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ABSTRACT

Street musicians have a precarious place in the urban fabric – despite having the ability to bring moments of conviviality to urban spaces, they simultaneously have little control over the conditions of the space in which they perform. While much existing academic literature focuses on the effects of the street musician (“busker”) on their surroundings, there is little research on how the urban space impacts the musician, namely the ways in which its qualities can foster or hinder street performance, and the adaptations these qualities force the musician to make. Additionally, most previous studies on street musicians come from an outside, third-person perspective, meaning that the performer’s intricate thoughts and feelings cannot be captured to the depth that a first-person perspective would allow. I attempt to fill these gaps in knowledge with this thesis, an autoethnographic study of my experience busking with my accordion and voice at Vienna’s Karlsplatz in the spring and summer of 2020. Analyzing the legal, social, physical, and sonic conditions of the space, I explore the extent to which my ability to put on a successful performance is shaped by the qualities of the urban space in which I play. Furthermore, I examine the tactics I use to make the best of a space’s conditions and appropriate it for my own musical purposes.

Keywords:

street music, busking, urban space, public space, spatial appropriation, Vienna



ABSTRACT

Straßenmusiker haben einen prekären Platz im Stadtgefüge – auf der einen Seite tragen sie Geselligkeit in den Stadtraum, auf der anderen Seite haben sie selbst jedoch wenig Kontrolle über die Bedingungen des Raums. Während sich ein Großteil der vorhandenen wissenschaftlichen Literatur auf die Auswirkungen der Straßenmusiker („Busker“) auf ihre Umgebung konzentriert, gibt es nur wenige Untersuchungen darüber, wie sich der städtische Raum auf den Musiker auswirkt, insbesondere bezüglich der Art und Weise, wie die Qualitäten des Raums das Auftreten auf der Straße begünstigen oder behindern können, und zu welchen Anpassungen diese den Musiker zwingen. Darüber hinaus werden die meisten bisherigen Studien über Straßenmusiker aus der Außenperspektive der dritten Person durchgeführt. Somit können die komplexen Gedanken und Gefühle des Künstlers jedoch nicht in der Tiefe erfasst werden können, wie es eine Ich-Perspektive erlauben würde. Mit dieser Masterarbeit, eine autoethnographische Studie meiner Erfahrung während des Frühlings und des Sommers 2021 am Karlsplatz in Wien als singender, akkordeonspielender Straßenmusiker, versuche ich, diese Wissenslücken zu füllen. Durch eine Analyse der rechtlichen, sozialen, physischen und akustischen Bedingungen des Stadtraums untersuche ich, inwieweit meine Fähigkeit, einen erfolgreichen Auftritt zu machen, durch die Qualitäten des Stadtraums, in dem ich spiele, geprägt ist. Außerdem beleuchte ich die Taktiken, die ich verwende, um das Beste aus den Bedingungen eines Stadtraums zu machen und mir so den Stadtraum anzueignen.

Schlagwörter:

Straßenmusik, Busking, Stadtraum, öffentlicher Raum, räumliche Aneignung, Wien



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I. INTRODUCTION

In March of 2020, I moved to Vienna, Austria for the second semester of the 4CITIES Master Course in Urban Studies, a two-year program that consists of a semester each in four different European capital cities: Brussels, Belgium; Vienna, Austria; Copenhagen, Denmark; and Madrid, Spain. On the side of my studies, I am also a musician, singing covers of pop songs while accompanying myself on the accordion. I have played both on the streets (“busking”) as well as at shows in bars and similar venues. Arriving in Vienna, I planned to focus more on booking gigs than on playing on the streets, and even went to an open mic in my first week to make connections in the local music scene. As was the case for many people in 2020, things did not quite go as planned.

A few short weeks into my stay in Vienna, the first lockdowns for the COVID-19 pandemic began, and with it, all live music events were cancelled. As public life began to reopen in Vienna in May, it was life on the streets that opened up first. Squares and parks were the centers of social life, as it was generally considered to be less risky than meeting up indoors. In a similar vein, the first musical performances after the onset of the pandemic were street performances. Unable to make any progress playing at open mics and shows, I turned my attention to street performance.

Over the next few months, I often performed several times per week and played at numerous locations around Vienna. But there is one spot that stands above the rest: Karlsplatz. I have played in many different cities and countries, but playing in other places, I have found it difficult to recapture the magic that was Karlsplatz during that spring and summer of 2020. Karlsplatz was *my* spot in the city, my figurative home during my stay in Vienna. But this ability to make the space mine, to appropriate Karlsplatz to serve my purposes as a street musician, largely hinged on the unique qualities of the space itself.

For a street musician, location is absolutely everything. Playing the exact same show in different spaces can easily be the difference between having an excited crowd with a large payday and earning nearly nothing as people uninterestedly walk by. A street corner, square, or park could appear to be a viable “pitch” (performance location) yet have some quality that makes it unsuitable for busking. It could be too much noise, the types of people passing through, the architecture, or a multitude of other reasons.

When choosing a space to play in and even during the act of performing, I am hyper-alert of its qualities, always looking to take advantage of them to have a successful performance. As Harrison-Pepper (1990) wrote, “The width of a sidewalk or shade from a tree, the noise surrounding the performance space, the proximity of other performers, the social as well as the atmospheric climates, the civic regulations concerning performance activities—all are part of the street performer’s daily, even minute-to-minute negotiations with a fluid and vital urban environment” (xv).

Many scholars have written about the effects of street music on musician’s environment, and on how it can contribute to the conviviality of urban space (Simpson 2011b; Doumpa and Broad 2014; Ho and Au 2021), but much less is written on the space’s effect on the performer, let alone from the street musician’s first-person perspective. In this paper, I draw on that personal experience to describe the street musician’s process specifically from the performer’s point of view, focusing on answering the following question:

“How do the legal, social, physical, and sonic conditions of an urban space affect a street musician’s ability to turn the space into a stage for musical performance, as well as their tactics in doing so?”

Karlsplatz, more than any other space I have encountered, had numerous factors that made it an optimal, even if imperfect, “pitch” for me to busk at, as evidenced by the frequency with which I went back there to play during my semester in Vienna. My goal is to articulate what made Karlsplatz such a great space to put on a show, describing how the urban environment allowed me to successfully put on impromptu street performances. Additionally, I will not only describe the static conditions of Karlsplatz, but will rather address the temporal variability of the space, and how that not only influenced my decision to play there, but also my tactics while playing and iterations on my performance. And in discussing my response as an artist to this ever-changing environment, I will look at de Certeau’s (1984) idea of “tactics,” and how it relates to a street musician’s attempts at spatial appropriation.

A major influence on my work has been Sally Harrison-Pepper’s (1990) book *Drawing a Circle in the Square: Street Performing in New York’s Washington Square Park*. This offers perhaps one of the most thorough accounts of street performers “transform[ing] city ‘space’ into a theater ‘place’” (xv), with specific emphasis on the properties of the space itself. In it, she maps out Washington Square Park and gives us a close look at its inner social workings, detailing

how performers interact with both their physical surroundings and audiences to establish a show. However, she, like most other papers describing the phenomenon of street performance, has written from a third-person perspective, meaning that the first-person street performer perspective is not fully explored. Even with interviews and quotes, a non-street musician cannot fully understand the entirety of a performer's thoughts and actions.

In contrast, this paper is an exercise in autoethnography. Building off Harrison-Pepper's work, I look at Vienna's Karlsplatz in a similar manner to her analysis of New York City's Washington Square Park, but with a specific focus on my personal experience. Utilizing my unique experience as a street musician, I will be able to dig deeper into the micro-level nuances involved in finding a space and appropriating it as a street musician.

In Chapter II, I give context to the research, explaining street music as an urban practice, my place in that practice, and existing discourse around spatial appropriation. Chapter III provides an explanation of my methodology, specifically focusing on the autoethnographic nature of this research. In Chapter IV, I analyze the legal regulation of street musicians in Vienna, and the advantageous position of Karlsplatz slightly outside of this. Chapter V presents the social qualities of the space, discussing how the types of people at Karlsplatz suited my performance as well as my tactics to interact with the crowd and promote interest in and engagement with my performance. In Chapter VI, I detail the architectural and physical environment of the space, and how it lends itself to my specific type of street performance. Chapter VII presents a sonic analysis of the space, with attention to the way in which competing sounds challenged me as a musician and influenced the exact space I attempted to occupy while playing. Finally, Chapter VIII consists of the conclusions from this study and suggestions for further research.

II. RESEARCH CONTEXT

A SELF-INTRODUCTION

Before I go too far into the details of my experience performing at Karlsplatz, it is important to introduce myself as the subject of research. In this study, I seek to take advantage of my experience busking, which I began in 2018 while living in Chicago. Since then, I have played on the streets all across Europe, including in Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, Denmark, Spain, and Portugal. Thus, I have experience not only in different cultural contexts, but with the complexities of street musician licensing and enforcement in different cities. Additionally, I have played in a plethora of types of spaces, from street corners to plazas to parks, giving me insight into the nuances of choosing a space and performing in it.

As an artist, I have a rather unique aesthetic compared to many performers I have seen. The most notable thing upon first seeing me is my instrument of choice: the accordion. The accordion is by-and-large seen as an instrument for ethnic folk music. In Austria, the site of my research, there is even a special type of accordion, the Steirische Harmonika, meant for playing typical Austrian folk music. In the United States, the accordion was for many years popular among immigrant communities (especially Italian immigrants) who valued it for its affordability compared to a piano, as well as its portability and simplicity to learn. In the first half of the 20th century, it worked its way into mainstream acceptance, only to experience a decline as rock ‘n roll music gained popularity (Jacobson 2012). To counteract the increase in electronic sounds of the 1970s and 1980s, artists such as Bruce Springsteen and John Mellencamp incorporated the accordion into their bands to provide a “rustic, ‘heartland’ flavor” (Jacobsen 2012, 166). But overall, the instrument has this “folksy” image, which is seemingly incompatible with mainstream (mostly English-language) popular music.

William Whyte, in his book *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* claimed that “a virtue of street acts is their unexpectedness” (1980, 97). As a street performer, I lean heavily into this mantra, as a large part of my success as a musician comes in this assumed incongruence between the instrument I play and my performance repertoire. Simultaneously playing the accordion and singing, I eschew the typical folk songs one might expect on the accordion in favor of a more mainstream repertoire. Performing my own spin on modern pop and rock songs, I play covers of music by artists ranging from Britney Spears, to Amy Winehouse, to Queen.



