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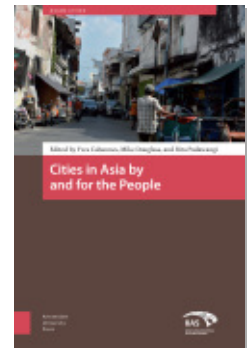
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6 Making the Music Scene, Making Singapore

Jumping Spatio-Sonic Scales in a Southeast Asian City-State

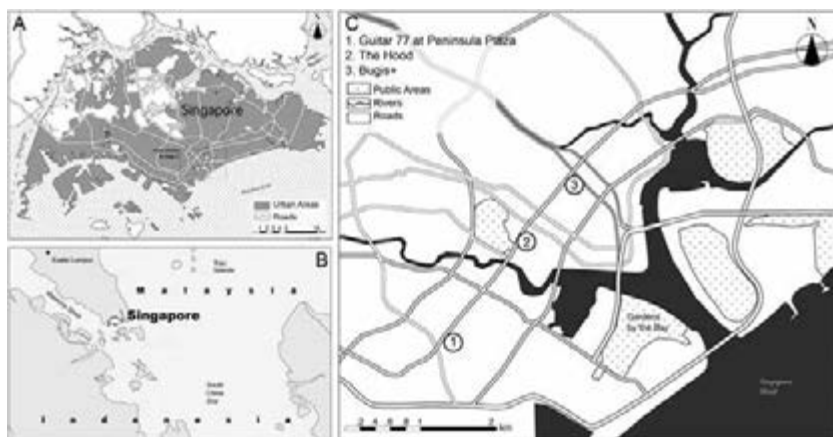
Steve Ferzacca

Abstract

This paper explores a shift in spatio-sonic scales that occurred with the changing location of a local pub in Singapore featuring live music. Ongoing participatory-ethnographic research has followed a small community of musicians, their families, friends, and various relations as they followed the pub and its music from a renovated shophouse in Chinatown to a mall (Bugis+) in the Bugis arts, culture, learning, and entertainment district of Singapore. This spatial history reveals shifts in ontological structures. Jumping spatio-sonic scales however from shophouse to mall, while extending the “reach” of the assemblage of networks, also extended the affective possibilities important to this community of musicians. Nevertheless, in spite of the jump and the social and cultural change represented by the menu of music and food, this community of musicians and friends continues to patronize the pub as a particularly Singaporean place, but more importantly, as a place to nurture a particularly Singaporean way of apprehending their sonically charged world. In a city-state intent on tight control over the presence of spatio-sonic scales (via the Public Entertainment Act), ethnographic attention to a local pub featuring live music encounters a vernacular community and popular culture made by Singaporeans for themselves.

Keywords: spatio-sonic scales, sonic space, music, arts, band, Singapore

Figure 6.1 Maps of (a) Singapore urban areas, (b) Singapore, and (c) Guitar 77, The Hood, and Bugis+



Source: Ariel Shepherd

1 Assembling Sonic Cities By, Of, and For the People

All cities, at all times, in all places, are cosmopolises in both theory and practice. Aidan Southhall's 'universal index' of urban processes highlights the centrality of heterogeneity and dense social role relationships as indicators of the presence of urbanization (Southhall 1973). Southhall emphasizes the 'high spatial density of social interactions' as a distinguishing feature of cities compared to the wider society 'in all times and places.' This necessary 'urban' configuration of heterogeneity and density are the conditions within which 'human and non-human forces' are assembled and reassembled on an everyday basis by urban residents as they make their lives as selves, persons, and groups in cities (Latour 2005). This *social* dimension—an essential characteristic of cities—can itself become the central motif of the urban experience. Walter Mignolo celebrates this experience as a 'cosmopolitan conviviality' that fuses urban solidarities of both mechanic and organic kinds (Mignolo 2000). This social fact alone—that urbanity is inherently cosmopolitan in effect, and that the experience of a cosmopolis can emphasize local and extra-local densities of social role relationships as well as real and perceived interactions in densely situated forms of social organization—is a basic part of scholarly interrogations of urban projects by and for the people.

One way to conceptualize this social dimension of the cosmopolis effect is the manner in which urban projects by and for the people are governed

and managed. In other words, the concerns revolve around what ‘ensemble of means’ is assembled in any place at any time as individuals and groups make cities for themselves. In the process of assemblage, these ‘ways of technique’ evoke judgments and consciousness—reflexive dispositions in which a way of life, a way of knowing the world, is the ‘object’ (Ellul 1964).¹ The assemblage of means, the techniques, the reflexive dispositions in the context of high spatial densities of social interaction can be conceptualized as Lefebvre’s ‘production of space in the richest sense’: an emergent relativity of terrestrial space that Neil Smith refers to as ‘deep space.’² For Smith, ‘deep space is quintessentially social space; it is physical extent fused through social intent.’ This social dimension of the cosmopolis effect provides theoretical orientations that are useful for understanding both the presence of and potential for ‘alternative spaces in the city’ (Smith 2008, 214).

This chapter examines Smith’s process of fusion in the context of understanding how city residents, in this case, residents of the Southeast Asian city of Singapore, make plain, homespun, alternate local worlds in this crossroads, global, Asian city. Like all cities, Singapore is a place of limits and possibilities that provide opportunities or impinge upon the intentions and efforts of Singaporeans to make a city, or parts of a city, as a place for and by the people. This chapter explores two concepts to provide insight into the activities of a small group of Singaporeans who come together in various ways, at various times, in particular places, to participate in making music, and in the process, make the city.

