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Street cries and the urban *refrain*

A methodological investigation of street cries

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Abstract

Street cries, though rarely heard in Northern European cities today, testify to ways in which audible practices shape and structure urban spaces. Paradigmatic for what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari call 'the refrain', the ritualised and stylised practice of street cries may point at the dynamics of space-making, through which the social and territorial construction of urban space is performed. The article draws on historical material, documenting and describing street cries, particularly in Copenhagen in the years 1929 to 1935. Most notably, the composer Vang Holmboe and the architect Steen Eiler Rasmussen have investigated Danish street cries as a musical and a spatial phenomenon, respectively. Such studies – from their individual perspectives – can be said to explore the aesthetics of urban environments, since street calls are developed and heard specifically in the context of the city. Investigating the different methods employed in the two studies and presenting Deleuze and Guattari's theory of the refrain as a framework for further studies in the field, this article seeks to outline a fertile area of study for sound studies: the investigation of everyday refrains and the environmental relations they express and perform. Today changed sensibilities and technologies have rendered street crying obsolete in Northern Europe, but new urban ritornells may have taken their place.

Urban spaces and their social qualities are rarely discussed in auditory terms. Architects, planners and designers tend to choose maps, drawings and models as tools for representation and design, and, correspondingly, discourses on the meanings and qualities of urban space are often based on visual impressions. Easily overlooked in such discourses are the dynamic and multi-sensuous aspects of everyday experience. The theoretician of everyday life Michel de Certeau has argued that the multiple practises which fill and shape urban space easily escape the attention of 'strategic thinking' (de Certeau, 1988). More specifically, de Certeau pointed to walking in the city as the practise of shaping urban environments on a 'tactic' level. Through his habitual practises of routes and gaits, the city dweller articulates another, anthropological spatiality, referring to an '*opaque and blind* mobile characteristics of the city' (ibid., p. 97; emphasis in original). Yet less attention has been paid to another range of tactic operations, namely the practises of sound making. Like pedestrian acts, sonic utterances perform a double operation of adapting to and transforming the environment.¹ Football fans, vendors and rioters all know the importance of being audible. Indeed, sound making is a powerful means to demonstrate presence and take possession of urban space during concerts, sport events or late at night in the city. But also more humble sound acts like humming, whistling and the sound of footsteps may be understood as appropriations of environments. The production of such 'sonic marks'² relies on an intricate interplay between impression and expres-

sion, perception and production, through which subjects make themselves felt in the world and balance inner and outer realities.

It is often assumed that an environment can be analysed as an 'object' of study. Hence, the concept of 'soundscape' concerns the 'sonic environment' or, as R. Murray Schafer defined it in 1977, 'any portion of the sonic environment regarded as a field of study' (in De Certeau, 1988, pp. 91-110). But while modern recording technology does facilitate the definition of an auditory 'field of study', it should be kept in mind that everyday listening takes place in interchange with various registers of sound making. Quite often what is heard is measured against one's own sound, such as breathing or walking. Voluntarily or not, we do contribute to sonic environments, and in the context of the city these environments are generally filled with noises of other people. It remains a challenge for sound studies to articulate and tackle the field of sonic practises, which feed on and feed into the environmental context. In a paper from 1998 Jean-Paul Thibaud calls for a 'praxiological' approach to sound. He argues that 'Sounds must be considered as a public account of the social world. They can be observed and described as an expression of the way we live together and share our common daily experience. An *etnophony* of everyday life could be achieved by recording all kinds of ordinary soundful practises' (Thibaud, 1998, p. 21; emphasis in original). Recently, in *Acoustic Territories*, Brandon Labelle mapped some features of an auditory urban geography of relations, itineraries and practises conditioned by acoustics. Taking special interest in buskers and their appearance on subway platforms, Labelle tracks relationships between sound events and the environments in which they occur, e.g. singing in the echoic cave below ground as a subversive strategy (Labelle, 2010). It is in the context of such increased interest in the relationships between sound and social and acoustical environments that new interest can be taken in such a fairly well-documented phenomenon as street cries.

Incorporating observations of sonic marks in analytical studies is not an easy task and calls for methodological investigations. Focusing on what was once a prominent feature of European urban environments (and still is in many Asian cities), street cries,³ this article charts two distinct methods employed in the study of street cries at their heyday in Copenhagen, and it presents Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of the 'refrain' as a theoretic framework for understanding the significance of such calls.

Deleuze and Guattari's refrain

In the course of their investigation of different forms of knowledge in *A Thousand Plateaus* Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari introduce the concept of the 'refrain', which basically means repetition. The translation of the French *ritournelle* to the English *refrain*, though, does not account for a few important aspects in the origi-

nal concept. The French term *ritournelle* literally means *little return* and *little change*,⁴ and, more importantly, Deleuze and Guattari develop the term in close dialogue with the ethological concept of ‘ritual’ and ‘ritualisation’. For Deleuze and Guattari the refrain involves the kind of repetition that may gain ‘expressional value’. The sales call is one example: the ‘merchant refrain’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 2003, p. 327). Such calls, like bird song or musical refrains, develop a specific sensorial quality through repetition; they become expressive. What Deleuze and Guattari develop is a theory of ways in which behaviour may gain expressional value independent of the original or primary function such behaviour may have. They borrow from ethology, particularly from Konrad Lorenz, who, based on zoological studies, describes how fixed action patterns develop from functional action patterns and over time become autonomous instincts that demand fulfilment without having a clear function (Lorenz, 1965, pp. 58-59).⁵ The behavioural pattern then demands repetition without purpose. It becomes a habit or a refrain, through which a basically chaotic world of impulses and impressions is structured and ordered into what could be termed ‘rules of engagement’, establishing a territorial system. Habits, patterns and repetitions seem significant, but they may not have a precise significance and may not, therefore, gain much attention in everyday life as well as in scholarly discourse. Yet, Deleuze and Guattari propose, such patterns may be points of anchorage through which environments are felt and performed.