Figure 1: Myself engaging with the crowd while performing in New York City's Washington Square Park (Image courtesy of Zara Simpson)

Needless to say, people are not used to hearing someone with an accordion playing songs in the style that I do. In that regard, my closest musical comparison is likely “Weird Al” Yankovich, who has used the accordion as his primary instrument throughout his 40-year career creating comedic parodies, polka-inspired cover medleys, and original songs. Indeed, a certain level of comedy is inherent in what I do. I often run around and dance in a somewhat risqué manner while playing, in contrast to many street musicians who are relatively stationary and often a bit more “serious.” As will be discussed further, I attempt to create a spectacle that involves the audience, rather than just a concert to passively listen to.

THE TERMINOLOGY OF STREET MUSIC

Now that I have introduced myself, it is important to lay a groundwork for what street music is. According to the Merriam-Webster English dictionary, a “busker” is “a person who entertains in a public place for donations” (“Busker” 2021). Thus, when I refer to busking, I am referring to this general definition. In this paper, the term “street performer” will also be interchangeably used to mean the same thing. Street performers can be musical in nature but need not be, with non-musical acts such as jugglers, comedians, and fire-breathers, magicians, and mimes also being common forms of busking. Street musicians, consequently, are street

performers that specifically focus on music as their artform, whether it be singing, playing an instrument, or doing both at the same time. However, as I will describe briefly, there is sometimes a larger distinction made between “street performers” and “street musicians.”

Street performance can take on various forms in various types of spaces. Kassem (2020) defines three principal types of street performance: circle shows, walk-by acts, and spotlight performances. Spotlight performances are the least relevant to my study, consisting of buskers doing very quick performances at traffic lights, or other such locations. The difference between circle shows and walk-by acts is related to both the timing of the act and the engagement of the audience. According to Kassem, a circle show has a beginning and an end, designed to have large groups staying in one space. In contrast, a walk-by act continues for an indefinite time, with most audience members only stopping by for a short time.

Oftentimes, a limited view is taken on street musicians, considering them to fall mostly in the category of walk-by acts. Harrison-Pepper (1990) takes such a view on street musicians, claiming that “Street music only happens to occur on an urban stage...the larger message is that the environment is mostly to be ignored” (xvi). This contrasts with the non-musical “circle show” acts she explicitly chooses to focus on, such as jugglers, comedians, and fire-breathers. At the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, often considered to be the world’s largest arts festival (Batchelder 2006), street performer registration and performance slots are divided between “buskers,” who perform to festivalgoers walking by and “street performers,” who perform circle shows to larger crowds. When describing the “street performers,” their web page specifically refers to them as having “a combination of circus skills and comedy” (“Fringe Street Events”), reinforcing the idea that street musicians are stationary acts to be passed by, not acts to build a circle show around.

In contrast, I would argue that street musicians can vary greatly in character and can utilize a similar space in completely different ways to achieve the goal of appropriating a public space to create a well-received performance. And personally, I have seen street musicians attract crowds similar in size to a juggler’s circle show. Ultimately, the musician playing a “walk- by

act” is often attempting to get passers-by to stick around, to create a crowd around them in a circle much as a “circle show” would.



Figure 2: Opera singer Rainer Kohut builds up a crowd while performing on Vienna's Kärntner Straße.

For this paper, I consider “street musicians” to simply be a subset of “street performers,” making no further assumptions beyond that. Additionally, as an artist, I make use of movement, preferring to play in a circle show-type environment than for passers-by. While this paper is about “street musicians,” as I have only observed from the point of view of that type of performer, I do not consider them to be entirely different entities and will not hold fast to a strict distinction in the terminology. Thus, I often will use the term “buskers” or “street performers” to refer to “street musicians,” even though those terms could be used for other types of performers as well.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF STREET MUSIC

To further understand street music as an urban practice, we need to look at its history. As Bennett and McKay (2019) have outlined, the practice has a long tradition. Although evidence of street music goes as far back as Biblical times and continues in ancient Rome, it became more widely documented with the minstrels and troubadours of the Middle Ages. These minstrels would travel from court to court, performing in different cities. While some had a privileged position, many were marginal figures in society with less financial means. As time went on, ballad sellers would sing of the current events of the day (Bennett and McKay 2019)

and street criers and vendors would use musical performers as a means to advertise their goods (Schafer 1994).

As industrialization progressed in the subsequent years, street performers often received blame for the increase in noise in city centers. In mid-1800s London, these debates were very visible, with prominent public figures such as Charles Dickens and Charles Babbage speaking out against the ample music in the city (Schafer 1994; Simpson 2017; Watt 2018). Babbage (1864) lodged a rather pointed criticism, stating that street music “destroys the time and the energies of all the intellectual classes of society by its continual interruptions of their pursuits” (3) and that “one-fourth of my working power has been destroyed by the nuisance against which I have protested” (11). Complaints such as this in cities around the world led to noise legislation designed to cleanse the urban soundscape, and subsequently, the disappearance of many such street performers and musicians (Schafer 1994). The common stigma that busking is not a profession, but merely a form of begging (Simpson 2011b; McNamara and Quilter 2016), likely did not help the profession to gain favor in the public opinion. As Harrison-Pepper (1990) put it, “much of the history of street performance...is found in laws which prohibit it” (22). This remains true to this day, with modern street musicians still operating in the landscape of such regulations.

CURRENT LANDSCAPE OF STREET MUSIC

Nowadays, most major cities have some sort of licensing scheme, with wildly different philosophies. These can range from daily auditions (Munich) to a fee per square meter of space used (Bratislava) (Doumpa and Broad 2017). While there are a variety of ways to approach street music, busking regulations tend to fall under two categories: those which regard it as a noise issue like Babbage and his contemporaries (Simpson 2011b), and those which want to foster it to improve a city’s vibrancy and/or curate its image, often along the lines of Florida’s (2002) “Creative Class” paradigm (Doumpa and Broad 2017; Kaul 2014; Seldin 2020).

In my time as a street musician, I’ve experienced firsthand the widely varying rules between cities. Chicago, where I first began busking in early 2018, required a visit to city hall and a \$100 fee, but the license I received allowed me to play nearly anywhere in the city for two years. In contrast, Brussels, where I lived from September 2019 to January 2020, charged no fee, but only gave out passes with one month of validity and only allowed performers to play in defined spots. Additionally, the city of Brussels seeks to maintain a level of quality on its

streets, so all performers must either present a music degree or pass an audition, the latter of which I did in September 2019. These regulations can create barriers to entry for buskers, as it is not always possible to get a permit; indeed, while traveling I have encountered cities that only give out licenses at set times of the year, meaning that street performers that move to the city may be required to wait several months to receive one and play legally. Ultimately, despite the conviviality that street music can bring to cities, buskers often have little freedom in where they are actually allowed to play.

Overall, busker opinion towards regulation is mixed. While there are certainly street musicians against all regulation, there are others that appreciate that it gives them a legitimate structure to work within. Still, it must be noted that a large part of regulation is the “unwritten rules” between buskers themselves, and that the rules on paper are often not what is enforced (Harrison-Pepper 1990; Patterson 2012; McNamara and Quilter 2016). Street musicians, myself included, will often push the envelope of what the law technically allows. For instance, when travelling to a new city for a short time, it is often not worth it to go through the formal process of applying for a permit, or even impossible if the process only occurs at certain times of the year. Consequently, a musician will often take their chances in playing “illegally,” as the potential profit outweighs the risks of being stopped by the police. While I have heard of serious fines and instrument confiscation, in my experience, most local police will simply ask musicians to leave if they are breaking the law. And when that happens, it can even be advantageous to the artist, as onlookers might be more generous to an artist whose act gets shut down. Oftentimes, the rules will not even be enforced, meaning that the musician is free to continue playing. Ultimately, legality for a street musician lies not in the written rules, but in their enforcement. Simply put, a space is legal until someone says it is not.

In this paper I will speak about having a “successful” performance. However, “successful” is a nebulous term, and one that has a different meaning for different buskers. There are many different reasons why individuals choose to play music on the streets. Many busk to earn a living, but still there are some that do it in an attempt to become more well-known and build their career, or even simply because they enjoy it (Harrison-Pepper 1990; Sebastian 2010). Additionally, some become street musicians due to a lack of opportunities in cultural institutions, leaving the streets as their only place to play (Genest 2001).

I personally have felt all of these separate motivations to varying extents. Obviously, I enjoy the money I receive doing it, but I also get a thrill from playing on the streets and having a

crowd cheer me on. Furthermore, I have busked due to a lack of show opportunities (as evidenced by my experience during the pandemic) and certainly have dreams of being discovered from busking, whether during the actual performance or by posting photos and videos to social media afterwards. During my time in Vienna, an employee of the local radio station FM4 even saw me busking and decided to do a segment on me. While I cannot say I “made it big,” this small example shows that such “discoveries” are possible from playing on the street.

Taking out the hopes of discovery, which is clearly very unpredictable, there are two clear measures of success for any given performance: monetary earnings and audience engagement. While the two “metrics” might seem completely different, they often go hand in hand. A performance with sparse applause and interest will not be very lucrative. In contrast, a large crowd with thunderous applause will likely be financially generous as well. While it is easier to tangibly measure earnings, it is also just the end result of an engaged audience, and a day’s total can be heavily skewed by a few large donations. Furthermore, whenever I played at Karlsplatz (or anywhere else for that matter) my focus was on entertaining the crowd and on creating interest around my show. Once I was able to do that, the money would certainly follow. And with so many environmental factors constantly in flux, it is difficult to know precisely what caused a day’s profits to be good or bad. Additionally, the topic of exact earnings is a somewhat sensitive one for street musicians, myself included, as our work (and the money gained from it) exists in a legal grey area, outside of traditional employment structures. Thus, while I will touch on both definitions of “success” throughout this paper, I will put more of an emphasis on audience engagement than on monetary earnings. And when I do speak about monetary success, I will do so in general terms, rather than referencing exact amounts earned on a given day.

SPATIAL APPROPRIATION

To engage the public and have a “successful” musical performance on the street, it is necessary for a busker to claim ownership over a space, to “appropriate” it for their needs. The French philosopher Henri Lefebvre has written extensively on the subject of spatial appropriation, stating that an appropriated space is one that has been “modified in order to serve the needs and possibilities of a group” (1991, 165) and that the right to appropriation is an inherent part

of “the right to the city” (Lefebvre 1968). Building off Lefebvre’s ideas, Purcell (2002) argues that appropriation does not just entail the right to occupy space, but to produce it as well.