The first is the notion of spatial scales. Urban scholars, particularly David Harvey, Neil Smith, Erik Swyngedouw, and Kevin Cox, all note that cityscapes are ‘differentiated into complex spatial patterns of human activity, systematically and hierarchically organized as “spatial scales”’ (Smith 2008, 181; Harvey 1985; Harvey 2000; Swyngedouw 1997; Cox 1998). Smith proposes a typology of three primary spatial scales: urban space itself; the production of urban space within the nation-state; and its production within global developments. In an article on medical tourism in Southeast Asia, Ara Wilson adds the bodily scale to Smith’s formulation (Wilson 2011). Drawing in part from the work of S. A. Marston (2000), Wilson finds “bodily spaces” the most immediate, primary of spatial scales, “nested” in urban, national, and global scales to varying degrees – varying degrees which represent political processes in the “social construction of space” (Wilson 2011, p. 123.³

1 I am drawing in haphazard fashion on the work of Jaques Ellul (1964).

2 See Neil Smith’s afterword to the second edition of *Uneven Development* (2008).

3 For Smith (2004), ‘home’ is the most immediate spatial scale (Wilson 2011, 123; Marston 2000).

From these perspectives, scale—as simply a relation between proximity and distance—is constantly in question. Harvey, Cox, Smith, and others consider scale and the production of space to be assembled networks of physical space and meaningful human activity, or simply the proximity and distance of human practice (Smith 2008, 107, 229). Such socio-spatial scales, a guitar shop and live music club for example, represent the ‘ways of technique’ and the ‘ensemble of means’ that in action are organized as ‘technical phenomenon’ in which the ‘meaning, concepts, and consciousness of space are inseparably linked to its physical production.’⁴ Moreover, this assemblage of socio-spatial scales constitutes popular, ‘local politics’ that operate on interpersonal scales or within the ‘hierarchy of scales’ identified by Harvey and others (Harvey 1985; Cox 1998). From this vantage point, ‘scale’ represents a ‘relation’: a network in action.

Especially in cityscapes, this ‘sense of place’ emerges in the actions of individuals and groups. In the process, individuals and groups act within and upon various scales in urban landscapes that can “contain” human activity “in space” while demarcating the space or spaces people “take up” or make for themselves (Smith 2008, 229-230). Cox notes that the relationships between these spatial containments of human activity and emergent, assembled spatial engagements are a crucial relationship through which ‘localized social relations’ realize the interests that are essential to making a city for and by the people (Cox 1998). In this way, particularly in the urban milieu, the state haunts (Derrida 1994) a politics of scale as individuals, communities, and groups secure spaces of dependence within the municipal codes, zoning regulations, rent, and real estate conditions. These mechanisms of governance, and their associated ideological projects that produce physical spaces reveals the city itself as a technical phenomenon made of ‘spaces of engagement’ in which the politics of securing a ‘space for dependence’ unfolds (Cox 1998, 2).

The second concept is sound, particularly *deep sound*. Similar to Smith’s notion of ‘deep space’, deep sound is sound in the richest sense. Deep sound is sonic extent fused through social intent. Deep sound resounds profoundly: it is soundings from the deepest fathoms of social life. The profound implications and consequences of deep sound are multi-sonorous in affect and meaning, the depth enabled by the milieu in which social lives occur. Michel Foucault described this milieu as ‘a certain number of combined, overall

4 I am combining Ellul’s (1964) thoughts on how technical functions involve and evoke judgments and consciousness with Smith’s (2008) theory of ‘uneven geographical development’ and the ‘politics of scale.’

effects bearing on all who live in it' (2007, 21). This immersion opens up participants experientially to local 'devices of saturation' that are points and moments of the 'intensification' of local experience (Foucault 2007, 21, 45).

The soundscapes that make up Singapore's music scene represent productions of space in which the state is deeply implicated. Sonic existence in Singapore can be challenging. Since its founding by a British colonial administrator, Singapore has been, from some perspectives, governed by one authoritative regime after another. Beginning with British colonialism and continuing into the 'authoritarian capitalism' of present times, the presence of past and present forms of governance not only 'haunt' but actualize the city itself as a nearly totalizing 'space of dependence' for city residents and the multitudes that pass through this southeast Asian crossroads to the world (Tan 2011; Derrida 1994).⁵

Chinese opera performances forced to move to the outskirts of town. Tamil ritual drumming outlawed. The Islamic call to worship confined to the congregation inside the walls of the mosque. Until recently, musicians and bands of all styles and kinds have found extreme limits on opportunities to perform music in public. Public sonics have been a source of concern and a target of social disciplining since Singapore's independence and statehood in 1965. Most recently Bart Barendregt, and Lily Kong specifically with regard to Singapore, have explored the popular music scene of the region, noting the significance of this sonic politics in the various similitudes of modernity (Barendregt 2014; Kong 1999).

State concerns about 'noise pollution' have long been in the books and manifest politically and spatially as the various permits allocated to spaces state authorities designate as educational, recreational, retail, and so forth. Sonic parameters and tolerances translate into spatial dimensions and proximities depending upon the allocation of these designations at any one time, constituting an ontology of 'spaces of dependence' organized through state-sponsored urban planning in a 'politics of scale' in which sound is a crucial determining feature (Harvey 1985; Cox 1998; Judd 1998). Recently, Kelvin Low (2011; 2014), Jim Sykes (2015), and others have explored 'the spatial politics of noise' in this city-state. Their work highlights the role of the state in urban life through legislative and licensing procedures that manage social conflicts between different kinds of sonic activities through the organization of socio-spatial presences and absences. The local live music scene in Singapore assembles spatio-sonic scales within state 'reach', the

5 For an interesting discussion of authoritarianism in Singapore's politics, see Tan (2011). I am echoing Derrida's notion of 'hauntology' (1994) here as well.

durations of which are responses to the access to public space for live music performances on one hand and the difficulties of establishing, maintaining, and sustaining a live music venue in a challenging business environment on the other. These 'spaces of engagement' are crucial sites 'in which the politics of securing a space of dependence unfolds' (Cox 1998, 2).