What Deleuze and Guattari track is a form of significance operating on a level below signification (such as specific functions and meanings). The refrains of an environment may be understood to have specific meanings; e.g. sales calls operate as commercials for the goods in question and as signature tones for the vendor, but understood in their environmental context such calls express what Deleuze and Guattari call a territorial ‘assemblage’ (French: *agencement*) (Deleuze & Guattari, 2003, pp. 323-334, 503-505). In the case of street cries, we may understand the concerned assemblage as relating to the urban environment, and we may say that such refrains express relations to the physical, social, cultural situation concerned. It is obvious that such assemblages are of interest for cultural analyses, and the question arises of how such refrains may be observed and analysed. Moreover, Deleuze and Guattari argue, what is also stated in their selection of terms, that sound compared to other forms of expression, such as gesture and visual display, has a predominant role as refrains (ibid., p. 323). Consequently, what we may see outlined in Deleuze and Guattari’s theory is a rich area of study, through which sound studies may become relevant for the larger context of cultural studies, that is, the investigation of everyday refrains and the environmental relations they express.

Musicology, particularly ethnomusicology, has a tradition for investigating relationships between sound/music, ritual and meaning. A particularly interesting study of street cries comes from the Danish composer Vagn Holmboe, who had

become accustomed to the methods of ethnomusicology during a period of field-work in Transylvania, before he took up studies of street calls in Copenhagen. As we shall see, he developed a sophisticated understanding of the ‘ritualisation’ or ‘stylisation’ of street cries and, thus, shows us street cries as urban refrains. While Holmboe tends to look at the artistic character of the calls and the caller, a few observations by the architect Steen Eiler Rasmussen may supplement Holmboe’s approach and emphasise the environmental and perceptual aspects of street cries. But before we go into depth with the two approaches, a historical perspective will chart the character of street cries as simultaneously a part of the environment, easily overheard and rarely reflected upon, and at the same time able to stand out as an object of scrutiny, nuisance and a container for all kinds of symbolic meaning relating to urbanism, noise, popular and folkloristic culture, traditionalism and even nationalism.

Listening to the cries of the city – a historical perspective

Sales calls may be one of the most enduring features of urban sonic environments. The streets and squares of the city have long resounded with the names and prices of goods, in some cases structured melodically and rhythmically like signature tones for both the item and the salesman.

In a study of *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England* Bruce R. Smith quotes the measures of composers Richard Dering, Thomas Weelkes, Thomas Ravenscroft and Orlando Gibbons, who all in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries transcribed cries they heard in the streets of London into musical notation, intending to transform these street cries into consort music for voice and viols (Smith, 1999, p. 64). Smith, also a scholar of early modern drama, finds in the recirculation of street cries in musical composition and in theatre performances ‘a rogation of the city soundscape’ (ibid., p. 67). Scoring the cries and composing with them was a way for the artists to hear and render audible the ‘city as a whole’. Street cries thus become synonymous with the urban environment and the street life that takes place outside theatres and concert halls. This is possible, Smith argues, because street cries, apart from making sense and displaying a function for the interested customer, may act like environmental sound: ‘Along the arch from primal cry to speech to music to sounds in nature, street cries occupy a position somewhere between speech and environmental sound. Like speech, they possess semantic meaning; like environmental sound, they are dispersed in space and time’ (ibid., pp. 67–68).

While Bruce R. Smith in the works of Dering, Weelkes, Ravenscroft and Gibbons hears impulses to ‘domesticate’ the sounds of the city in a musical context (Smith, 1999, p. 64), R. Murray Schafer tells another story about the relation between indoor and outdoor music in the nineteenth century. Here the fascination and the impulses

to musicalise city life are substituted for a conflict between indoor and outdoor music, a conflict Schafer describes as one between professional musicians and street music and cries (Schafer, 1977, pp. 64-67). In *The Tuning of the World* Schafer outlines a whole intellectual history from the inclusions or exclusions of environmental sound in music. According to Schafer, such changing attitudes towards street music even led to the disappearance of street music in the twentieth-century metropolis, where aesthetes and collectors developed a hostility towards urban music. Schafer mentions a bylaw passed in Weimer at the end of the eighteenth century that forbids the making of music, unless conducted behind closed doors, and a bill proposed by Michael T. Bass in 1864 England designed to put an end to street music in the metropolis. Bass in his bill refers to a letter from two hundred leading composers and music professors in the metropolis, complaining vigorously of the way in which their professional duties are seriously interrupted (ibid., p. 66). Such controversies between institutionalised music and street cries and music accentuate the barriers that separate acceptable sound from noisy sound. Both social and cultural distinctions are accentuated in such judgements. But such distinctions are continuously subject to changes according to technological developments. The historian David Garrioch in the article 'Sounds of the city: the soundscape of early modern European towns' notices that the number of carriages in Paris went from three in 1550 to around twenty thousand in 1750 and continued to increase thereafter. Garrioch then cites a source on street criers in Paris from the late eighteenth century, 'Their throats overcome the noise and the dim of the cross-roads [...] only those will succeed who cry their merchandise in a loud and shrill voice' (Garrioch, 2003, p. 21).