Going back to Lefebvre, in his work *The Production of Space*, he states that “(social) space is a (social) product” (1991, 26). Spaces are produced out of nature by the social activities that take place. Hence, these activities do not just turn a non-social space into a social one, but rather are the force that makes it into a space at all (Lefebvre 1991; Elden 2004). Without appropriations, social forces guiding its use, a space is hardly a space at all.

To successfully appropriate a space, a street performer must contribute to the conviviality of urban space (Simpson 2011b; Doumpa and Broad 2014; Ho and Au 2021). They must produce a space of their own, taking ownership of an everyday area that they can temporarily claim as their own. While this temporary claim of a space is often over the course of one performance, it is also something that can extend beyond just one busking session, as some performers play at one location enough times to gain somewhat of an “ownership” of it (Adomaitis 2012). But either way, there is an undeniable temporal element to this claim for space. Bywater (2007) wrote about the transformation of everyday spaces into performance spaces by buskers, as well as about the temporal dimension inherent in the quest to appropriate a space. As he stated:

Liminal spaces are contended for in transit. The crowd moves through the space, but the space itself is fixed and bounded. If one wishes to extend possession of the space, the only dimension in which one may do so is in that of time; the longer one can hold the attention of the crowd (the crowd in aggregate, that is; individual members of the crowd will come and go, but the collective attention remains), the longer one holds the space. For the marginal occupants of such spaces – staking a claim rather than simply moving through – time is, literally, money. (Bywater 2007, 118)

Despite the literature on the effect of the street performer on the space, there is limited work on the qualities of the space itself, and on how that impacts the artist. Bywater (2007) briefly mentions different types of busking spots, based on the overall usage patterns of the spaces, as well as on the extent to which street performance is already expected, and therefore accepted in the space. While Clua, Llorca-Bofí, and Psarra (2020) have analyzed the quality of busking locations in Barcelona, this was from a very quantitative perspective, with a great emphasis put on acoustic qualities. It did not focus as much on social usage of the space or other more qualitative aspects of a busking pitch. Harrison-Pepper (1990) does thoroughly examine this with respect to New York City’s Washington Square Park, but focuses mostly on non-musical circle shows.

“TACTICS” OF SPATIAL APPROPRIATION

In addition to analyzing the extent to which a busking space’s qualities affect a street musician’s ability to play there, I will also look at the tactics of the musician to both take advantage of a space’s positive qualities and overcome its negative ones. To properly discuss the tactics a street musician uses to appropriate public space, we must first look at Michel de Certeau’s concept of “tactic.” In his work *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau (1984) defines a “tactic” as an “art of the weak” (37) that “takes advantage of ‘opportunities’ and depends on them” (37), as opposed to a “strategy,” which is carried out by those with some position of power.

De Certeau’s concept of “tactics” has been applied to buskers in analyzing how they appropriate the complicated spaces around them. Wees (2017) outlines the different strategies and considerations of street performers in the Montreal metro, stating that “buskers must negotiate the demands of legal regulations and engaging the public, of spatial acoustics and financial viability, among other considerations” (11).

Additionally, as Seldin (2020) states:

Faced with the obstacles of daily life, they must find solutions to share their art and earn their living by (re)appropriating the streets according to the given possibilities, subverting references and norms, and often opening cracks in the pre-established power relations. (9)

Inherently, street musicians do not have power over the spots they play in. They are reliant on factors out of their control, such as the architecture, sounds, and foot traffic of the spaces they inherit. Thus, they must do their best to shape the space they are in from a powerless position. While playing at Vienna’s Karlsplatz, I experienced this firsthand – my ability to put on a successful show hinged on the qualities of the space. I had to learn how to best take advantage of what I was given in order to succeed in “breaking the monotony of urban life and tactically triggering the attention of others” (Seldin 2020, 9).

III. METHODOLOGY

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

I did not begin to busk at Karlsplatz with any thoughts of research in mind, but simply for the same reasons I busk anywhere else: to have some fun playing music and make a bit of money in the process. And even as I settled on street music as the topic of my thesis, I originally intended to do a more comparative approach of different cities and busking spots. It is only as I kept going back to Karlsplatz that I narrowed the focus down to this one special space. There was no other spot (in Vienna or elsewhere) with which I had such an intimate relationship, or about which I had such a depth of knowledge.

This study is at its core an exploratory one. I did not have hypotheses in mind when I started my observations, but instead reflected upon my experience to better understand the space, and how its qualities affected my process of putting on performances there as a street musician. Additionally, due to the lack of first-person academic works by street musicians, I determined it would be better to be broad in my scope. Specifically, I touch on the legal, social, physical, and sonic qualities of the space instead of focusing solely on one or two of these categories. As this is an exploratory study, I use qualitative methods of research, as I will now delve into.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

As previously mentioned, most existing research on street music has been undertaken from a third-person perspective, with a researcher studying the street musician as the “other.” Rarely is the researcher also a street musician, and even when they are, they are usually not also the object of study. Thus, insights into the artist’s thoughts, feelings, and decision-making process can only be discovered through interviews, which are dependent on the interviewer’s questions and the interviewee’s willingness and ability to communicate.

Autoethnography, on the other hand, gives the researcher the power of self-disclosure and allows them “to provide valuable, insider insight not possible with other research techniques” (Adams 2012, 187). Instead of the researcher analyzing others from that 3rd-person perspective, in an autoethnographic study, the researcher is the object of observation and seeks



to use personal experience to describe a broader cultural phenomenon (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011; Adams, Ellis, and Jones 2017).

My research data largely comes in the form of written field notes. Over the course of approximately three months, I took notes on my experiences playing at Karlsplatz and other locations around Vienna. Between May and August of 2020, I have documentation of having played on 33 separate days in Vienna.¹ On 18 separate occasions, I played at Karlsplatz, by far the most of any location in the city. While I played a few times before I started turning this activity into an object of research, I began taking field notes in earnest starting on May 30, the 5th time I performed at Karlsplatz. My notes consist of ethnographic observations on the space before and after playing as well as notes on occurrences during my actual performance. While I could not take notes while performing, I did my best to document immediately afterwards, as well as by supplementing my notes with audio and visual data, as I will describe later in this chapter. As time went on, my notes focused more on the unique things that happened at any given performance. Having played 18 times at the same location, I knew to a certain extent how the space operated, and a lot of times the flow of my show, the usage of the space, and the crowd reactions were relatively similar. Despite this, there was nearly always something that made a day unique, something going on in the space that changed how I approached my show or my success in earning applause and contributions. I made sure to note these occurrences, and throughout my thesis will reference events from specific days to highlight their unique impact on myself as the performer, and on my ability to appropriate the space. As I will further discuss, I also have audio and visual data of several of my performances, giving me ample evidence to support the assertions I make and examples I reference.

CRITICISMS OF AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Despite the widespread recognition of autoethnography as a research method, it is not without its criticisms. Its validity is often called into question on various grounds, such as being too personal, devoid of scientific rigor, or even downright self-indulgent (Madison 2006; Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011; Forber-Pratt 2015; Fourie 2021). Perhaps one of my biggest dangers is writing what Freeman (2011) refers to as a “narcissistic autoethnography” (215), one in which “autoethnography...appears to be used as little more than a relatively research-friendly term, as something that sounds more academically legitimate than autobiography but

¹ Not including busking I did during travels to other cities during this time

which has more in common with drawing the reader into the researcher's own life than using one's culturally located experiences as something that opens a door onto wider understanding" (215). Anderson (2006) similarly criticizes the self-focused nature of some autoethnographies, writing that "No ethnographic work—not even autoethnography—is a warrant to generalize from an 'N of one'" (368).

To counter these criticisms, it is necessary to recognize both the limitations and the value in what I am doing. In this study, I have focused on a specific space (Karlsplatz) in a specific city (Vienna) at a specific point in time (spring/summer 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic). I am also a singular musician with a unique playing style and instrument. Thus, I cannot and do not attempt to speak for all street musicians, as my personal experience is inherently unique. Still, no academic research paper exists in a vacuum. As an iteration on previous literature, my personal experience can provide a more complete picture on a street performer's interactions with space and tactics to appropriate it. What I have written about in Vienna can certainly be compared to and contrasted with existing literature, such as Harrison-Pepper's (1990) work in New York City and Wees's (2017) writing on Montreal, but with the benefits of insider information that autoethnography allows for. As Duncan (2004) writes, "there is a place in scholarship for shining the light of research where one stands for attempting to know one's own experience and sharing that knowledge" (38).

My research focus has also been guided by a recognition of the necessity to avoid biases and such "self-indulgence" as much as possible. While it is interesting to look at the impact of the busker on their performance space, it is difficult to do this neutrally in an autoethnographic manner. For instance, while playing, I can observe a crowd forming, as well as people cheering and donating money with a certain level of objectivity. Such observations can be related to the characteristics of the space, as well as my actions when performing, in order to understand my relationship with my "performance stage." However, making broad claims about the conviviality of urban space as a result of my own music is a road I intentionally did not go down, as I felt it veers too much into that realm of "self-indulgence". I cannot definitively say that I made Karlsplatz "better" or "more enjoyable" by playing there, but rather can only report on the reactions I received from the audience.

I have also been careful to distance myself in the process of research, ensuring that my observations are not purely autobiographical stories, but rather scientific data that builds upon existing academic discourse and theory, and comments upon a cultural phenomenon. As

Winkler (2018, 237) describes, “autoethnographic research requires balancing the ‘auto’ [‘the self’] and the ‘ethno’ [‘the culture’] to the extent that there is sufficient emphasis on the cultural settings to enable a research or a text to pass as autoethnography.”

There is also debate about what constitutes legitimate autoethnography, specifically when it comes to using personal memory as a source of data. While some scholars (Wall 2008; Winkler 2014; Winkler 2018) embrace the rigor and validity of memory-constructed autoethnographies, others (Duncan 2004; Muncey 2005) are skeptical of this as the sole form of data and advocate for some sort of “hard” data to support the author’s personal recollections. While I am not shying away from using memory as a part of my data collection, there is also no shortage of “hard” data to back up my assertions, as evidenced by the extensive notes and audio/visual material I have. Thus, I have no doubt that my methods of autoethnography will satisfy the standards of academic rigor for both the pro- and anti-memory camps of researchers.