In Singapore, the exuberance of the music scene in the heady days of the 1960s and early 1970s has recently been restored. The growing numbers of guitar stores, rehearsal spaces, local pubs, and clubs—in addition to venues located in downtown tourist areas—reflect the confluence in Singapore and all over Southeast Asia of a wide-ranging circulation of things and sounds, specifically music and the things to make music with. This confluence is nothing new in this crossroads of world history. What is historically specific in this ongoing long *duree* of circulation is the increasing access of nearly all Singaporeans to musical gear of all kinds for all purposes that in the past was highly limited by consumer prices, skill and knowledge, local availability, and the number and density of active communities of interest (musicians, listeners). This democratization of access to the many things used to make contemporary music of every genre, local and global, at home and on the stage, is central to the making and assembling of alternative urban spaces in this sonically challenged urban-state. The effect of this sonic democracy is a multitude of spatio-sonic scales scattered around the urban-state, each representing differing degrees of 'coordination' and production, the extent and duration of each to a greater or lesser degree subject to chronic threats (Hendy 2013).⁶

This chapter explores the making of the music scene in Singapore, one of the most urban of all nation-states on the planet. The members of the music community who participated in this research make music and a music scene in a set of nested scales that involve interpersonal networks where the centrality of the presence of the Singaporean state shifts in quality and kind, thinness and thickness in these musical affairs. Participating in the events and social activities of a community of musicians and music lovers who congregate at both a guitar shop and a local live music club demonstrates how, in the process of 'engagement', 'spaces of dependence' produce and are experienced as sometimes competing, sometimes nested affective scales sonically charged by music. The guitar shop, the live music club, and the other musical spaces located around the city clearly represent sonically charged scalar opportunities made by participants in particular city spaces.

6 Hendy (2013) notes that a fundamental, perhaps primordial feature, of the human making of sound is the accompanying making of coordination among things and people.

Each of these spaces of engagement and dependence is assembled with the presence and absence of scales produced in the process of state governance and rule. Potential spaces of dependence always involve the state.

This chapter associates this reality of the Singaporean production of sonic space with the affective scales assembled along with state-built features of city space, as well as with the wide array of other human and non-human forces that make up the described events and activities. These affective scales are effective in generating sonically produced and spatially transcendent human feelings of self and networked others as a 'sense of place'. For analytical purposes, two locally meaningful affective scales are implicated in the community events at the store and the live music club known as Hood. During the course of this research, the Hood changed location, or 'jumped scale', seeking 'locational advantage' (Harvey 1985; Smith 2008, 176-177). This rupture in the habits of this community of interest revealed the affective scales organized around business and friendship—affective scales that shift the coordination of subtly distinct affective modes in interpersonal relations. These affective scales are assembled into the events and activities of this community of musicians, friends, fans, customers, and family along with the guitars, amplifiers, alcohol, food, cigarettes, and of course city places where networks emerge and are assembled. The affective scale of business and friendship overlap but are not without tension and conflict; These network dynamics built from the associations of people and things comprise the social of this community, and it is in this community of interest that reflexivity occurs.

2 Methodologies

From an ethnographic perspective, this chapter examines the making of sonic communities in urban spaces, and in spaces that can be conceptualized from a number of perspectives—for example, economic and political—as nearly totalizing urban spaces of dependence. This chapter is based on my fieldwork conducted over a three-year period across several urban spaces and among members of a fairly stable community of amateur and semi-professional musicians, business partners, friends, family, and other varied associates, most of whom were born and raised in Singapore, while others originate from the many who pass through and sometimes find a home in this Southeast Asian port city. None of the community members live near each other in Singapore, much less in a place-based neighbourhood, although some members share place-based memoryscapes in their backgrounds.

One central gathering spot for this community's 'focused gatherings' is in the basement of a shopping mall in Singapore's central business district among a collection of music stores well known in Singapore for selling vintage and contemporary music gear. One shop in particular—Guitar 77—is one among several urban spaces where urban projects for and by people in Singapore were observed. Other fieldwork sites included practice studios, performance venues, music schools, churches, and the void decks of apartment complexes where some of the members of this community organized around music interests are active. Some of the performance venues are located in other Southeast Asian cities (Melaka, Malaysia; Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam). Members of this community travel as a group, either to perform or as members of the entourage, to urban locations in the region—assemblages made increasingly possible by budget airlines and the loosening of visa restrictions among ASEAN countries.

In performance venues this community sonically expresses, and so extends, its interest as a community. Musical performances are one of several techniques involved in reproducing ways of knowing and experiencing the world through sound and performance that Steven Feld refers to as 'acoustemology' in his ethnography of jazz musicians in Ghana (2012). Jam sessions in the guitar shop and musical performances in other venues re-actualize—*re-entextualize*—and so affectively re-assemble this 'community of interest,' this 'vernacular milieu' across the urban milieu in bars and pubs, church events and congregations, music festivals, and so forth (Pickering and Green 1987). The shop, the bar, the city participate as objects in the assembling of 'situated sources of identity' for which affect, generated in part sonically, but also through other 'techniques of the body' (Mauss 1973), becomes scale-able in terms of its presence in place (Pickering and Green 1987, 8). In these cases of city-making, the social is actualized as spatio-sonic scales both present and heard, but also 'imagined' in networks that may or may not produce actual participation in the sonically charged events and performances. This amalgam of scale-able affect and interest are essential for the making of alternate urban spaces—the 'spaces of engagement' where cities are made by and for people; spaces where the popular culture of cities makes place.