It seems probable that the technological development, particularly the spread of vehicles, caused the general noise level to become an increasing nuisance for the middle classes. But it is somewhat symptomatic, as Schafer notices, that it is not street noise in general that is fought in the bylaws and bills proposed during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but rather the human voices which merely seek audibility within this noise. Rather than preparing less noisy roads or improving traffic regulation, campaigns are directed against the peddlers, hawkers and street musicians. Again it seems the cries and songs performed in the streets come to function as knots or nodes in the diffuse phenomenon of urban noise. The cries may just be the topping of urban noise, but since they are designed to stand out from urban noise, it is possible to direct anger and frustration towards them. They come to represent the noisy, dirty and somewhat uncontrollable street life, from which the bourgeois rulers felt increasingly detached, while they themselves demand still more powerful systems of circulation for people and goods. But bills and bans did not put an end to cries in the streets. As R. Murray Schafer concludes, the legislation and the public opinion probably had little impact on city life compared to the technological development that would transform urban environments through the

twentieth century: 'It was not the result of centuries of legislative refinement but the invention of the automobile that muffled the voices of the street cries' (Schafer, 1977, p. 67).⁶ While such effective rhetoric may slightly overstate the point, there can be no doubt of the profound influence motorised traffic had on urban sonic environments, where it remains a dominant and ubiquitous feature. In her study of *The Soundscape of Modernity* Emily Thompson also notices how the disciplinary acts of silencing in early twentieth-century North America cleared the way for another kind of noise: 'Ironically, by silencing peddlers and then removing them from the streets altogether, city officials only cleared the way for more powerful noises of motorized traffic' (Thompson, 2004, p. 125). Thompson brilliantly shows how noise control tended to be social control: 'Laws newly passed or newly enforced at the urging of noise abaters typically identified relatively powerless targets, noisemakers who impeded, in ways not just acoustical, the middle-class vision of a well-ordered city' (ibid., p. 123).

Even while new noisy technology began to fill the streets, new interest was invested in street cries during the twentieth century. With the rise of ethnomusicology around the turn of the century street cries became subject of more systematic studies, transcriptions and positive attention. Two dissertations were published on the subject in Holland in 1909 and 1919, respectively (Garms, 1909; Sagers 1919), and the Danish composer Vagn Holmboe transcribed and systematised 366 street cries in Copenhagen in the period 1935-1940.⁷ It was now possible to venture out into the streets and study street cries according to the same methods that were applied to the music of indigenous people around the world. Also national broadcasting showed interest in the 'cries and the odd melodies' of the street. Carried out into the city in transmission wagons, Danish broadcasting was now able to record street life on acetate disks. From 1938 a seven-person Chevrolet had made it possible to travel smaller streets, and in 1940 Svend Carstensen made 14 records with street vendors in central Copenhagen and broadcasted the records in a 29-minute feature about *The Romances of Street Vending*.⁸ Street vending had by then become a somewhat old-fashioned and romantic phenomenon that may well have accommodated the agendas and limitations of broadcasting in occupied Denmark. During the following five occupied years at least four features about street vendors in Copenhagen were broadcasted and archived by the Danish Broadcasting Company.⁹ But quickly after the end of the occupation, national broadcasting's interest in street life seemed to fade, while the *The Danish Folklore Collection* kept on collecting and recording Danish street cries. The last big collection of Copenhagen cries is from 1959, where Anders Enevig, equipped with a mobile tape recorder, documented the cries and lives of street hawkers, rag pickers and vagabonds in Copenhagen and the Danish provinces. In 1988 Svend Nielsen from *The Danish Folklore Collection* collected previous recordings in a tape publication and added two recordings of contemporary cries.¹⁰ In an article from 2007 Svend Nielsen concludes:

Today we probably have to realise that street cries in Denmark are history. At the old vegetable market on Israels Plads in Copenhagen one may still hear a faint reflection when the vendors announce their goods – a particular accentuation of the words and a particular melody of the voice, but that is street talk, not street cries, and that relates to approaching people within a five metre radius. (Nielsen, 2007, p. 71; my translation from Danish)

Listening to the recordings, it is easy to hear that the occasional sales call heard at markets today follow other rules than the historical street cries from mobile vendors, hawkers whose voices needed both to be heard clearly and, at the same time, to be dispersed in space and time.