ETHNOGRAPHY

While the overall thesis can certainly be classified as an autoethnography, there were certainly moments where I used a third-person ethnographic approach to “study the activities of people in their everyday settings” (Palmer 2001, 301). In addition to focusing on my own experience performing, it was necessary to focus on the space of Karlsplatz without music in order to understand the day-to-day patterns and users. This allowed me to better describe the overall atmosphere of the area, as well as what made it such a unique busking location. My approach here also came in the form of field notes. As previously stated, my notes from playing at Karlsplatz also include sections on events before and after my performance times, meaning that in addition to analyzing my interaction with the space, I also was analyzing the space outside of my influence on it. Additionally, on a limited basis, I was able to observe other street musicians in Vienna with the same critical eye I had for myself, similarly observing their interactions with the space around them. Instead of solely taking notes on these other musicians’ performances, I took video recordings with my smartphone on a tripod, allowing me to review what I saw, as well as to have ample visual documentation.

INFORMAL INTERVIEWS

After observing other musicians play, I also did a few informal (unstructured) interviews with them, to understand their relationship with the “pitch” they played on and their experience

playing in Vienna. While the focus of this paper was mainly on my personal experience, these perspectives serve as counterpoints to my own, helping to show that street musician experiences are diverse by nature. Interviews were conducted in English and German, and all musicians interviewed were informed of its academic purpose and consented to my recording of the conversations.

FIELD RECORDINGS

During my time in Vienna, I acquired a Roland R-07 High Resolution Audio Recorder, with which I was able to take field recordings of Karlsplatz and other spaces, both with and without musical performances. All recordings were taken with a windscreen over the microphones in order to reduce excess wind noises. These audio recordings allowed me to listen back to the soundscape, to better recall the sonic environments of the spaces in which I played. Additionally, by putting the sound files into an audio editing software, I was able to view the sound waves from my recordings and was able to do qualitative analysis on them.

VISUAL ETHNOGRAPHY

Throughout my ethnographic observations of Karlsplatz and other sites around Vienna, I took photographs to illustrate key concepts and highlight notable events. However, my role as both researcher and subject of observation in this autoethnographic study caused a bit of a challenge in terms of my ability to visually document my experiences while playing. How could I possibly take photographs of myself while I was in the process of playing?

Fortunately, causing a spectacle such as a street performer does, many people at Karlsplatz took photos and videos of me for their own purposes. While there are surely many I did not receive, there are many I did. In general, as a street musician, whenever I see someone recording me or taking photographs, I make a point to ask them to send me what they have, so I can use it for my own artistic purposes, such as posting on social media. Additionally, sometimes viewers tag videos of me in their Instagram story. Instagram alerts me when this occurs, allowing me to message these users as well, asking for a copy of their videos. While I would have asked for these images and videos anyway for personal use, in the case of this study they also provided me with a wealth of visual documentation of my experience playing at Karlsplatz. All images (whether photos or snapshots of videos) taken by others are

appropriately credited, and permission was received for their use from the people who took them. Any images not specifically credited are my own productions.

For two performances (July 25 and 26), I also have full video recordings, allowing me to watch myself after the fact as an audience member would. Obviously, I could not record myself, as I was too occupied with my performances. Thus, I recruited classmates to assist me with the endeavor (Nelson Reed on July 25 and Christian Allmer on July 26). Following Jewitt's (2012) discussions on the merits of "fixed" vs. "roaming" camera use, I opted to have them record from a mostly "fixed" position. Since I was not able to do the filming myself, this afforded me more control over the angle that I would be recorded from. Moreover, it was less obtrusive to my show, as having a videographer following me could have influenced the way I behaved and the way the audience reacted. I attached my smartphone (my video camera for this exercise) to the top of a tripod off to the side of my main performance area by one of the side seating ledges. I then directed my assisting classmates to move the tripod to follow me as I moved around during my performance.

It is still possible that the presence of the video camera influenced the behavior of those being recorded, as Jewitt (2012) mentioned. The audience could have noticed the tripod off to the side, although with so many things happening at Karlsplatz, I doubt that it altered their reaction to my show much if at all. Slightly more likely is that it influenced my behavior, for example encouraging me to spend more time on the side closer to the camera, so that I would get better images. I made an effort to play the shows as I normally would, but I cannot rule out the possibility that I was subconsciously affected. Still, even if that is the case, I do not feel like it severely negatively altered the data I received.

Overall, the use of visual evidence helped me confront one of my largest research challenges: the inability to both play and take field notes at the same time. For much of my field notes, I was forced to rely on memory to write them at the end of my performance, as it was usually not possible to note what was happening mid-show. Thus, the images and videos I have (both spontaneous ones from spectators and the prearranged ones from classmates) filled in a gap and allowed me to provide a much more detailed account of my experiences. In one of the few first-person studies I have encountered by a street musician, geographer Paul Simpson (2011a) records himself while busking in Bath, England. Speaking of the experience, he says, "...I would have to concentrate for the most part on what I was actually playing and so would miss or not notice some events or their detail. However, in general, the video camera recorded far

more detail than would have been possible from my observations alone” (Simpson 2011a, 345). Similarly, the visual evidence I received greatly aided in my research, allowing me to attain a greater understanding of my own performance practices.

IV. THE RIGHT TO PLAY: “LEGAL” CONSIDERATIONS

BUSKING LEGISLATION IN VIENNA

Vienna as a city is often associated with music and is even at times referred to as the “city of music” or “capital of music” (Hatz 2009; Kostova 2021). To be more specific, this cultural designation is often referring to its lengthy history in the classical and orchestral music canon. The city was a center of European music under the Habsburg Empire, and many renowned composers lived in Vienna at some point in their lives, including Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, and Strauss (Hatz 2009). This appreciation for the city’s musical heritage can still be seen today. For example, there are currently three separate major opera houses in use (“Opera in Vienna”). Additionally, one of the main landmarks of the city’s Stadtpark is a large golden statue of Johann Strauss playing a violin.

However, this reverence for classical, orchestral, and operatic music has not translated to the same appreciation for street musicians, at least not at the city level. As Fuchs and Stadelmann (1987) showed in their interviews with street musicians and listeners on Vienna’s Kärtner Straße, opinion on street musicians, even historically, is somewhat mixed, with some residents complaining about street music as being a nuisance to their daily lives. Looking at the city regulations on street music, there is a clear reflection of this outlook on busking.

Previously, I discussed the two separate paradigms for city-level street music legislation: those which value the activity as a positive contribution to culture, and those which regulate it as an everyday noise disturbance. Nowadays in Vienna, street music regulation falls under the category of noise pollution management. Indeed, it is a rather regimented activity, with specific spots legislated as being allowed street performance spaces. According to the city of Vienna’s statute on the regulation of street art, there are a total of 70 legal spots to perform street art in the city: 32 are reserved for street performers (both musical and non-musical) with permits, 33 are specifically for musical acts without permits, and 5 are reserved for visual street artists (such as painters or drawers) with permits. To get a permit for a given month, I had to send an email requesting one to the appropriate city office by the 15th day of the preceding month. Then, it was necessary to get it in person on the last Monday of that preceding month, paying a 6.54€ fee in cash upon pickup (“Straßenkunstverordnung 2012”).

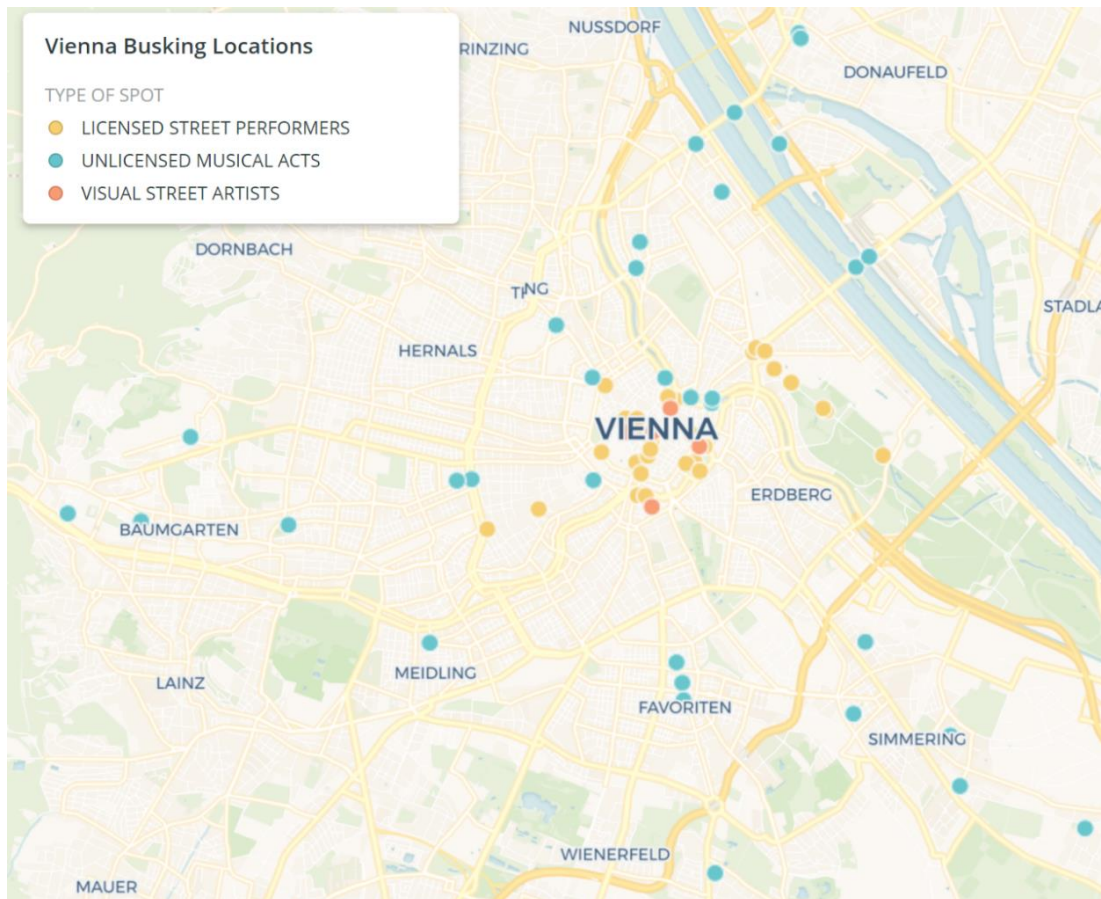


Figure 3: Map of all legal busking locations according to the Vienna street performance ordinances. (Map created in CARTO)