This chapter examines these issues by following a musical community as its 'home' performance venue changes location. In my ongoing participatory-ethnographic research, I have followed this small community of musicians, their families, friends, and various other relations, as they followed the pub and its music from a renovated shophouse in Chinatown to a mall (Bugis+) in the old colonial residential area that has since become the Bugis arts, culture,

Figure 6.2 The Hood, 2011

Source: author

learning and entertainment district of Singapore. Jumping spatio-sonic scales from shophouse to mall, while extending the ‘reach’ of this assemblage of networks, has also extended the sonically-charged affective possibilities of this community. In a ‘hierarchy of scales’ organized around the Public Entertainment Act (PEA), which provides the process and guidelines for obtaining the required licensing for live music performances in public urban spaces, Harvey’s imagined ‘struggle for the right to the city’ takes place. This participatory-ethnographic project—conducted by a group of musicians, their friends and family, fans, and customers of a local guitar shop and live music club in Singapore and written by an anthropologist—calls attention to those who ‘capture’ the ‘commons’ of urban life ‘at a variety of scales’ through alternative urban spaces (Harvey 1985, 78).⁷

In spite of radical changes to the live music format and technique, range of musical genre, food and beverages, spatial size, location, staff, and so forth across these varied ‘spaces of engagement’, this community of musicians and friends continues to patronize the pub as a particularly Singaporean place, but moreover as a place to nurture, to assemble a particularly Singaporean sonically charged way of ‘apprehending’ their world. In a city-state intent on

7 ‘This reminds us that the real problem lies with the private character of property rights and the power these rights confer to appropriate not only the labour but also the collective products of others. Put another way, the problem is not the common per se, but the relations between those who produce or capture it at a variety of scales’. (Harvey 1985, 78)

maintaining tight control over the presence of spatio-sonic scales (via the Public Entertainment Act), ethnographic attention to a local pub featuring live music encounters a vernacular community and popular culture made by Singaporeans for themselves. This example of jumping scales reveals the 'nature' of city-making literally embodied in the community's sensorial response, and especially the sonic consequences brought about by this change in spatial location and scale.

3 The Guitar Shop

Tucked between the elegantly whitewashed and refurbished colonial buildings, museums and art galleries of Singapore's Civic District and the gleaming skyscrapers of the Financial District lies the relatively dated Peninsula Shopping Centre at Coleman Street. Supposedly an upmarket shopping mall when it was built in 1980 with an array of shops from sports accessories and travel agents to tattoo studios and guitar outlets, the place has evolved into an eclectic zone shared as an enclave by youthful punks and skinheads, ethnic Burmese migrant workers, bargain shoppers, and of course music lovers of all kinds. In the basement of the mall where the aromas from the food stalls are mixed into the building's air-conditioning, several rows of shops displaying a range of wooden acoustic and shiny electric guitars can be found. My ethnographic fieldwork was conducted among these music outlets in the mall, including Davis Guitar, Guitar Connections, and Guitar 77, over a three-year period. Conversations with the owners and assistants of these shops as well as customers were facilitated by a global language of guitars and amplifiers. This 'gear talk' is the lingua franca of global popular culture. Reverberating in this global desire for musical commodities, however, are local histories and music scenes vibrating right along with the steel strings.

Kiang is the manager of Guitar 77. I meet him as he stands behind the counter in his shop, glasses hanging on the end of his nose and his long concrete-coloured hair streaked with the blackness of his youth, clearly a man of my age (Figure 4). I ask if I can plug in the shiny black guitar, and I am led to an amplifier with numerous guitar effect pedals attached. Together, the guitar and amp sound beautiful, and I play beginning with some blues riffs from a 'classic' repertoire of mid-20th century urban, electric American blues—Howling Wolf, Muddy Waters, Albert King. Peering over the top of his glasses, Kiang loudly exclaims as I crank on another riff, 'A real bluesman.' Now the guitar store's owner and manager, Kiang began his career in music in the 1960s as a bass player and founding member of 'The Straydogs'— a

legendary Singaporean band. Kiang describes The Straydogs as a ‘beats and blues’ group that began playing and later recording in 1966. As our conversations continued, the presence of a ‘cosmopolitanism’ recognizable for its so-called ‘western’ features was stunning in its degree of resemblances. Kiang and I had grown up listening and playing the same music, yet living thousands of miles apart and involved in quite different histories. I was struck in the moment by the conjuncture of the ‘gestures of similitude’ we had both assumed back in the day as our uniquely similar, unsurprisingly distinct entries into ‘the politics of membership in the “world society”’.

However, as Kiang and I got to know each other, as I spent more time in the guitar shop becoming acquainted with the music scene of Guitar 77 and the other shops in the mall, and as Kiang and I began to play together, even forming a band named after his shop (Blues 77), my ethnocentric cosmopolitanism that provided a medium through which we could communicate insights into each of our life stories opened up to reveal a historically anchored, rich Southeast Asian cosmopolitanism. Mignolo (2000) has defined cosmopolitanism as a counter-movement to globalization. However, Kiang and The Straydogs reminded me that this island nation has always been at the centre of cosmo-politics immersed in a kind of ‘planetary conviviality’: a conviviality for the cosmopolitan forged across vast global networks. Feld has also observed this kind of cosmopolitanism in an African musical milieu, and characterizes the cosmopolitan outlook of jazz musicians as an ‘acoustemology’ which he argues illustrates a ‘way of knowing the world through sound’ (2012).

