of the aural sense in the perception of place-temporality is key, as in music; a principal attribute of place-temporality is the quality of its soundscape. However, and as an understanding of "music as praxis" suggests, there is more to the sensory experience of music. The visual and haptic sensory registers play a significant role in the perception of rhythm and overall tonal structures of music as much as in the perception of place-temporality and its rhythmic patterns. Lefebvre defined the full sensorial engagement with the elements of music and place-time as "listening" (2004, 22). Place-temporality requires our involvement as performers and as "listeners".

#### *Performing*

Performing place-temporality is an experience comparable to performing orchestral music. One common attribute is resonance. Resonance is experienced by orchestral musicians in the same way as by people during their everyday social life practices, where their movements, gestures, codes, and practices respond to and synchronize with each other (Ingold 1993, 160) (Figure 38).



**Figures 38.** Temporally resonant social practices at Fitzroy Square, 2005. Photomontage by the author, "Freeze-time photography project" 2008 (30).

But there is more to music's resonance than the performers' bodies' mutual and attentive engagement. Broadly speaking, resonance means to be tuned in or in tune with, and resonance in music is also a sound attribute induced by harmoniously bound musical structures, both melodic and rhythmic. Musical resonance is experienced as a pleasurable sense of balance and agreement between audible rhythmic structures, such as two or more rhythmic units which follow or complete one another; tones close in frequency, pitch or intensity; or musical phrasings and polyphonic dialogues whose melody and rhythm are themes of a musical piece. Temporally agreeable rhythmic structures and tunes are the basis of resonance, consonance and harmony, and lastly tonality in music, in the same way as they are in urban space.

Resonance is thus another key attribute of temporality in urban space, and it is directly related to the four other attributes (a vivid sense of time, hi-fi soundscape, flow, and rhythmicity) explored in this paper. It is expressed not only in the synchronization of people's movements, gestures, codes, and practices in everyday social life, but also, more encompassingly, by the refrains (aesthetically bound regular temporal patterns) of aural, visual, and haptic, and social, physical, and natural rhythms of events, unique to one location. In the same way as in music, different kinds of rhythms group temporally and resonate aesthetically, inducing the sensorial and affective meaning of time in urban places.

### *Listening*

The experience of listening to an urban space and discovering its inherent temporality is comparable to the experience of listening to orchestral music in a concert hall and enjoying the sensual discovery of a musical piece. Both processes involve observing, hearing, and overall bodily engagement, either unconsciously enjoying and joining with the flow or consciously attending in an attempt to sense and map rhythmical relationships. It is possible to listen to (map and analyze) the aural, visual, and haptic rhythmic stimuli which together characterize place-temporality as if they constituted a piece of music. One may listen to the sound of footsteps, the horn of a passing car, or the juddering of glass bottles on the milk-cart as if they were the sounds of instruments, and observe the movement, lines, and directions of groups of people walking by as if they were the continuum of a Baroque piece; one can enjoy the singing of birds and the rustling of leafy trees, against a backdrop of intermittent seasonal events such as sunshine or rain, as if they were a change of movement, tune, or rhythmical structure in a musical composition.

In conclusion, there are evident relationships between the experience of music and that of urban place-temporality from which to learn. An exploration of these relationships opens the door to a tangible understanding of the urban sense of time, its relationship to the sense of place, and, most importantly, its significance and how it could be approached in the process of analyzing and designing urban places.

*The Elements of Place-Temporality: A Conceptual and Analytical Tool Kit for Place-Rhythm Analysis*

In the search for a useful terminology, and as a basis for new forms of analysis and representation, this paper proposes a conceptual framework based on the most significant elements and aesthetic processes of place-temporality.

According to key research literature on the aesthetics and psychology of music, musical aesthetics is principally concerned with three musical processes: rhythm, performance, and tonality (Meyer 1956; Lundin 1967; Cooper and Meyer 1960). Rhythm varies in scales and combinations, and shapes and organizes musical time; performance concerns the way musical structures unfold and are expressed through time; tonality (or tonal organization) refers to a system of fixed relationships of tones which determine the character or style of a musical piece. Tones, influenced by pitch, loudness, timbre, volume, and density, combine into melody and harmony and resonate into consonant and dissonant patterns of music. These three musical processes, rhythm, performance, and tonality, encourage sensory-affective responses to music, e.g. image-processes, connotations, and moods (Meyer 1956; Lundin 1967). These processes expose aspects of structure (scale and articulation) as well as sensorial meanings and affects of musical time. An analysis of these processes reveals the fundamentals of the aesthetics of a musical composition.