Collecting a number of different approaches to street cries demonstrates their double character of being, on the one hand, dispersed in urban space and, on the other hand, objects that easily lend their form to all kinds of significations. It could be argued that such a character applies to many kinds of environmental sound and to human voices in particular, but I will maintain that it is the ritualised and organic repetition of the calls, their sensitivity to contexts and environments, their ritor-nalised character, to use the original term of Deleuze and Guattari, that make such sonic marks ready objects for all kinds of signification. Acting as auditory ornaments, pertaining not to places, but to environments, street cries may give access to deeper levels of territorial signification. The following provides an analysis of two studies of the phenomenon. In each their way Vagn Holmboe and Steen Eiler Rasmussen demonstrate the fertility of the subject, at their time a predominant figure in the streets of Copenhagen.

Vagn Holmboe and the stylisation of street cries

At a crucial junction for European street trade the composer Vagn Holmboe roamed the streets of Copenhagen from 1935 to 1940 in order to study the musical structure of sales calls. In his later publication of the thorough study *Danish Street Cries. A Study of the musical structure and a complete edition of tunes with words collected before 1960* Holmboe opens by recognising that he had lived with the cries for years without noticing them:

In the years between 1930 and 1940 the city of Copenhagen abounded with street cries. Like so many other town-dwellers I had heard street hawkers daily cry out their fish, fruit and vegetables and from time to time I had also bought from them, but apart from that I had paid no further attention to the cries. They were merely registered as a characteristic and humorous trait in the city scene, a part of everyday life, and so well known that they rarely aroused particular interest. (Holmboe, 1988, p. 11)



Illustration 1: From Holmboe, 1988 p. 12: Photo of Vagn Holmboe in Transylvania (private photo)

Holmboe had studied composition for three years at The Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen and probably spent more time thinking about musical composition than about street cries. But upon returning to Copenhagen after one year of studying and collecting folk music in Rumania, he was prepared to listen: 'My professional interest was aroused so much that I took down almost by habit the most characteristic cries that I heard in the streets' (ibid.). Holmboe, in his sober and downright tone, notices how sound events in urban space, even in rather elaborate forms, do not stand out, but, due to habitual repetition, are registered as a part of the 'everyday environment' or the 'street scene'. They are, in the words of Smith, 'dispersed in space and time'. The cries enter into the collage of street life, of cars and people, shouts, talk, maybe the singing of a bird and the clatter of the neighbours, all heard with a kind of unfocused attention. Focused listening is not easily activated in relation to everyday sonic occurrences, particularly at Holmboe's time, when portable recording equipment was not yet commonly available. For Holmboe the activation of focused listening involves what he terms 'a professional interest' that had evolved through his folk music studies. But the professionalisation of Holmboe's listening skills in the process of his work with street cries develop into a three-step operation: on spot registration of the cries with notebook and pen; invention of a transcriptional method particularly suited for street cries; and a typification of the collected material. Far from his English predecessors Holmboe, then a trained composer and later to be internationally acknowledged as such, really plays the ethnomusicologist. He develops a highly disciplined method of transcription and

proposes an interesting theory about the stylisation of street cries, which will be of value to the present investigation.

Holmboe notices how the skills for crying were already eroding by the time he was studying them. The situation at that time was influenced by the economic depression during the 1930s. Young men without a job found street hawking a way out of their troubled situation and started to sell cheap vegetables and fruit in the streets. He summarises the situation:

So due to the dismal economic situation, the street cries flourished in the streets of Copenhagen in the 1930's although in a rather different way than before. Then, practically all hawking was done by hawkers who had a license and also some experience in crying. The many unemployed seldom stuck to hawking for long. They hardly got further than crying in strained, hoarse voices, – short exclamations with no fullness of tone –, and the hawkers found the 'screaming' intolerable but necessary. What they really wanted was a license to a permanent stall where crying was neither necessary nor permitted. Others, however, kept on hawking and by and by they succeeded in finding the 'right tone', i.e. they began to sing. (Holmboe, 1988, pp. 15-16)¹¹

The paragraph summarises not only the social and legal situation for street hawking, but also Holmboe's most far-reaching hypothesis: that survival in the trade is synonymous with singing rather than screaming. Becoming a professional street vendor either requires a stall or a song. One may even say that the song transforms the street into one big stall for the hawker. Thus, in a very Deleuzian way, singing in the street for Holmboe is a matter of 'becoming' a street hawk. When this becoming is achieved through singing proper, both orator and environment are transformed: the street is no longer just a locus of transportation and the vendor no longer just a pedestrian; but the hawker is a proprietor of the urban flux of commodities, values and people. The hawker orates the social space of the street.

Holmboe rather romantically shows us that hawking is an art form pertaining to the urban, just like the singing of shepherds, an earlier object of Holmboe's studies, is an art form pertaining to the rural. But even though his main interest is musical calls, and even though the ultimate goal of his studies is to investigate 'why one could find types of songs known from the Gregorian plainsong flourishing in the streets of Copenhagen', Holmboe ends up taking a lot of care in investigating 'how this music form had