This same conviviality—the experience of global popular music embodied in an acoustemology—knowing global forces in lived local circumstances through sound—are central to the lives and livelihoods of these guitar shops. It turns out the people I had met and was going to meet ascribed fully to the ‘cosmopolitan commitment’ forged from willing, and at times courageous, ‘inter-subjective negotiation’ that is highly valued and also central to the ‘deep hermeneutic engagement’ that is one’s life. From what I learned, their commitments were always and continue to be framed in an intense loyalty to Singaporean identity, fraught as it is with ethnic politics and crossroads consequences, while forging this loyalty out of a marginal aesthetic footnote in the Singaporean story. Singaporean rock legends like Kiang made commitments to cosmopolitanism years ago, in those mythic times of nation-building and the release from colonial to post-colonial globality. Kiang and many of the others I have come to know and ‘jam’ with continue to express their cosmopolitan commitments through their music and lifestyle, over and over again, in the context of Singapore’s contemporary

music scene. In the basement of this dingy (by Singaporean standards), aging shopping mall in the heart of the heartland where else would I meet up with the cosmopolitan?

The remainder of this chapter explores the change in location of the live music club associated with the guitar shop named Hood. Hood opened not long after I arrived (in 2011) and recently changed location (in 2013). This change in location is considered here to be 'jumping scales' (Harvey 1985). Rather than exploring the capital involved in the capacity to jump scale in urban commercial settings for the augmentation of economic conditions, this chapter observes the effect on the community of friends who have participated in both assemblages from an ethnographic perspective. In this case, alternative urban space is re-assembled again and again not only from interest but from a habitus that is deeply local and fiercely Singaporean—and so broadly alternative—in spite of the transformations in the live performance experience from one 'space of engagement' to another.

4 Hood on Keong Saik Road

old hood got a nice feel, people mix around with each other freely, kind of like home pub sort of place and the music is so close to the audience makes it very vibrant. (interview, Kiang Lim, musician, guitar shop manager, February 2015)

Hood, a local live music club, established by the owner of Guitar 77, opened its doors for business on Keong Saik Road in the Chinatown district of Singapore not long after I arrived to take up an appointment at a research institute for my sabbatical. Until the 1960s, the area was a prominent and notorious red light district with a high concentration of brothels located in the three-storey shophouses known as examples of the 'transitional, late and art deco styles' (Savage and Yeoh 2004). By the 1990s, the area was transformed by the presence of 'boutique hotels,' shophouses renovated into private residences, coffee shops, restaurants, art galleries, and other shops for commercial use. The Hood's first home was the street-level 'shop' of a shophouse. The Hood features local artists, not quite exclusively, but there is a preference for and concerted effort made to book local artists, mostly popular music from across a variety of genres. Hood opened across the street from a well-known locally known only restaurant specializing in Singaporean Chinese food. Just next door was a small but also highly recommended Malay restaurant. These local establishments signify the effects of structural

Figure 6.3 Inside the Hood, 2011

(Source: author)

time, illustrating another feature of scale—duration—which in the case of this neighbourhood stand as monuments saturated in generational depth especially for Chinese Singaporeans. Along with the food establishments, Keong Saik Road is a one-way street with sidewalks, making it an appealing location for a live music club. Located just far enough away from the high-rise residences that surround this heritage neighbourhood in Singapore, the Hood renovated the long and narrow street-level storey with a stage, a Plexiglas enclosure to surround the drums, a small bar, a few tables, an open area to stand, some outside tables next to the sidewalk with ash cans for smokers, and toaster ovens and microwaves to prepare a minimal menu. With so many of Singapore's well-known local restaurants, food courts, and hawkers' stalls nearby, the Hood chose to allow food from outside to minimize their own need for an extensive food menu. The most important item on the menu for the live performances I attend with these groups of musicians and their friends is alcohol, mainly scotch whiskey—Dewar's is preferred—consumed by the bottle. However, a wide range of alcohols are consumed; some generational preferences seem to pattern alcohol choices, although as the evening's performances proceed, a general trend towards shots and cheers emerges among the crowd.

On the evenings I was present, the clientele was nearly entirely and nearly always male. Women were present—girlfriends, wives, co-workers, and friends of those who were playing on stage at some point in the evening

made up the majority—but in small numbers. Women appearing to be out for a night on the town did filter through. The Hood experience for a night on the town could be irregular: one night might be loud and highly charged, while other times the Hood was completely empty. Generally, however, performers brought along family and friends; an audience, even a small one, made performances at the Hood feel like events.

Hood provides opportunities for a wide range of talent, popular music genres, and ages and genders of performers. *Local talents in town* (as the sign says) is the determining factor in the selection of performers. Genres range from classic rock, contemporary pop, metal, and some blues performed at various levels of amplification to electric instrumentations or some mix of both, by solo performers and bands. One evening I attended an event for high school-aged music students. With each band, a new set of parents and friends came and went.

Each performance generates some degree of the excitement of live music performed before an audience and amplified at levels loud enough to call for nearly complete attention from all present. The only escape from this dense and intense sonic experience is out the front door to the sidewalk tables—amidst the cigarette smoke. The size and layout of the Hood grudgingly held in place a spatio-sonic scale at the very edge of bursting forth with each opening of the front door—a literal spatio-sonic scale more often than not bursting at the seams of containment. Kiang, in his comments that opened this section, describes this sonic experience as ‘very vibrant’. John Cage noted that the distinction between silence and sound is not a question of acoustics but one of ‘attention’.⁸ Sound, as Nancy (2007, 7) argues, is ‘made of referrals’: ‘[m]eaning and sound’ come to share ‘the space of the self, a subject’ (8). Sound is ‘the ricochet, the repercussion, the reverberation: the echo in a given body’ (2007, 40).