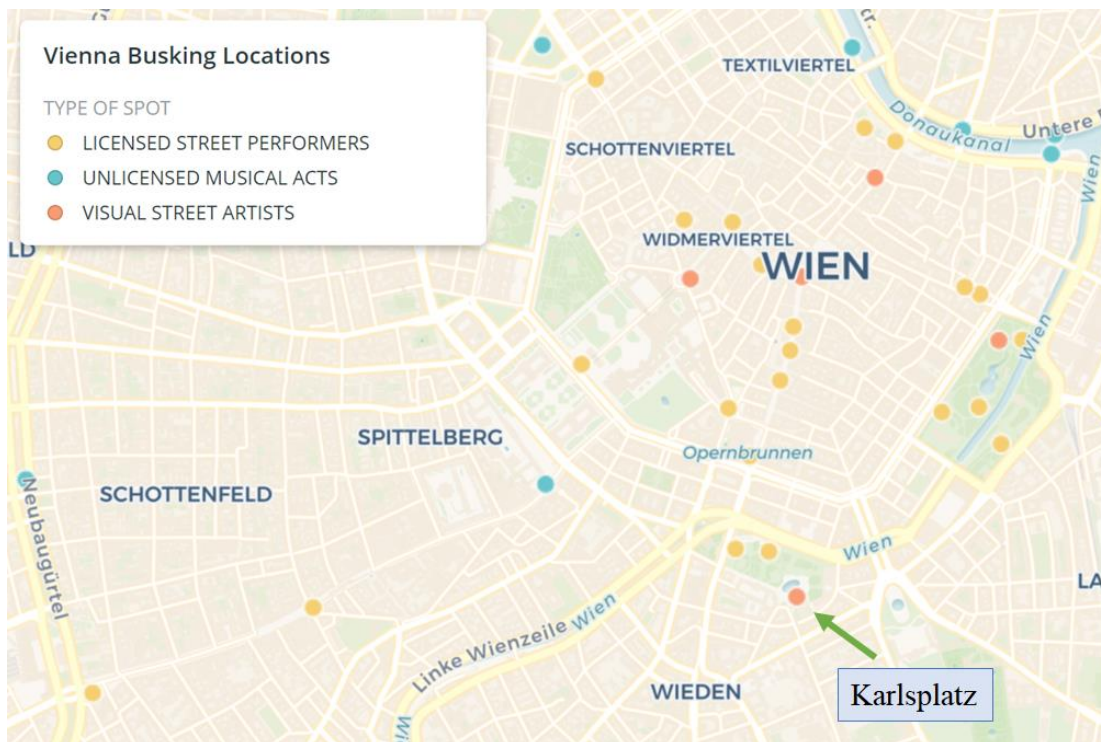


Figure 4: Close-up image of Figure 3, focusing on the center of the city. Karlsplatz, indicated by the green arrow, is not a legal spot for street musicians, only for “visual” artists (such as painters and drawers). (Map created in CARTO, with markings added afterwards)

Despite the seemingly ample legal pitches, street performers do not have free reign to play where they would like. While the 33 locations that do not require a permit can be used by anyone at most any time, these spots are often not the “premiere” locations where an artist can make a good profit. As can be seen in the map below, most spots in the city center are reserved for licensed musicians. Thus, this creates somewhat of a hierarchy between street musicians. Those who are officially licensed through the city have access to locations that others do not.

Even in the spots for unlicensed musicians, there was not truly freedom to play when and where one wanted. For example, one of the most “desirable” spots for unlicensed musicians is just outside the entrance to the Museumsquartier, a cultural center with several art museums as well as ample space to sit down and relax on a nice day. Between people going in and out of this space and people passing by on Mariahilferstraße, a prominent pedestrian shopping street, there is a good amount of foot traffic. Thus, it was a very popular spot for musicians to play if they did not have a license or if they did not have an assigned spot on a given day.

Owning to the culturally-minded individuals that frequent this space, there were many 3- to 4-piece string ensembles that would play in this space. Trying to play at this space on July 6th, I encountered these other groups and learned that they have their own system for organizing the space. Many of the musicians are of Russian origin and they added me to a WhatsApp group message called искусство в массы.² This group solely functions to organize this playing space, with members reserving the spot to play for up to two-hour blocks of time as far in advance as they want. Technically, there is nothing requiring anyone to recognize the validity of these reservations. Someone not in the WhatsApp group could show up on any given day and would have just as much “right” to play there based on the Vienna street performance regulations. However, due to the often “unspoken etiquette between buskers” (McNamara and Quilter 2016, 121) I would assume that most new performers to the spot would defer to this informal regulation of the space.

In addition to the city-run street performance regulation, there is a separate system in place to play on the city’s metro stations. The so-called “U-Bahn Stars” program is even more exclusive, requiring musicians to audition for the scheme in a “casting” process which only

² Translation to English: “art to the masses”

takes place once or twice per year. Being a member of this program gives artists the ability to play in specially designated spots at many of the city's metro stations, especially advantageous locations on days of inclement weather. As Reia (2019) notes in relation to a similar program in Montreal, musician opinion on such officially-sanctioned metro programs is mixed. Some benefit from the



Figure 5: A harpist plays at the Karlsplatz U-Bahn station in one of the designated spots for the “U-Bahn Stars” program.

legitimacy it provides, while others criticize it as an exclusionary system. Surely, it removes some of the egalitarianism inherent to street music, as it privileges certain musicians over others. Indeed, I was also excluded from this program, as due to my limited time in Vienna and the COVID-19 pandemic putting a hold on new applications, I was unable to take part in this scheme.

For the 32 busking spots reserved for permit-holders in the city's standard licensing system, the city distributes monthly passes. These detail the exact date, times, and locations where artists are assigned to play, and no two performers are ever assigned the same spot. There are only two playing “slots” per day, 4-6 PM and 6-8 PM. Thus, with a finite number of locations and time slots, the number of spots a musician receives (and their quality, as some are much better than others) is highly dependent on the total number of musicians requesting a permit.

For example, in June 2020, I personally received a spot on 23 out of 30 (~77%) days. In contrast, in July of 2021, I only was assigned a location on 11 out of 31 (~35%) days. Additionally, none of those 11 assigned spots in July fell on a Saturday, generally the most lucrative day for street musicians. This discrepancy in the number of spots assigned could potentially be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. As restrictions were gradually lifted, permits were only given out again starting in the second half of the month of May. Thus, June was the first full month of permits after the lockdown, and it is possible that the disruption

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Platzkarte für den Monat
Juni 2020
für akustische und stille Darbietungen
der Straßenkunst
 (ausgenommen bildende Straßenkunst)



Name

Simpson, Ryan

Darbietungsform(en)

1801 Akkordeon, Gesang

Tag	Ort der Darbietung	Zeit
Mo 1.	----	----
Di 2.	1; Stadtpark beim Franz-Lehar-Denkmal	16:00 - 18:00 Uhr
Mi 3.	2; Hauptallee vor dem Carl Michael-Ziehrer-Denkmal	18:00 - 20:00 Uhr
Do 4.	1; Schottentor beim U-Bahn-Aufgang, Ecke Schottengasse ONr. 6/Schottenring ONr. 2-6	18:00 - 20:00 Uhr
Fr 5.	1; Stock-im-Eisen-Platz vor ONr. 4 (Haas Haus) ident Stephansplatz ONr. 12 ident Graben ONr.32 (beim U-Bahn- Abgang)	16:00 - 18:00 Uhr
Sa 6.	----	----
So 7.	2; Praterstern – vor der linken der 3 Stelen	18:00 - 20:00 Uhr
Mo 8.	2; Hauptallee Kreuzung Hauptallee/Rustenschacherallee	18:00 - 20:00 Uhr
Di 9.	1; Ecke Fahnengasse ONr. 2/Wallnerstraße ONr. 5-7	18:00 - 20:00 Uhr
Mi 10.	1; Kärntner Straße vor ONr. 14	16:00 - 18:00 Uhr
Do 11.	----	----
Fr 12.	2; Praterstern – vor der hinteren Stele gegenüber dem Tegetthoffdenkmal	18:00 - 20:00 Uhr
Sa 13.	2; Hauptallee beim Kilometerstein 1,0 vor der Bowlinghalle (vor Hauptallee ONr. 124)	18:00 - 20:00 Uhr
So 14.	6; Christian-Broda-Platz	18:00 - 20:00 Uhr
Mo 15.	1; Graben vor dem Eingang ONr. 12	16:00 - 18:00 Uhr
Di 16.	----	----
Mi 17.	2; Praterstern – Abgang zur U1 neben dem Zugang zum Bahnhof bzw. neben der Umkehrsder Straßenbahn	18:00 - 20:00 Uhr
Do 18.	2; Hauptallee beim Kilometerstein 0,9 vor der Hockeysportanlage	16:00 - 18:00 Uhr
Fr 19.	6; Bundesländerplatz zwischen Mariahilfer Straße und Schadekassgasse	16:00 - 18:00 Uhr
Sa 20.	----	----
So 21.	1; Stadtpark zwischen Kleiner Ungarbrücke und Weiskirchnerstraße	18:00 - 20:00 Uhr
Mo 22.	1; Morzinplatz vor der Ruprechtsstiege	18:00 - 20:00 Uhr
Di 23.	1; vor dem Burgtor – Ecke Burgring	16:00 - 18:00 Uhr
Mi 24.	1; Tuchlauben vor ONr. 2	16:00 - 18:00 Uhr
Do 25.	----	----
Fr 26.	1; Stadtpark beim Franz-Lehar-Denkmal	16:00 - 18:00 Uhr

Platzkarte der MA 36 Seite 2 von 2

ausgestellt am 19.Mai.2020 09:51

Sa 27.	2; Hauptallee vor dem Carl Michael-Ziehrer-Denkmal	18:00 - 20:00 Uhr
So 28.	1; Schottentor beim U-Bahn-Aufgang, Ecke Schottengasse ONr. 6/Schottenring ONr. 2-6	18:00 - 20:00 Uhr
Mo 29.	1; Stock-im-Eisen-Platz vor ONr. 4 (Haas Haus) ident Stephansplatz ONr. 12 ident Graben ONr.32 (beim U-Bahn- Abgang)	16:00 - 18:00 Uhr
Di 30.	----	----

Die Gebühr (Verwaltungsabgabe) in Höhe von 6,54 Euro wurde entrichtet.