Illustration 2: From Holmboe, 1988 p. 17:
Photo of flower monger Svendsen
by Meta Holmboe

arisen' (Holmboe, 1988, p. 11).¹² He chooses to incorporate in the study not only the elaborate street songs of knife-grinders, for example, but all sorts of street cries, the term designated as 'the cries and songs of itinerant vendors' (ibid., p. 14). The term, and the study, then comprises a continuum from speech to cry and singing. Holmboe arranges the material in three basic groups, and sets the knife-grinders' elaborate song aside: the half-cry designated as an alternation between speech and rhythmic cries. 'Examples of ordinary strident speech and cries have only been recorded if they contain rhythmic figures or definable tones, that is, when more stable musical elements occur' (ibid., p. 28). Next come the elementary cries, which Holmboe describes as a stylisation of the half-cry: 'the short non-legato exclamation is transformed and becomes stylized: the tone becomes sonorous, accents and portamenti are reduced, and intervals between sung tones may be clearly defined' (ibid., p. 31). Last come cries dominated by motifs where 'a particular melodic phrase usually opens or colours the cry' (ibid., p. 34). Going from elementary rhythmic figures and definable tones, in itself a stylisation of ordinary speech, to melodic motifs, the professionalisation and stylisation of hawkers are also a 'musicalisation'. The hawker learns to sing. It is obvious that through such schooling the hawker also accommodates established aesthetic norms. But Holmboe does not stress this point, since street cries neither for him nor for his contemporaries seem to be an object of aesthetic scrutiny. Rather, for Holmboe the stylisation is a matter of finding a form within the repertoire presented by other hawkers or through improvisation. Hawkers generally maintain that they do not sing: 'singing that's something we hear on the radio. No we cry' (ibid., p. 16), as one hawker says.

Holmboe puts an effort into understanding the phenomenon of street cries on its own terms, rather than merely transcribing heard cries as musical scores, as did Dering, Weelkes, Ravenscroft and Gibbons two centuries earlier. Not only does he describe the social and economic situation surrounding the cries, he also performs brief interviews with hawkers and develops a method for transcribing cries from musical notation. In accordance with the semi-musicality of the phenomenon, he uses a notational system with neither key signatures nor time signatures or bar lines, and he invents symbols to describe the structures he finds are of significance in the cries. Still, Holmboe does not entirely escape the tendency towards the 'domestication' of street cries on behalf of their context-specific nature. This has to do with the efforts he puts into giving 'as adequate an impression of the musical qualities as possible' (Holmboe, 1988, p. 19). Holmboe took down calls after hearing them a few times. Often he would then follow the hawker, trying to validate his transcription. His main concern would not be the possible variations that took place on the route, but rather 'to seek that which is *typical*, i.e. the feature which occur most frequently in the hawker's cries, so that the example in the collection may be classified as the hawker's usual cry' (ibid., p. 21). Though such a method would, at the time, be the










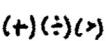




1.  Speech or cry without fixed pitch.
2.  Fixed tone with no sonority.
3.  Sounds with weaker strenght.
4.  Appoggiatura of very short duration.
5.  Glissando of a fairly light nature.
6.  Portamento (a slow glissando).
7.  A wide vibrato.
8.  Is valid until a change of note.
9.  Raising – lowering by about 1/4 tone.
10.  Does not always occur in the individual cry.
11.  Static accent (grave accent, agogic accent).
12.  Dynamic accent (acute accent, stress accent).
13.  Ecstatic accent (stress and agogic accent).
14.  Accent shift (syncope, agogic shift).

Illustration 3: From Holmboe, 1988 p. 19-20: Illustration of the symbols Holmboe used to transcribe street cries

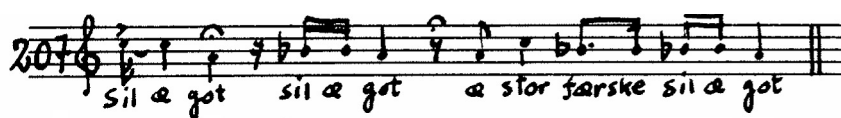


Illustration 4: From Holmboe, 1988 p. 122: Holmboe's transcription of Dagmar Hansen calling with herring, 1936

only way of obtaining reliable material for studies of melodic structures, it does tend to attribute specific calls to specific hawkers as expressions of a personal style, while downplaying variations according to contextual factors, such as fluctuations in commercial supply and demand, or in the physical or social environment. It is difficult, if not impossible, from Holmboe's material to see any interplay with the environment, though his hypothesis about the stylisation of street cries presumes that such interplay exists. Variations according to neighbourhood, architecture, atmosphere or mood are more or less omitted in Holmboe's stringent approach. One curious example, though, is recorded: one day the hawker Johan Poulsen, aged 40, varies his crying on the subject of flowers. The word *hydrangea* would usually be followed by a simple recitation, but this sunny day in June he continues with the tunes from a well-known song called 'Valencia': 'Hortensia la la la ...'. When asked if he usually made use of well-known melodies, he replied, 'No, but today the sun is shining and then the idea came to me. It is something entirely different – it just came to me' (ibid., p. 62).