Straydogs and associates present a ‘community of interest’ organized around rebellious behaviour and cosmopolitan conviviality. As amateur musicians involved in the music scene, Kiang and the others who form the Guitar 77 entourage, again a community of interest, reproduce community in a ‘vernacular milieu’ in which the ‘rocker’ and the rock and roll lifestyle as it existed and was configured in both the past and present, provide a ‘specific plane’ that becomes a focus for interaction and identity formation. Such communities of interest can be numerous and exist on their own or come together collectively. This happens with the blues jams that occur

8 This well-known quote from John Cage is further discussed with reference to urban existence by James Donald (2011).

from time to time around Singapore. Local communities like Guitar 77 become involved in such events and encounter other communities that share similar interests. While Guitar 77 represents a 'situated source of identity', it is also a recognizable one among the other situated sources of identity in the community.

The vernacular milieu is the context in which participation in the non-mediated forms and processes of cultural life thrive. To understand the situated sources of identity that are involved and the manner in which these sources of identity are used, it is crucial to identify the technical phenomenon that both helps produce individual and group consciousness of forms of identity and provides the equipment for life that presents identity sources which Kiang and others use to evaluate and perhaps judge the conditions surrounding the maintenance of identity forms that matter to them. In addition to the gear, the stage, the sound, the crucial source, a central source, is alcohol. While the images, activities, and associations that surround the everyday life of this community of amateur musicians are cosmopolitan and include people from many different backgrounds, the nature of most of their activities are characterized by the centrality of masculinity and male bonding. In addition to the constructions of gender that are facilitated by the activities in the store and on the stage, the parochial, and so less cosmopolitan, notions of tolerance for social differences becomes more visible. The afternoon jam sessions in the store, the gigs in Singapore and on the road, follow a similar pattern—referred to by Kiang and others in the community as 'talking cock'. These are the very 'delights' at the centre of many of the activities that Kiang, myself, and our associates find so pleasurable, and meaningful. For these reasons, the old Hood was a 'very vibrant' place.

The activities and events at the Hood on Keong Saik Road embedded urban scales of dependence and engagement that were networked differently over the duration of an evening and from night to night. The live music and all that it involved offered participants an individual, yet at the same time collective, experience in intense, focused ways. These 'focused gatherings' featuring 'messy fluid' bodily scales positioned participants in the capturing of ontological scales around particular renditions of Singaporean masculinity anchored in some generational depth.⁹ For this small group, national scales of dependence were contemporary and historical, rooted in the urban present and past, both fiercely criticized and chastised and

9 Of course I am referring to Erving Goffman and Clifford Geertz's use of this concept. For the bodily scale I am drawing upon Wilson (2011), Parr (2002), Smith (2004), and Marston (2000).

at the same time fiercely loved and honoured. Hood itself in its technical arrangements—from the design of the space to the execution of formal arrangements with the state—provided a vital place for the ‘realization of essential interests’ (Cox 1998, 2). As a spatio-sonic scale, Hood assembled networks of ‘human and non-human’, in durable yet innovatively respondent associations and resemblances in the reproduction of local meaning. The emergent quality of Keong Saik Road was ‘an “anthropological,” poetic and mythic experience of space’ (de Certeau 1984, 92-93). Alternative urban spaces— popular milieus where urban residents engage in practices for themselves by themselves—are the struggle for the city in all its senses.

In 2012, Hood changed locations—jumping scale, partly because the Muslim owner decided to renovate the location for a boutique hotel, or as Harvey might say, for purposes of capital, and he wouldn’t be wrong.

5 Hood @ Bugis+: Scale-ability

The main difference is obviously the size of the place. We chose this place due to the location. It is central, and the shopping mall would be pretty crowded (at the time we signed the lease the mall was not ready). The place is bigger and it is more mass market-oriented. To fill the place (or try to), we had to cater our music selection / decor / Food and Beverages to a larger audience. We couldn’t be as niche as we were before. The decor remained the same, just bigger. The Food offering changed quite a bit as we have our own kitchen that is capable of dinner and lunch services. So we redesigned our menu from scratch. Our drink selection also increased because we expected a bigger crowd. (Yang Xi Clement, musician, principal, Hood/Guitar 77. Personal communication, 11 February 2015)

The move from Keong Saik Road to the Bugis+ Mall was not only a change in the classic features of geographic scale—size, distance, proximity, level—or simply the scale of investment, risk, loss, profit, but also a change in relations and perception. A ‘hierarchy of scales’ that was purely economic and municipal became more visible. Clement, the principal involved in Hood and Guitar 77 and himself a well-known, excellent musician, noted this increased presence as he spoke of the ‘old place’ as ‘less risky’ and ‘more cosy’, but ‘impossible’ in terms of scale-ability (i.e., less scale-able).

The old place at Keong Saik definitely was more cosy. It provided a more intimate experience for the customer. The revenue was limited by the size

and the number of people it could hold. At the new place, the potential to earn more money is more, but we now are dealing with how to make this a cosy drinking environment. We can now hold events that cater for between 50 to 400 people. It would be impossible previously. The new place, being more mass market is also more scale-able. Now we are looking to do more events on top of our usual night business. (Yang Xi Clement, personal communication, 2015)

Scale-ability, disposed as spaces of engagement that are formed within and from spaces of dependence in urban milieus, highlights the capture, or at least the capacity to capture, the urban commons—in this case, contemporary Singaporean experiences and identities at, as Harvey notes, ‘a variety of scales’. While spaces of dependence—the state; capitalist and commercial business relations—determine the size and associated physical aspects of both locations as spatio-sonic scales, the spatial features on their own are but minor determinants in their ontological capacities and network reach.