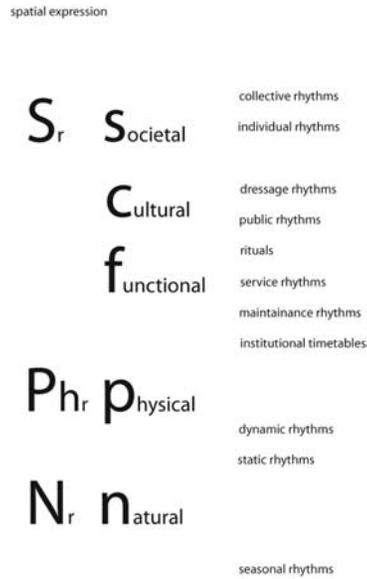
With this in mind, and drawing upon the analogy between musical and urban place time, the question is whether the aesthetic processes of music can assist an understanding of place-temporal aesthetics: specifically, whether a conceptual translation of these three temporal processes—rhythm, performance, and tonality—can frame the study of the aesthetics of temporality in urban space.

Based on the earlier explorations that illustrated how close the experience of place-temporality is to that of music, this paper suggests that this aesthetics can best be understood through the concept of place-rhythm and the triad relationship of place-temporal performance, place-tonality, and sense of time. It is thus key to understand these concepts in the context of urban space and how they articulate over time to induce sensual and affective senses of temporality.

*Place-Rhythm*

As previously explored, urban places are rhythmically complex, and this complexity is specific to their geography. Place-rhythm is the first and foremost element and process, through which the other three aesthetic processes are structured and arise. Similarly to in music, where the focus is on sound and its expression through time, when examining the rhythmical complexity of places it is key to consider both the spatial and the temporal expression of place-rhythms.

Place-rhythms are spatial events and therefore can be visualized. To capture their spatial expression in urban space, they can be grouped in relation to dominant



**Figures 39.** Place-rhythms categories according to spatial characteristics.

spatial attributes. By their very nature, and from a macro social and spatial perspective, three primary categories of place-rhythms can be defined: social, natural, and physical rhythms (Zerubavel 1981; Lefebvre 2004), as approached earlier. These, though, need to be further divided into sub-groups so as to better understand the complexity of their spatial expression in urban space (e.g. social into societal, cultural, and functional; natural into daily and seasonal; and physical into dynamic and static) (Figure 39). Also, place-rhythm diaries, presented on different occasions in this paper, in the way of daily and seasonal photographic albums (Figures 24–30), on-site personal narratives (Section 1), and place-rhythm site-specific writings (Figure 33), are key fieldwork techniques which facilitate the process of sampling place-rhythms according to their spatial expression.

The temporal expression of place-rhythms is the least explored in academic research literature. Whatever their spatial characteristics, place-rhythms are inherently temporal. Learning from music, the main temporal attributes of rhythms in urban space are articulation (structure and accentuation), scale, and its sensual forms of expression. One needs to consider these attributes to fully understand place-rhythms and how they express themselves in urban space and articulate to generate unique forms of place-temporality. The place-rhythm spectral diagram discussed previously (Figures 14–16 and 34–37) was developed as a primary analytical technique, but also and principally a mode of representation of place-rhythms, through which it is possible to understand temporal articulation (structure and accentuation), scale, and also aspects of rhythms' sensual forms of expression in urban space.

#### *The Triad: Place-Temporal Performance—Place-Tonality—Sense of Time*

An aesthetic sense of urban place-temporality depends on the relationship between groups of place-rhythms. Unique groupings of place-rhythms define distinctive forms of place-temporal performance, place-tonality, and senses of time.



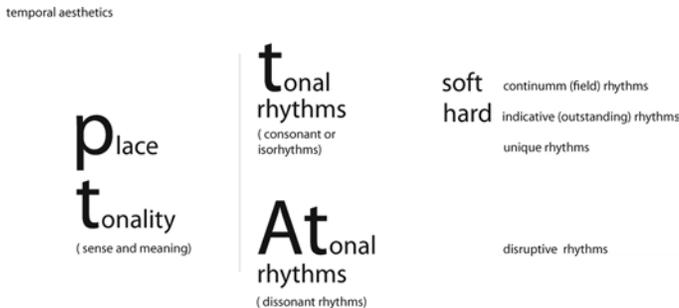
Figures 40. Place-rhythm categories according to regularity/temporal structure.