Für den Abteilungsleiter:


 Alexander Broskwa
 Magistratsabteilung 36 - Dezernat K
 rechtliches Veranstaltungswesen
 Dresdner Straße 75 /4, Stock, 1200 Wien
 Tel.: (+43 1) 4000-36 336
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 E-Mail: post@ma36.wien.gv.at
 www.wien.at/wirtschaft/gewerbe/technik/
 www.veranstaltungswesen.wien.at



Figure 6: My Vienna street performer license for June 2020. I was assigned a spot on 23 out of 30 days.

resulted in fewer applications, with July being a bit more “normal” in terms of the number of applications received.

Not all of the permitted spots are of equal quality based on the acoustics and pedestrian traffic patterns, and some may be more or less successful for different musicians. According to Rainer Kohut, an opera singer whom I encountered singing on Kärntner Straße in the center of Vienna, “there are good spots, average spots, and very bad spots”³ amongst the official locations on the list. Discussing his decision on whether or not to play at a day’s assigned spot, he said, “I only play at the good spots, with exceptions...for example, at the Prater Hauptallee or Praterstern, I don’t play.”⁴ Indeed, I also personally experienced this, feeling that many of the spots on the list were not actually worth

³ Translated from German

⁴ Translated from German

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**Platzkarte für den Monat
Juli 2020
für akustische und stille Darbietungen
der Straßenkunst
(ausgenommen bildende Straßenkunst)**



Name
Simpson, Ryan

Darbietungsform(en)
1801 Akkordeon, Gesang

Tag	Ort der Darbietung	Zeit
Mi 1.	-----	-----
Do 2.	1; Schottentor beim U-Bahn-Aufgang, Ecke Schottengasse ONr. 6/Schottenring ONr. 2-6	18:00 - 20:00 Uhr
Fr 3.	-----	-----
Sa 4.	-----	-----
So 5.	-----	-----
Mo 6.	4; Karlsplatz, vom Ausgang der Fußgängerpassage „Akademiestraße“ in Richtung Resselpark beim kleinen Rondeau unmittelbar beim Ausgang rechts	18:00 - 20:00 Uhr
Di 7.	-----	-----
Mi 8.	-----	-----
Do 9.	6; Bundesländerplatz zwischen Mariahilfer Straße und Schadekassengasse	16:00 - 18:00 Uhr
Fr 10.	-----	-----
Sa 11.	-----	-----
So 12.	-----	-----
Mo 13.	2; Hauptallee beim Kilometerstein 0,9 vor der Hockeysportanlage	18:00 - 20:00 Uhr
Di 14.	-----	-----
Mi 15.	-----	-----
Do 16.	1; Kärntner Straße vor ONr. 14	18:00 - 20:00 Uhr
Fr 17.	1; befestigte Fläche am Herbert-von-Karajan-Platz vor Kärntner Straße ONr. 40 (Staatsoper), gegenüber Kärntner Straße ONr. 53-55	18:00 - 20:00 Uhr
Sa 18.	-----	-----
So 19.	-----	-----
Mo 20.	1; Ecke Fahngasse ONr. 2/Wallnerstraße ONr. 5-7	16:00 - 18:00 Uhr
Di 21.	-----	-----
Mi 22.	-----	-----
Do 23.	-----	-----
Fr 24.	2; Hauptallee vor dem Carl Michael-Ziehrer-Denkmal	18:00 - 20:00 Uhr
Sa 25.	-----	-----
So 26.	-----	-----
Mo 27.	1; Albertinaplatz beim Brunnen	16:00 - 18:00 Uhr

Di 28.	1; Stadtpark zwischen Kleiner Ungarbrücke und Weiskirchnerstraße	16:00 - 18:00 Uhr
Mi 29.	-----	-----
Do 30.	-----	-----
Fr 31.	1; Wollzeile vor ONr. 39	16:00 - 18:00 Uhr

Die Gebühr (Verwaltungsabgabe) in Höhe von 6,54 Euro wurde entrichtet.

Für den Abteilungsleiter:


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Figure 7: My Vienna street performer license for July 2020. I was assigned a spot on only 11 of 31 days, much fewer than the prior month.

play there that month. Street musician permits are heavily enforced, as police officers are not shy about asking to see one's paperwork. Shop owners in the busier streets are often very

playing at. For instance, the Prater Hauptallee, mentioned by Kohut as a particularly bad spot, is a major route for runners and cyclists, who are often not likely to stop and listen to a street musician. Looking at my 11 assigned slots for July 2020, I personally would only call 3 of those particularly "good" spots, at least for my act. And as I mentioned before, not a single one of my 11 timeslots fell on a Saturday. With such limited opportunities to legally play at desirable locations and times, the Viennese permit system can make it difficult for street musicians to pursue their work.

Additionally, being confined to specific times and days makes bad weather a much larger problem. Street musicians in Vienna must hope for good weather on days they have high-quality locations. If it rains, they may not have another chance to

knowledgeable about the regulations and will threaten to call the police when one plays at an improper time.

An example of the rigidity of the licensing system can be found on June 10th/11th. On the 10th, I was assigned to play at Kärtner Straße 14, which I thought would be a rather good spot as it is on a major shopping street, approximately a 3-minute walk away from Stephansdom in the center of Vienna. However, due to some rain on the 10th, I did not end up playing that day. Instead, I decided to come back on the 11th to play in the same spot at the same time.

Although I technically did not have the legal right to play there, I decided to take my chances. Usually, the worst that police will do to “illegal street performers” is to ask them to pack up and leave. I had heard of fines being given out, but thankfully had never experienced it up to this point. And if they really made a big deal about it, I planned to claim that I misread my permit and came on the wrong day by accident. Additionally, the 11th was a holiday, so I knew that many people would be walking around the center of the city. I was a bit disappointed that I was not granted a spot for this day, so I determined that it would be worth the risk to try to play anyway.

I arrived at 4:40 PM, well after the beginning of the 4 PM slot and started playing my normal songs. People came and went, and occasionally crowds built up around me. Thankfully, no police officers asked to see my paperwork during my entire performance time. Being a holiday, most shops were closed, which is ideal, as it is often shop owners who are most likely to complain about street musicians, as they have no choice but to stay where they are. However, a tourist shop in the vicinity of my spot was still open on this day and was staffed by a middle-aged woman. As I played, I could see on her face that she was not thrilled with my presence, but did not say anything at all. At 6 PM on the dot, she came up to me angrily, claiming she had “Kopfschmerzen”⁵ and demanding that I must stop. It seemed she knew the rules for street musicians and was aware that my theoretical slot should have ended at 6 PM.

I responded by saying that I would play one more song and then leave, eager to earn a bit more money before I leave. Technically that would be slightly surpassing my theoretical time limit, but most store owners would accept it and consider that to be a reasonable compromise. In the middle of my final song, she came right up to me, loudly trying to talk to me as I played. I tried to finish the song before leaving, but she had completely broken my ownership of the pitch,

⁵ Translation to English: “a headache”

coming right into my performance space and challenging my right to play. I left after that song, before she had a chance to call the police.

The licensing system in Vienna truly made street performing a difficult endeavor. With little freedom over where to play, my best option was to subvert the rules and hope that they wouldn't be enforced. Yet even though they were not enforced by public authorities, they were essentially enforced by this shopkeeper, who was opposed to my continued appropriation of this space. This desire to escape from the stringency of the city's street music regulations is what brought me time and again to Karlsplatz, my spot of choice in Vienna and the subject of this paper.

KARLSPLATZ: AN INTRODUCTION

Karlsplatz has a history of over 800 years, developing around the suburb of Wieden and alongside the Wien River (Suitner 2015). While modern-day Karlsplatz is home to many institutions, the premier landmark of the square is the Karlskirche.⁶ Constructed between 1716 and 1737, the church was built in the aftermath of the 1713 plague which ravaged the city. Emperor Charles VI commissioned the construction of the church to honor St. Charles Borromeo (1538-1584), who was the Archbishop of Milan and is often referred to as the patron saint of plague sufferers (Brownlow 2020), quite appropriate given the ongoing pandemic during my time playing there. The church itself is built in a Baroque style, with a large dome flanked by two bell towers on either side (Schürmann 2017). Indeed, with its immense stature and unique green highlights, it serves as a remarkable backdrop for the various activities on the square. In front of it lies a fountain,⁷ adding to the scenic nature of the area.

As a square, Karlsplatz has long been a place of transition. One of its most prominent features is housing numerous cultural institutions. It is the home to the Technische Universität Wien, in addition to the Wien City Museum and the Otto Wagner Museum, dedicated to the works of the great Viennese architect. The Musikverein, home to the Vienna Philharmonic, lies across the road from Karlsplatz, and the Vienna State Opera is connected to both the Karlsplatz metro station and the area of Karlskirche via the Opernpassage, an underground pedestrian walkway that runs under the famed Vienna Ringstraße. In addition to these formal institutions, Karlsplatz

⁶ Translation to English: "St. Charles Church"

⁷ It is most likely technically a reflecting pool and not a fountain, as there is no moving water. Nevertheless, I often heard the German word for fountain (Brunnen) used in reference to it, so I will use the two terms interchangeably in this paper.

is the site of many temporary cultural events, such as Vienna's annual Christmas market and the Vienna Popfest⁸ (Suitner 2015). It is even the site of the annual Vienna Buskers Festival, a three-day event in which over 100 street performers perform at Karlsplatz. According to the event webpage, over 80,000 people came to the 2018 edition of the event ("From Idea to Realisation").

Karlsplatz serves as a convergence of diverse groups from widely varying backgrounds. With the Karlsplatz U-Bahn station connecting three of the city's metro lines, and numerous tram stops in close vicinity, the area functions as a "nodal point in Vienna's public transport network and the neighboring cultural infrastructures" (Suitner 2015, 146). However, in addition to the formal uses of the space, it is also the site of many informal uses. For a time, it "housed large parts of Vienna's drug scene," as the "wide and branched structure of the subterranean pedestrian pathways was a safe refuge for a fringe group of Vienna's society" (Suitner 2015, 147).