One could say that the professional attitude towards street cries, which Holmboe develops during his studies, tends to disregard his initial impression of street cries as 'a characteristic and humorous trait in the city scene, a part of everyday life'. The professional and trained listening that the study requires of Holmboe bears resemblance to what Michel Chion calls 'reduced listening', one that 'takes the sound – verbal, played on an instrument, noises, or whatever – as itself the object to be observed instead of as a vehicle for something else' (Chion, 1994, p. 29). Clearly, such analytical listening is far from the registers of auditory attention normally activated in the city. When simply being in and hearing a city most sounds are, with Holmboe's own words, 'so well-known that they rarely arouse particular interest'. Many types of sonic events, including sales calls, seem to be able to blend into the environment and partake in the definition of lived and social space, without causing much attention to others than those listening for it. They are dispersed in time and space to such an extent that they tend to appear as environmental qualities rather than events. At the same time, sales calls are, as by a sudden turn, able to stand out and attract attention from potential customers, from those disturbed by the general noise level or aesthetes suddenly paying attention to the unheard art of the street. Such a tendency of an auditory phenomenon to snap in and out of focus is rarely accounted for. Many careful studies of everyday sounds, like Holmboe's, bring to mind the quotidian character of the phenomenon and then proceed

with in-depth analyses of structure and content, leaving behind the more environmental aspects of the phenomenon. While Holmboe brilliantly describes the structure of typical calls, further investigation of the phenomenon could proceed with enquiries into the environmental character of specific calls and variations between calls according to environmental change. One approach to the spatial character of street cries in Copenhagen was actually presented one year before Holmboe commenced his studies by the architect and architectural critic Steen Eiler Rasmussen.



Illustration 5: From Holmboe, 1988 p. 91: Photo of fish monger Dagmar Hansen from Politikens Press Service

Steen Eiler Rasmussen and street tones

Even before Holmboe began his thorough studies of Danish street cries, the young architect Steen Eiler Rasmussen had paid enthusiastic attention to one particular hawker named Dagmar Hansen. In 1929 Rasmussen published an essay in the newspaper *Nationaltidende* solely about Dagmar Hansen's cries.¹³ Like Holmboe, Rasmussen opens his text from an everyday life perspective:

How many mornings have I been sitting with my work, ready to write, and heard the singing of Dagmar Hansen? It was not the well-known Dagmar Hansen, who is more appearance than voice, but a fish seller, who walked and sold herring in the side streets of Østerbro and who was sheer voice: from a great distance, one heard her shrill voice stand in the street: *herring is good, herring is good*. (Rasmussen, 1940, p. 48; my translation from Danish)

Rasmussen recounts the iterant event by positioning himself leaning over his work in what is probably a habitual posture. Seeing himself at his desk in front of the open window, he recalls the 'shrill voice standing in the street' and the call emerges, as from a long gone past. Rasmussen consequently uses the past tense when the

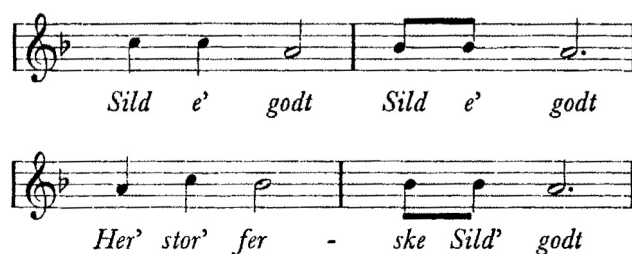


Illustration 6: From Holmboe, 1988 p. 52:

Steen Eiler Rasmussen's transcription of Dagmar Hansen calling with herring

refers to Dagmar Hansen's cries, even though she is still alive at the time and can hardly have been long gone from her daily routine in Livjærgade in November 1929. Indeed, one year later, in 1930, Hansen is still vigorously alive, and Steen Eiler Rasmussen arranges a gramophone recording of her cries.¹⁴ It seems the temporal distance makes it easier to recount and analyse the cry, no more just a habitual and scarcely noticed part of the street scene, but now the focus of attention. The cry even gains artistic value in its absence: 'The more I think about it, the more I realise what a unique person she was, how splendid her song was' (Rasmussen, 1940, p. 48; my translation from Danish). It seems that the achieved distance to the subject, Dagmar Hansen's voice in Livjærgade, and Steen Eiler Rasmussen's own habitual perception of the voice somehow support the significance of the cry. Far from just being an utterance, it appears as a sonic mark of a specific time and environment, and it reminds us that one day the everyday scene turned into inspiration, bringing the writer in new directions.

While Holmboe activates his abilities as composer and trained ethnomusicologist when tuning in on the cries, Rasmussen has another angle to the phenomenon. A trained and practising architect, essayist and critic, he brings to mind that 'certain big, old cathedrals reverberated in a special way, since one particular tone and all its overtones kept on ringing longer than other tones under the high arches', and introduces his hypothesis: 'I think Dagmar Hansen has found Livjærgade's special tone, which hits back from houses and paving stones and reverberates from a distance of a hundred meters as a long singing' (Rasmussen, 1940, pp. 48-49). Not only did Dagmar Hansen manage to find the tone of the street, according to Steen Eiler Rasmussen her cries were adjusted to the physical surroundings. When she reached the end of Livjærgade and turned up Classensgade, which only had houses on one side, her voice would fade (*ibid.*, p. 49). Or, as he recounts in a TV programme about the relations between space and acoustics in 1968: 'When she reached Kastelsvej, she went something like half a tone down. I could imagine that she accommodated to the somewhat changed acoustics'.¹⁵ Unfortunately, we do not have documentation of such performance by Dagmar Hansen today, so Rasmussen's observation cannot be confirmed. There seems to be a slight displacement from the initial observation

of the voice fading to the recollection of a modulation of tone forty years later. While the fading voice might pertain to the reception of the phenomenon, the change of tone implies an adjustment in the calling. Whether we may ascribe such ability and singing capacity to Dagmar Hansen remains uncertain, but the attention to the adaptive aesthetics of sales calls that Steen Eiler Rasmussen points to is important. For Rasmussen, Dagmar Hansen not only becomes the voice of street life in general, but of one street in particular. Her song becomes the song of Livjærgade and, moreover, the song of Rasmussen's mornings. Dagmar Hansen becomes the street, while Steen Eiler Rasmussen, inside his study, becomes a part of the street.