Place-temporal performance refers both to the organizational structure of temporality and the sensual experience that derives from it. Characteristic senses of structure, order, and pace are induced by groupings of place-rhythms with either a similar or complementary temporal pattern in terms of scale, structure, and accentuation. In this context, in regard to their regularity and structure and the resultant sensual expression, place-rhythms can be predictable, circumstantial, or occasional (Figure 40).

For example, daily work shifts and institutional timetables influence the temporal structure of a weekday in particular urban spaces, and the unique constellation of walking and circumstantial social practices shape specific temporal moments of the day such as rush hours, rest periods and lunch times. Together these moments shape a unique daily pattern characterizing a place-temporal structure and performance overall.

Place-tonality is the process and attribute that refers to both the sensual and affective expression of place-temporality. In music, tonality is an effect of the interaction between a series of rhythms and tones, part of a balanced (resonant) tonal structure. A tonal structure is a system of qualitative relationships between rhythm and tones, framing an audible “tonal sphere” (Meyer 1956, 214).

In tonal music, some of the system’s tones are active whilst others are structural and substantive (Meyer 1956, 214). In a tonal urban place, expressive bundles of foreground (hard) and background (soft) place-rhythms (Figure 41) shape unique sensual and affective experiences. Background place-rhythms are events frequent enough to form a backdrop that vividly highlights other temporal events. They deeply penetrate people’s hearing, sight, and touch, without which the temporal experience of places would be significantly impoverished. Background place-rhythms shape a place’s temporal continuum (Figure 42). This temporal continuum is overlain by foreground place-rhythms that imbue places with their temporal and rhythmical distinctiveness (Figures 43–45). These are usually place-specific and of a representative nature; they may, for example, refer to a particular aspect of a place’s communal life, culture, or society. Such place-rhythms bring special meaning to an urban place.



Figures 41. Place-rhythm categories according to sensual and affective forms of expression.



Figures 42. Background (continuum/soft) place-rhythms at Fitzroy Square.



Figures 43–45. Foreground (tonal unique/hard) place-rhythms at Fitzroy Square. Photomontages by the author, “Freeze-time photography project”, 2008.

Place-tonality is expressed by the close relationship between background and foreground rhythms; in other words, between place-temporal continuums and other unique rhythmic events. Place-tonality characterizes place-temporality as a harmonious form of experiential time, in contrast to other unruly, ambiguous, and uncharacteristic forms of urban space-time.

The distorted sense of time is a principal attribute of place-temporality and indicator of aspects of its temporal character and sensoriality (the starting point of this paper). It is influenced not only by the intensity of engagement but also by the density, complexity, and ultimately the pace of its place-rhythms. The number and relative paces of the recurrent practices in an urban space influence the way time is collectively sensed. Place-rhythms maybe slow or fast; in other words, structured by slow or long-enduring practices. Also, these may be continuous or intermittent. This will influence how time is experienced, inducing its slowness or fastness and its continuity or intermittency.

Together, place-temporal performance, place-tonality, and distorted senses of time define place-temporality as a high-quality experience. They are attributes of vivid temporal environments full of character.

## Conclusion

This paper offers a comprehensive framework for the understanding of the aesthetics of place-temporality. It considers how this aesthetics is expressed, experienced, and represented, as well as its significance. By drawing on aspects of theory and practice, it proposes a new perspective on the aesthetics of urban places. The paper frames this perspective through new vocabulary, concepts, and analytical practices. It defines the concept of place-temporality through the means of place-rhythm. Inspired by parallels to the aesthetics of music, the paper sets out a

conceptual tool kit for place-rhythm analysis, focusing on four principal aesthetic processes: *place-rhythm*, *place-temporal performance*, *place-tonality*, and *sense of time*. It is through these processes that place-temporality expresses and represents itself in urban space.

In fieldwork at Fitzroy Square, this research used a set of techniques for temporal and rhythm analysis and representation to help uncover and map the aesthetics of place temporality. Because the main focus of this paper is on making a new theoretical argument, it refers only briefly, and for illustrative purposes, to these techniques. There is clearly more to say on the broader methodological approach to place-rhythm analysis, but this deserves its own paper.