Before delving more into the current environment of Karlsplatz, there is a simple question that needs to be reexamined: What is Karlsplatz? Or perhaps more accurately: *Where is my Karlsplatz?*

The architectural layout of Karlsplatz as it stands today is the product of renowned Danish landscape architect Sven-Ingvar Andersson. His 1971 winning competition entry plans extend all the way from Palais Schwarzenberg to Schillerplatz, serving to connect these areas, with the Karlskirche and reflecting pool in the middle (Treib 1994). Even a more conservative definition of "Karlsplatz" would likely include most of the area outlined in orange in Figure 9. That would consist of anything between the church and the current location of the metro stop, with Resselpark in between. However, for my purposes, both as a street musician and as an urban researcher, Karlsplatz has a much narrower definition. "My Karlsplatz" is solely the area around the church and the fountain. As I will describe further later, the exact location of my performance was subject to change based on my surroundings and based on the sounds of the other people using the space on any given day. When performing, my performance area was often smaller than that oval, only including the area between the church and the fountain. However, occasionally I was able to command the entire area around the fountain, turning the

⁸ An outdoor music festival held each summer

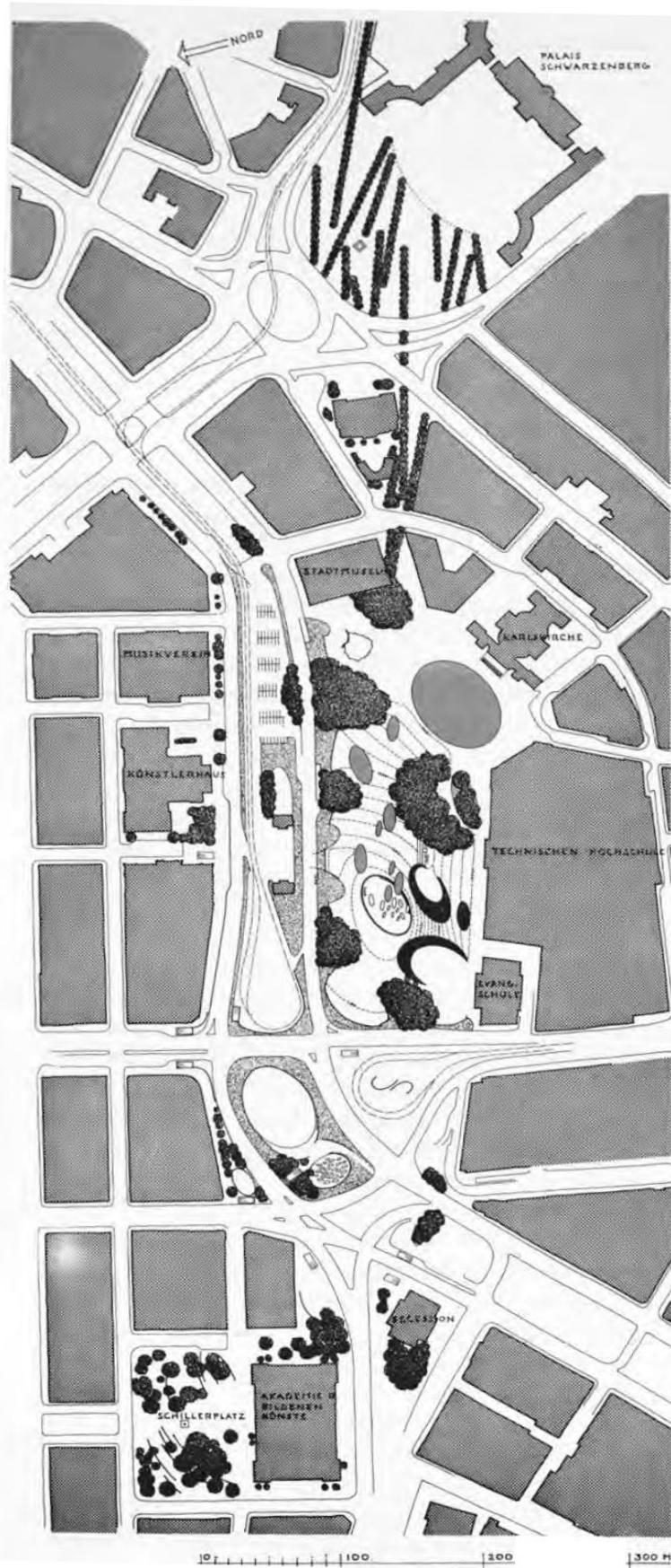


Figure 8: Drawing from architect Sven-Ingvar Andersson's 1971 competition entry to design Karlsplatz
(Image courtesy of Treib 1994)

entirety of this area into my performance stage. For the purposes of my observations and discussion, I will be focusing on this area specifically. Unless otherwise stated, any reference to “Karlsplatz” can be interpreted as this space which I have just defined and have delineated in green on Figure 9, as opposed to “greater Karlsplatz,” which includes the larger region leading all the way to the underground entrances to the U-Bahn stop.

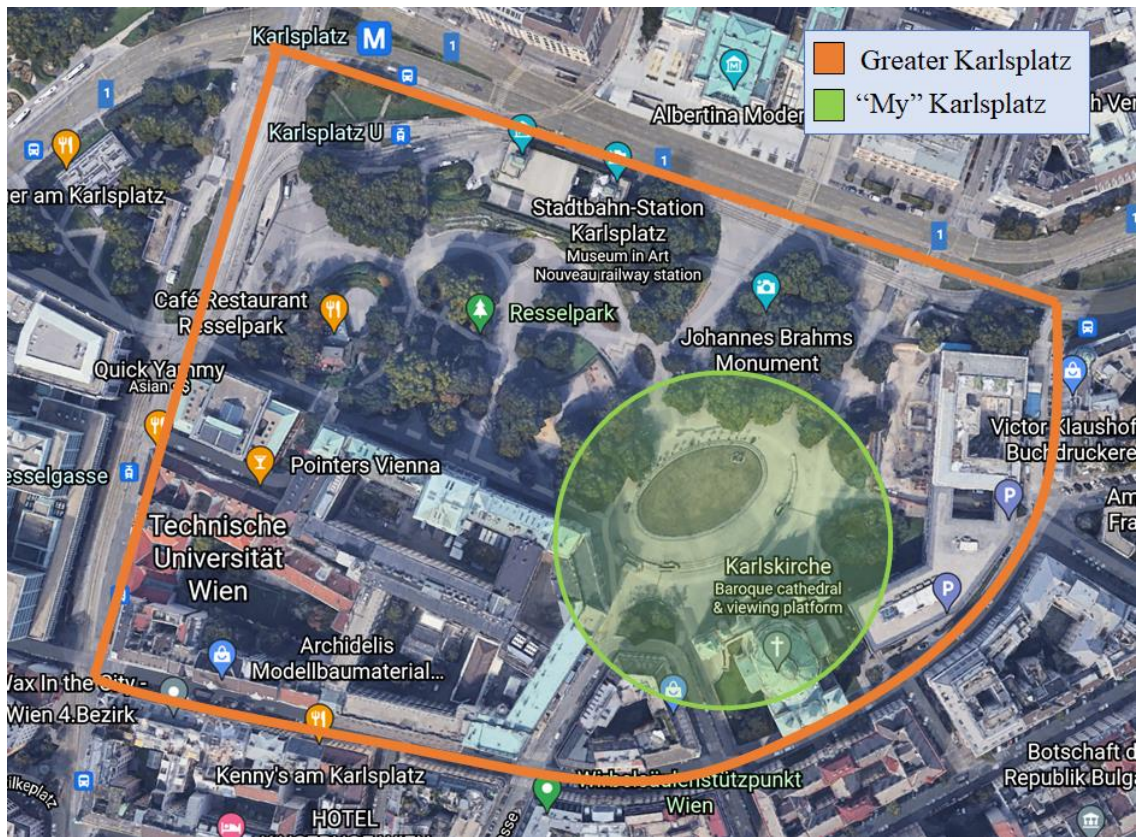


Figure 9: Map of Karlsplatz, showing the difference between “Greater Karlsplatz” and “My Karlsplatz,” the area of study for this thesis.

(Image courtesy of Google Earth, with markings added afterwards)



Figure 10: Three-dimensional view of “my Karlsplatz”

(Image courtesy of Google Earth)

A “LOOSE” SPACE TO BE APPROPRIATED

Nowadays, Karlsplatz has become what Franck and Stevens (2006) describe as a “loose space,” one where individuals “recognize the possibilities inherent in it and make use of those possibilities for their own ends” (2). Mutia (2011) expanded on this concept, highlighting the relationship between behavioral control over a space and its “looseness.” The less control over the space there is, the less restricted one’s behavior becomes, and the more freedom one has to appropriate the space for their own uses. Inherent in the concept of “loose space” is that the space is used in ways that are contrary to its intended uses (Franck and Stevens 2006; Ameen and Tani 2012; Lara-Hernandez and Melis 2020).

During the day and early evening, Karlsplatz was a calm hangout spot, perfect for a picnic, with the church serving as the perfect backdrop. To the northwest of the fountain lies a playground, attracting families with children to the area as well. As the sun would down and the day would turn to night, the space in front of the church would become more and more crowded and noisy, with families becoming gradually replaced by youths who would use the square as an outdoor drinking space.

The events of my research are also intrinsically linked to the time in which they took place—namely, the late spring and summer of 2020, which



Figure 11: Daytime Karlsplatz – various people enjoy a late afternoon at the edge of the fountain. August 16 at 5:41 PM



Figure 12: Nighttime Karlsplatz – youths gather in front of the church to listen to music and drink. August 16 at 11:21 PM (same day as Figure 11)

marked the end of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Vienna and Austria. Early in the pandemic, Austria was relatively spared from major devastation compared to other parts of Europe and the world, with a peak of 1,321 reported cases on March 26, 2020. Additionally, the second wave would not begin in earnest until the fall of 2020, after I had completed my fieldwork (“Austria Coronavirus - Worldometer”). I never personally knew a pre-pandemic Karlsplatz, having only arrived in Vienna in March of 2020, a few weeks before the lockdown began. But during my time playing there after restrictions were relaxed, I heard often about how the space was different from previous years.



Figure 13: A beer salesman with his cart takes a break as youths gather and party by the Karlskirche.

As in most of the world, indoor gatherings were severely limited, if not outright cancelled, and social life in Vienna was forced to move outdoors. Outdoor drinking was no longer an alternative to the bars and clubs of the city, but instead one of the only ways to enjoy this type of social environment. Karlsplatz was a particularly popular location for this, rivaling the Donaukanal⁹ as

one of the city’s hotspots for informal nightlife (Scherndl 2020). Beer salesmen would circle the pond, selling cans of beer for €2.50 a piece (Voigt 2020). In the early evening there would be one or two, but more would arrive as the sky turned dark and the music from the various speakers got louder.