Clement and the newly located Hood jump scales sonically in a continued project that calls attention to localized social relations: local Singaporean talent. The ‘old Hood’ offered a wide range of contemporary Singaporean popular music. Local talent was selected for and the club presented itself as a live music venue for local Singaporean musicians. Associations with the guitar shop provided significant actualization possibilities for networks around the guitar shop’s musicians and clientele to attend and perform at Hood events, jam nights, CD parties, and so forth.

In the new Hood, the performance scale is expanded: there is a bigger stage, a better sound system, and the possibility of visual effects. The spatial location and physical distance of the audience is clearly apparent and demarcated: the stage is raised to just about head level; rows of tables fill the space for audience and clientele; there is a large section of the main room where patrons can be seated away from the music; and there is a smoking section outside on a balcony that can be reached through large glass doors overlooking the city street below.

The most obvious difference is that the new Hood is located inside a mall, with mall parking, mall escalators, and mall shops sparkling here and there on multiple floors in large, vertical, soaring spaces. The Hood is on the fourth floor next to and surrounded by several restaurants serving franchise food. An always-busy steak restaurant is the Hood’s neighbour. Unlike the local cuisine offered on Keong Saik Road, the food near the Hood at the Bugis+ location appeals to a different generation. Hood’s own menu

also reflects its proximity to franchise food: it is much expanded and even includes entrees. Parking is certainly more predictable and less of a hassle at the mall location, and there is easy access to nearby mass transit.

From the perspective of some, the Bugis+ location is more 'central'. Located between Queen Street and Victoria Street, the mall is surrounded by a number of churches, business and arts schools; the Singapore Management University is nearby, as is the National Library and several important museums. Bugis+ also borders the Bugis arts and cultural district—the Bras Basah Bugis Precinct. Originally planned by Singapore's European founder for European residences (hence the number of churches), the community quickly reflected Singapore's cosmopolitan foundations afforded by its location in the Asian Maritime trade network. Singapore's elite educational institutions, museums, shops, and eateries exist along with the anchorings in this emerging urban entrepot and its cosmopolitan history. Food and fashion, and also an entire array of thousands of Arabian nights for all the senses can be found.

Compared to Keong Saik Road, the depth of national, regional, and global scales are more clearly palatable, tactile, and visceral in and around Bugis+. Clement considered Keong Saik Road to be 'niche'—limited, in terms of scale-ability. Keong Saik Road as an urban place exists as an urban place forged over structural time through the events of communities, Chinese New Year for example, that reproduce generational depth anchored in a self-conscious community of interest, Chinatown. While this socio-spatial scale feels cosy to the mostly Chinese Singaporean heartlanders who are the core participants in this community of interest, Hood's scale-ability was also limited by the parochial qualities of the Keong Saik Road location. At least, these are my impressions. As Hood jumped scale, the politics of socio-spatial scale in the old Hood finds a new home that retrofits alternative urban spaces in this new location so that the same qualities central to local communities extend and contain experience.

As far as I can tell, the national and regional scales forged in history within which Hood is now emplaced do not seem to have relevance to the owner, performers, or clientele that I have come to know. Clearly apparent in the new location is a particularly local actualization of the contemporary Singaporean sonic experience in which the interactive quality of live music is based upon current and fleeting popular music. In this way, both global and regional sonic scales are tapped. Jam nights are a mix of local talent and hosts who can perform live music of nearly any current popular tune with the aid of iPads and other tablets that can quickly upload lyrics and basic chord structures from online resources while performing.

Figure 6.4 Having a good time at the new Hood

Source: author

This enriched sonic democracy calls for some readjustment among bodies, nations, cosmopolitanisms, and live music experiences. Kiang remarks that the ‘new Hood lack the warmth and there is no mingling amongst the people’ (personal communication, 10 February 2015). Clement agrees that ‘most of the guys prefer the old place [...] It was more of a hole-in-a-wall kind of place while the Bugis+ one is much more commercial’ (Yang Xi Clement, personal communication, 2015).

6 Networks, Scales, Cities

Ironically, the cosmopolitan commitment in this case is an entirely local affair both historically and in the present. For this group of musicians and friends, cosmopolitanism is central to a fiercely loyal, chauvinistically proud Singaporean self-identification. A ‘hole-in-the-wall kind of place’ is a likely one for sonically charged cosmopolitan conviviality. Twentieth-century classic sounds like Pink Floyd, Muddy Waters, and Eric Clapton co-mingle with contemporary global popular music of the twenty-first century as Singaporeans assemble in local establishments that offer live music to perform and listen, to make Singapore together. In addition to these more travelled musics are the regionally inspired performances as well as, as in the case of the Hood, an emphasis on ‘local talent’. In the Hood and

many other local clubs, especially those not located in well-defined 'tourist locations' (Clark Quay, for example), this feast of global music is always a local affair, is always a celebration of the cosmopolis even in its most chauvinistic expressions.

Much of this activity is experienced *in situ*, but it also makes appearances in various forms of social media—further localizing spatio-sonic scales while at the same time extending their reach beyond phenomenological sonic limits. Social media has the capacity to extend spatio-sonic scales limited by space and auditory reach into networks assembled as images, videos, comments, and other tertiary texts available on cell phones, computers, and any other device able to manage social media activity. The community of interest for which the guitar shop and the Hood are actant sites of assembly—sites of the social—is the city; the urban spaces and non-human forces in a network of fragile things, Kiang and others included.