Indeed, there does seem to be just as intimate a connection between the street cries and the location as between the cry and the person performing it. In the radio feature *The Romance of Street Vending* several vendors emphasise that they only sell in particular neighbourhoods, and asked about the origin of the cries, the fish seller says, 'You learn it gradually, when you start driving on the street. If you have just a bit of singing voice, you get used to taking the different melodies for different goods from elder hawkers'.¹⁶ Obviously, the calls are passed on through generations of hawkers and accommodated by the individual sellers, their style and capacity as well as by the external conditions: the amount of traffic, the physical shape of the streets and the type of street life taking place. The kind of probing for audibility that takes place in the street is already implied in Holmboe's observation of stylisation and musicalisation. But Rasmussen reminds us that the 'urban street' is not unambiguous, but varies according to location and moment, and that hawkers are able to adapt to changing conditions, just like opera singers adapt to concert halls. Another thing that Rasmussen reminds us of is that such refrains not only accommodate a relation between the producer and the environment; they also constitute a mark through which the listener may become involved.

While the newspaper essay from 1929 focuses entirely on Dagmar Hansen's performance in Livjærgade, in the 1968 TV programme Steen Eiler Rasmussen carefully lets the street and the cries evoke each other. While the first programme in a series of two, *Something about Architecture* (*Noget om Arkitektur*), is devoted to the outer shape of buildings, this second programme, *More about Architecture* (*Noget Mere om Arkitektur*), turns to what Rasmussen calls the 'essence': the experience of spaces. Rather unconventionally he devotes the full programme to acoustics as a way of articulating space through sound. Piano music, laughing and playing children, military parades, street cries etc. characterise ecclesiastical, urban and musical spaces and give convincing account of the intimate relations between sound and space. As Rasmussen states in his famous book *Experiencing Architecture*:

[M]ost people would say that as architecture does not produce sound, it cannot be heard. But neither does it radiate light and yet can be seen. We see the light it reflects and thereby gain an impression of the form and material. In the same way, we hear

the sounds it reflects and they, too, give us an impression of form and material. Differently shaped rooms and different materials reverberate differently. (Rasmussen, 1964, p. 224)

No doubt, Rasmussen had an ear for architecture. His attention to street cries as well as playing children in the spiral staircase of Copenhagen's Round Tower shows that he did not only conceptualise such relations as one between professional architecture and music, but as a general exchange that takes place at the level of everyday life between spatial form and sonic practise: 'In the bathroom with its hard acoustics of tiles and water in the tub, it is tempting to express oneself by singing and whistling. And just try to let some children in to the staircase of round tower, which is like an endless spiral gate. And then listen!'¹⁷ The quote is followed by a fifteen second sequence showing a group of twenty to thirty children around the age of ten running down the staircase laughing, giggling and crying in a loud resonating murmur. What is experienced here is, of course, not just a sonic practise, but rather a 'behaviour' with both gestural and sonic components. Still, it is easy to follow Rasmussen's point that spaces may condition or afford behaviour, and that acoustics in a particular way express relations between spatial form and social practise. Sounding practise, street cries or the giggling of children may inscribe themselves in spaces as sonic marks in systems of acoustic territoriality. Such marks point out a social space, not only by way of sheer power and decibel, but also, as in the case with the hawkers, through a form of sensitivity to the given spatial, acoustic and social environment.

Conclusion

Activating not only their listening capacities, but also their artistic sensibilities and technical vocabularies, Vagn Holmboe and Steen Eiler Rasmussen demonstrate aspects of a phenomenon which was at the time both ordinary and outstanding. On the one hand, street crying was ubiquitous to the extent that it rarely attracted attention, and, on the other hand, it had developed into an equilibristic practise of daily urban life. Like so many ordinary sounds, street cries, at the time when they were still resonating in the streets of Copenhagen, seem to have had the capacity to blend into environments as a characteristic trait, heard, but not noticed, and then suddenly to stand out to the pleasure of some and the annoyance of others. The habitual repetitions of cries in carefully chosen streets and neighbourhoods allow well-developed and well-adapted cries to 'become expressive' for something else than the particular hawker and the particular merchandise. This 'something else' may be understood to take part in an environment of social, economic, acoustic and artistic conditions to which it carefully adapts and, at the same time, expresses. The methodological point is that through repetition, through the careful adaption to an

environment such sonic marks become particularly relevant for cultural analysis. Thus, the reception of street cries, which could be seen as a paradigm for the urban refrain, may show how quotidian sonic occurrences – children's laughter in the playgrounds, ritualised conversations at supermarket cash registers and screaming seagulls – mark and qualify environments. Such everyday refrains may even be more efficient when it comes to producing spaces, environments and atmospheres than applied background music or other kinds of environmental design.