This paper provides a relevant contribution to urban design theory and other disciplines. It builds on seminal research studies on time, society, and behaviour in urban design by Lynch (1972) and Whyte (1980) and expands on the work of contemporary authors such as Bosselman (1998), Isaacs (2001), Carmona et al. (2003), and Knox (2005) who have linked the temporal dimension of urban spaces with aspects of experience and social performance. Furthermore, the study responds to human geography and critical spatial theory interpretations of place as practice and process (Seamon 1980; Massey 2005) and elaborates on the concept of space as performative (Thrift 2003, 2008). It also responds to research in spatial theory by de Certeau (1984), Lefebvre (2004), and Sennet (1990), who have looked at the relation of space, time, and everyday life. Here in particular the paper takes forward Lefebvre's views on time, rhythm, and everyday life (2004) and Deleuze's views of the "refrain" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) by bringing these into the urban space context and looking at their relevance to the field of urban analysis and design.

Setting out a new conceptual framework on temporal experience in cities, the paper also contributes to the contemporary discourse on the acceleration of cities and the effect it has on the quality of urban life in the twenty-first century (Parkins and Craig 2006; Knox 2005), which forms part of the wider social sustainability agenda.

Lastly, the paper highlights that there is much to learn from musical aesthetics, because there is a clear link between experience, aspects of performance, and representation in music and urban place-temporality. This is an analogy worth pursuing, because it helps us understand in particular what constitutes rhythm and tonality in urban space, and has the potential to assist the review of analytical practices and modes of representation within the design process.

### *A New Agenda for Urban Design*

From the new framework of place-temporal aesthetics explored in this paper arises a challenge to current urban design theory and practice. There is a need to argue for a new agenda of "temporal urban design". Urban design needs to move away from the conventional perspective on place and place-making, with its narrow focus on physical form, the visual, and "material beauty". If one wants to design effectively for people and society and in response to nature and space, and is concerned with everyday well-being and health in urban space, then the focus must be on places' inherent temporal identity and include considerations of their temporal performance. In this context, the physical form of the urban public realm is only one aspect; it provides the scenery and condition for the actual forms of places that are perceived in motion and through time. The actual forms of places

are ephemeral, temporal, and specifically rhythmical: the forms of people, nature, and society in space.

Understanding these forms requires a more holistic framework for urban design. This should include the sense of time, tonality, and rhythm, and consider all the senses as indispensable resources in the processes of both analysis and design. Urban design's main focus needs to be on "temporal beauty" imparted through the close grouping of urban place-rhythms, which express themselves both spatially and temporally. This will have implications for how physical space is approached through design.

In this context, the design of Fitzroy Square is about the sensorial fine grain of everyday social life activity rhythms, individual people's actions, gestures, and walking patterns, nature's daily and seasonal shadows, smells, weather patterns (cold, warm, sun, rain, or wind), the seasonal blossoming of flowers, and so on. The fine temporal grain of these social and natural place-rhythms superimposes with the similarly fine-grained pattern of the architectural and public-realm design of the square. The temporal beauty of Fitzroy Square is provided by the temporal intricacy, agreeable and recognizable structure, sensoriality, and intensity of these unique place-rhythms. This characterizes the "music" of the square.

The rhythmical analysis of Fitzroy Square also uncovered moments of conflict between social place-rhythms and physical space, for example when on warm and sunny days the square fills with people hoping to spend their lunch time here, some of whom fail to find suitable places to sit and socialize. This highlights opportunities for practical applications of rhythmical analysis to inform design. Conversely, urban design may be used to consciously orchestrate or even compose temporal events through time and space. Again, there are clear parallels to analyzing or even composing a piece of music, where voices of different instruments are orchestrated in aesthetic ways, temporally and sensorially relating to each other.

In summary, this paper explores new territory, shifting the urban design research focus and offering an opportunity for designers to rethink their approach to urban places. It offers a new and alternative perspective on urban place and place-making, one that has the potential to open a new page in urban place research and analysis which could better inform and inspire the practice of urban place analysis and design.

## Note

1. With reference to Kevin Lynch (1972). In Lynch's work, time is touched upon briefly and from different perspectives (though mostly the planning dimension). The present study focuses in depth and exclusively on the everyday sensorial dimension of time in places in the city.

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