Kiang and others who share in the networks assembled by the nexus of guitar shop–old Hood–new Hood engage show up, eat and drink, perform. Compared to the 'old Hood', the affective scale of this community is not completely diminished, although this seems the effect of jumping scale, at least on the occasions I've been present. Rather, the affective scale of this community in the larger confines of the new Hood, and with the change in food and music menus, is spatio-sonically scaled down. In both space and acoustemology, the way of knowing that was the old Hood has lost some vibrancy in the new location. On the occasions I have been present, the group of friends and musicians whom I have learned from and played music with usually seat themselves as a group at a set of tables to the left side of the stage close to the bar. The remainder, and of course majority, of the tables extend across the front of the stage towards the back of the room, and then off into the extended area furthest from the stage. On the occasions when I have been present and from conversations about the new Hood in many contexts, the general consensus is that a younger, dating crowd has come to populate the Hood in increasingly large numbers. This is good for business, but the sonic effect on the live music is audible: contemporary popular music; taking audience requests; audience participation in performances; the use of hosts to mediate the audience experience; and visual experiences as an alternative to sonic experience, as the entire back wall of the stage is used as a screen to project live soccer matches while live music is being performed. As Clement says, the 'new Hood' is 'commercial.'

Nevertheless, this group of friends continues to show up, eat and drink, and perform from time to time, some members of the group more than others. Opportunities to perform still exist and are extended when slots in

the performance schedule become available. Local talent is still selected. The Hood continues to strongly endorse its networks and segments of the music community by providing performance opportunities and becoming involved in the production and management of some local groups, musicians, and singer–songwriters. The Hood guitar shop and the Hood are linked in networks of practice spaces, music schools, church programs, musical communities, and venues assembled in various configurations across this spatially located social milieu.

In this urban-nation, this city-state, the Hood jumps scales. As the Hood jumps scales, in the process impacting the continued existence of the guitar shop through diversions of capital, these affective scales that are crucial to the sense of place and the spaces of dependence around which this community assembles become more relevant, more apparent to the social life of the community, and more importantly here for the making of alternative city places. In either case, the Singaporeans involved in this paper, whether associating as friends or as business partners, make the city by and for the people. The friendship emphasizes the cosmopolitan conviviality that the city itself is built from. The business scale emphasizes Singapore as a local cosmopolis. The change in the Hood's location that reverberated across town helped, in part, to bring about the closing of the guitar shop, but also to open new social limits and possibilities with the presence and loss in scales for this sonic urban community. This re-scaling of the Hood did so with a continuing emphasis on live music performed by and for Singaporeans, builds a 'space of engagement' in a hierarchy of scales, political and otherwise, that make such engagements possible. In this way, the 'new Hood' offers an alternative urban space in a music scene where foreign labourers dominate hospitality industry gigs and live music experiences (Filipino musicians) and foreign talent completely dominates the music scene that Singaporeans pay ticket prices to see in concert halls and venues. The consequences have had effect on the spatio-sonic scale identified with the old Hood. The possibility of masculine displays as central to the vibrancy of the space is limited, diminished by the increasing size of the space itself. The space of engagement still exists; it is still possible. It is just another alternative in a sonic democracy.

7 Epilogue

At the time this paper was presented at the workshop used to organize this volume for publication, the guitar shop closed. Its closure, tied in part to the

financial conditions involved in launching the new Hood, was described to me as 'cutting costs'. Local politics are in this case scalar politics: an assemblage of personal, national, and global relations. The affective scale used to represent the circumstances was the one of business, easily understood by all members of this community of interest. The week-long clearance sale provided me the opportunity to talk with many in the community, including customers and clerks from other stores, about the closure of the shop. The scale of business—whether the shop was doing business or not, attracting customers or not—or the role of the production of space itself in the shop's existence—for example, attention to the costs of real estate and rents, the ability to compete in an increasingly densely populated market of music retailers, and simply paying the bills to keep the shop open—were local models reflecting the inter-relationships, the nesting of various scales that complicated matters to the point of actually losing a scalar opportunity (the closing of the shop) in this community to 'make' music and so make the city. Judd argues that scales may have 'consequences', but so do their 'absences'—as is clearly indicated in the state's attempt to limit and regulate sonic performances through the Public Entertainment Act. These state sponsored absences in the music community and community at-large ironically provide for the merging social of this community state-designated spaces of dependence (Judd 1998, 30).

The making of the city in this sense is the cosmopolis in which localized identities that are scale-able reflect a bond with a larger scale that is perhaps transcendent of any particular place: the spectre of the multi-cultural city. The old Hood explored this scale, but also provided significant opportunities for sonically charged renditions of a cosmopolitan conviviality from the mid- to late- twentieth century in which local talent not only tapped into global flows but were immersed in them in this global crossroads city-state. In the new Hood, the opportunity for this kind of making the city is reduced, yet the friends who had found so much value in the old location, in its scale of sonically charged affect, continued to show up at the new Hood, even though the affective cohesion sonically saturating their participation was becoming increasingly silenced. The continuing presence of this community of interest traveling across scales highlights the centrality of the network in the construction of the urban social. One would guess that the significance of affective scales is crucial as well.

It was difficult for everybody to speak of the impact of the closure of the guitar shop on the friendships that help shape the network at any one event, for any one jam session in the afternoon at the guitar shop, for any one performance involving the 'friends' that make up this community at

the Hood and elsewhere. Kiang's aura of rock and roll heritage, his elder status expressed in kinship terms as an 'uncle' among community members, his embodiment of a cosmopolitan conviviality remain mostly unspoken. After the clearance sale, when the shop had closed its doors for a final time after 12 years in place, at the bottom of the escalator, in the basement of an aging shopping mall, a south Asian Singaporean, a Malay Singaporean, a relocated guitar player/businessman from Japan, Kiang, and myself stood together outside the doors of the shop expressing disbelief at the news of its closure. Kiang opened the bar, mostly for himself. We talked about music, and Kiang stole the show while the other four of us, saturated in our cosmopolitan conviviality, became enchanted as we made this city in this space this way one more time.

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