Today, as the calls have faded in Copenhagen streets, such utterances are likely to easily gain extra romantic value and seem more appealing than at the time. Even though a few aesthetes actually did direct their attention to the phenomenon, street cries were probably not the focus of very much positive attention in Copenhagen in the 1930s. It remains intriguing to speculate where and how we may find contemporary refrains that are as paradigmatic for contemporary urban environments as the street cries were in earlier times? Could it be the refrains from mobile phone conversations with their specific phrases – 'Hi, it's me', 'where are you?', 'What's up?' – or the calls from information systems at large railway stations and airports? Such calls, like street cries, express the mobile character of global urban culture, but situate the talker in an even more expanded environment, appropriated and ritualised through everyday practise.

Notes

1. A highly interesting work done in this field is the work of Jean-François Augoyard and his colleagues at Cresson, anticipated in Augoyard's *Pas à pas* (Augoyard, 1979) and introduced in English in *Sonic Experience. A Guide to Everyday Sounds* (Augoyard, 2005).
2. The meaning of the term 'sonic mark' in this study differs slightly from R. Murray Schafer's definition of 'soundmark' as 'a community sound which is unique or possesses qualities which make it specially regarded or noticed by people in that community' (Schafer, 1977, p. 274). Rather, inspired by J.-F. Augoyard's 'le marquage sonore' (Augoyard, 1991) and the ethological understanding of territoriality as a practise of marking, the concept of sonic marks is used for sonic practises that express a relation to a given environment. I have elsewhere argued that Schafer's rather cartographic idea of the soundmark as an auditory parallel to the landmark limits the scope of his otherwise very operational taxonomy for environmental sound: keynote sound, soundmark and sound signal (Kreutzfeldt, 2009, p. 217; Kreutzfeldt, 2011, p. 10). Sonic marks more easily designate practises that are neither unnoticed nor attention-attracting, but which participate in the dynamics of space-making.
3. Following the practise of Vagn Holmboe this study uses the word 'street cries' and not 'street shoutings' for hawkers' cries and shouts in urban spaces.
4. *Ritournelle* is the diminutive form of *retour* with has a number of different meanings, most of them concerning repetition and one concerning change. Like the English *ritornelle* the concept has specific meanings, referring to form aspects of particularly seventeenth-century poetry and music.

5. Throughout the chapter Deleuze and Guattari criticise and discuss fundamental ethological concepts. Still, there seems to be a solid inspiration, not least from Lorenz. See also Gensko, 2002.
6. Of course, Schafer's effective rhetoric should not blur the fact that it was not the invention of the automobile, but their gradual spread during the twentieth century that had a profound impact on the soundscape.
7. Even though most of the work was done between 1935 and 1940, Holmboe's study was not published until 1988. The ethnomusicological interest in street crying was presented by folkloristic collections of street calls and songs aimed for the entertainment market. For example Andrew W. Tuer. *Old London Cries and the cries of to-day*. New York, 1887. Tuer refers to 'some hundreds' of books with renderings of street cries along with illustrations of criers. The interest here focuses on the textual rather than the melodic elements.
8. *Gadehandelens Romantik*. DR 17 September 1940. By Svend Carstensen. 'Cries and odd melodies' is quoted from one of Carstensen's questions (11.10-11.15).
9. The archive of DR only contains very few broadcastings from the period. In these cases, the material was originally recorded on acetate disks and later recorded onto tape.
10. *Her'er sild! Danske gaderåb optaget i perioden 1935-1988*. Dansk Folkemindesamling and Forlaget Kragen, 1988.
11. According to Holmboe, at the time it was prohibited by law to cry from permanent stalls.
12. Holmboe does not relate his studies of street cries to other types of ethnomusicological material, such as work songs, sea shanties, prisoner songs etc., and limits the historical scope of his investigation to the period 1860-1967, the years covered by his material. While shepherds' songs and street cries definitely pertain to two different types of environments (as do sea shanties and prisoner songs), the transformation of work songs during the industrialisation and urbanisation is subject to research interest (see Schafer, 1977, pp. 63-64; Gioia, T. (2006). *Work songs*. Duke UP).
13. It is unknown whether Holmboe was directly inspired by Rasmussen's essay, when he started his project in 1934. In the much later publication of his work, he refers to Rasmussen's essay, but does not discuss it. Rather than a direct link, it seems probable that there a relation of synchronous inspiration exists from a by then prominent phenomenon in the streets of Copenhagen.
14. Though he had already transcribed the calls (see illustration 6), Steen Eiler Rasmussen realised the opportunity to document them on a gramophone record in 1930 and asked Hansen to come with him to the basement of a Copenhagen department store. He recounts the incident in an essay published in 1971 and remembers that the weather-beaten woman lost her ability to cry in the small sound-insulated room, so they had to open the door and let her voice resonate through the department store (Rasmussen, 1971, pp. 41-43).
15. From the TV programme *Noget mere om Arkitektur*. DR 1968, 14.42-14.57 (my own translation from Danish).
16. *Gadehandelens Romantik*. DR 17 September 1940. By Svend Carstensen. The fish seller states that he only sells on the street at Islands Brygge (10.52-10.56). Also, the flower seller only sells in Islands Brygge (22.25-22.30) (my own translation from Danish).
17. *Noget Mere om Arkitektur*. DR TV 1968. 7.15-7.35.

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