The appropriation of public spaces by youth for the purpose of drinking has been explored by Demant and Landolt (2014), who analyzed the culture of youth drinking in Zurich, Switzerland. They categorized outdoor drinking into “club street drinking” (areas nearby to nightclubs) and “square street drinking” (public squares not near nightclubs). “Square street drinking,” which would apply to the case of Karlsplatz, often results in contestation of space. Drinking can conflict with other uses of public squares, and drinking can be perceived as “out of place” in such settings that are not explicitly designated for the consumption of alcohol. While police

⁹ The canal of the Danube river – adjacent to the city center, it is lined with graffiti and is another hub of youth gathering in Vienna.

presence can sometimes interrupt the placemaking process involved in “square street drinking”, lack of police enforcement can serve as a tacit acknowledgement of the right of youth to use the space, and serves to validate their success in having created an outdoor drinking space of their own. This tacit permission was the case at Karlsplatz, as there was a specific lack of police intervention, specifically in terms of public drinking



Figure 14: Street musicians play outside the entrance to the Opernpassage and the Karlsplatz U-Bahn station, in one of the legal pitches at “greater Karlsplatz.” Unlike this spot, my playing location is not a specifically legal place for street musicians to play.

was not actually one of them. It is only listed as one of the “visual street arts” locations on the official list, meaning that it is not a legal spot for musicians such as myself, and is thus not assigned to musicians on their monthly permits. McNamara and Quilter’s (2016) findings of a discrepancy between street performance law and enforcement was certainly the case with Karlsplatz, my preferred busking spot in Vienna. I learned about it by doing some simple online research, as other buskers mentioned it was a good place to play. Even though it is not officially on the list of “allowed” places, it operates as somewhat of a grey zone. While police officers in other parts of the city often asked for my permit, at Karlsplatz I was never once stopped or asked for any paperwork.

This minimal police intervention was key to Karlsplatz’s status as a “loose space,” and what sets it apart from other spaces I have found in other cities. For instance, Madrid’s Plaza del Dos de Mayo is a public square with a similar crowd of youth street drinking that I attempted playing at in the winter/spring of 2021. However, its police regulation was completely the opposite. Many people would often drink there, with similar beer salesmen walking through

In fact, it was very accepted at this spot, with police cars only occasionally passing by over the course of an evening to ensure that there were no serious problems. This minimal regulation of the space extended to my use of it to play music. While there are several locations marked as legal playing spots in the greater area of Karlsplatz, this playing location in the vicinity of the square’s church and fountain

the crowds of people. However, the moment a police car approached, the crowds would disperse and people would hide their beers. Apparently, public drinking was not allowed, and this law was strictly enforced by the authorities, who would go around giving out fines to those caught drinking alcohol. Similarly, I was only able to play there twice before I was given a citation for breaking the city's street musician ordinance. While the first two times I played there, the police officers present ignored me and let me continue with my show, the officers on duty the third time were not as lenient, and I had to stop busking there.

Despite being outside the list of pitches officially assigned to street musicians by the city of Vienna, the "looseness" of the space made it a de facto legal spot. And this "grey" legal status outside of the official regulations of the city made it a more desirable spot, as it eliminated many of the previously-described inconveniences inherent in the licensing system. Unlike the officially sanctioned spots, I was not bound to any set time slots. I could go whenever I wanted, even multiple days in the same week. There were no shop owners nearby to complain about my music, nor residents whose homes I was directly playing under, so there was really no one with an incentive to call the police on me. And as I just mentioned, the police that were there took no issue with my performances and let me keep playing.

The "looseness" of Karlsplatz, while mostly advantageous to me, was also a double-edged sword in some regards. While the space was open to my appropriation, it was also open to appropriation by others, challenging my ability to play there.

While I was usually the only street musician at Karlsplatz, occasionally there were others, who had just as much (or as little, depending on how you look at it) of a right to be there as I did. A few times early in my time at Karlsplatz, I ran into a singer/guitarist from Italy named Francesco. Once or twice, he was already playing when I got there, and I had to approach him to ask how much longer he would be playing. On July 12, we had a situation where it was unclear who had the right to play. After I arrived and as I was setting up, I noticed he was hanging out on one of the sets of steps, but I didn't see his instrument out, so I figured he was not planning to play yet. However, when I began to get out my accordion and put my hat on the ground, he approached me, saying he was already there and planning to play. We reached an amicable solution – I shortened my set a bit, saying I would only play a half hour, and then would give up the space to him.

My last day performing at Karlsplatz, August 16, was also the day I met another Italian guitarist, Manuel Buda, who plays mostly classical guitar music, as well as the occasional instrumental version of a more well-known song, such as “Hey Jude” by The Beatles. He has played at Karlsplatz since 2012, coming back for a few days at least every summer, in what he says has become “quite a tradition” for him. I was clearly there before him, so as I was about to start, he approached me and asked me how long I would be playing, just as I had asked Francesco in the past. I explained that I would be playing for about 45 minutes, so with some time added for me to go around and pass the hat, I would be done in an hour. Satisfied with this answer, he waited for the duration of my performance.

In addition to the legalities between musicians and authorities, there are the unofficial rules between buskers themselves (Harrison-Pepper 1990; McNamara and Quilter 2016), as I briefly touched upon when speaking about the spot at the entrance to Vienna’s Museumsquartier. Due to Karlsplatz’s place outside the formal licensing system in Vienna, and thus the inconsistency with which I saw other musicians there, I never encountered any set rules for the space. Nevertheless, even in the absence of such unwritten rules, there is still theoretically that aforementioned “unspoken etiquette between buskers” (McNamara and Quilter 2016, 121) – if someone is waiting to play, most musicians I have encountered will give up a spot after a reasonable amount of time. However, not all musicians are like this. Speaking to Buda, he told me of one musician he encountered in the past at Karlsplatz who would basically monopolize the space:

“He was playing like five hours per day, and he wouldn’t listen to any argumentation trying to ask him if I could play like half an hour. So there was this year where I had to wait every night like at 8:30/9:00 to begin my set”

When larger events occurred, they also seriously challenged my ability to play at Karlsplatz. For instance, on Thursday June 4, there was a Black Lives Matter demonstration, with over 50,000 people marching to protest against racism. The march began at the Platz der Menschenrechte¹⁰ and ended at Karlsplatz, with thousands continuing the demonstration around the church and the fountain (Seidl 2020). I obviously did not attempt to perform at Karlsplatz on this day. Out of respect for the protest, I had no desire to try busking there that day, but even if I had wanted to, it would have been impossible due to the extremely large crowds.

¹⁰ Translation to English: “Human Rights Square”

HIGHER PRIORITY SPATIAL USES

Additionally, as I mentioned earlier, due to its ample open space and scenic backdrop, Karlsplatz is often the site of various temporary cultural events in the city. Due to the pandemic, the 2020 Donauinselfest,¹¹ could not take place as it normally does. Instead of having a large gathering with thousands of people in its usual location on the Donauinsel¹², there were small pop-up festivals around the city, with artists playing on the top of a large tour bus. Twice, the bus arrived to play at Karlsplatz as I was performing, with very different results. On July 17, I played a very successful show, with some of the best audience engagement I had experienced up to that point. Several people danced with me in the crowd, and the applause quite loud after every number. As I finished my rendition of “My Heart Will Go On,” the audience repeatedly chanted “Zugabe! Zugabe!”¹³, indicating that they wanted to hear one more number.

Just as this was occurring, the Donauinselfest bus drove onto the square, making me fear that I would not be able to play my encore as planned. Instead, the artist scheduled to perform that day, Thorsteinn Einarsson, got out and asked me if I would like to play a song on top of the bus. Obviously, I said



Figure 15: Preparing to play on top of the Donauinselfest bus on July 17. (Image courtesy of Stefan Ablinger)

yes to this exciting opportunity, and was treated to the most memorable experience of my time at Karlsplatz. For a moment, I was not just an impromptu street performer, but gained another level of legitimacy. My encore of Queen’s “Somebody to Love” drew what felt like the loudest applause I had heard at Karlsplatz. Furthermore, with my music amplified and my position on top of the tour bus, there was no doubt that I had temporary ownership over the square.

¹¹ Vienna’s largest annual music festival

¹² A large island in the middle of the Danube River in Vienna

¹³ Translation to English: “Encore! Encore!”

August 14, the second time the Donauinselfest bus arrived, marked a clear contrast. I was in the middle of a song when the bus arrived, and I was not as fortunate this time. As I was playing, a festival-worker got out of the bus. My instrument bag and hat were slightly in the way of where they wanted the bus to go, so she unceremoniously



Figure 16: The Donauinselfest bus on August 14, with my hat and accordion case next to it, after my performance was interrupted.

pushed them out of the way with her foot, not even waiting to ask me to move everything myself. I attempted to play one more song before the concert started, to give a farewell to the audience I had, but this wasn't very successful. The bus made it impossible to play for both the people at the fountain and those on the steps of the church at the same time. Whenever I was focusing on one group, the bus was blocking the other from even seeing me. Add to this the competing noise from the bus, and I was essentially forced to end my show early. To make up for this, I ended up playing another shorter set about an hour later, after the Donauinselfest concert had ended, although this was a bit later than I usually prefer to play. Between the two performances combined, I had a solid day financially, but because of this interruption, neither one had a particularly enthusiastic crowd reaction.

These more “official” events with city backing will always take priority over a quasi-legal appropriation such as my own. Street musicians simply do not bring the money or notoriety to a city that large concerts, festivals, and other events do. Even a street musician fully within the rules is not immune to this. While I was living in Brussels, several spots which were normally legal were eliminated for the entirety of December, due to the city's annual Christmas market.

The legalities of a city and an individual space have a very large say in where and when a street musician will perform. Even for someone “breaking the rules”, a large part of navigating the legalities of street performance is knowing how to “tastefully” break them. For instance, knowing that the time slots at licensed pitches are from 4-6 and 6-8 PM, playing at 3 PM would

be a dead giveaway that I am playing “illegally”. Similarly, when playing at an illegal pitch, it is better to be one where the law is not strictly enforced. Therefore Karlsplatz, a place with lax enforcement of noise ordinances and an acceptance of youth drinking culture, was a nearly perfect solution. Nevertheless, it still came with its own unofficial codes (such as those with the other musicians) and had moments where I still did not have the right to play.

At the end of the day, a street musician’s “right to the city” (Lefebvre 1968) is often of a low priority compared to other actors with more power, such as city governments, shop owners, and cultural institutions. Most often, spatial use (and the rules governing it) is determined based on the prerogatives of said actors. Yet simply put, the law is what is enforced, not what is on paper. The busker must work both within, and occasionally outside, of the technical law in order to find spaces and moments where they can be successful. While playing at Karlsplatz was perhaps not “legal,” I would not call it “illegal” either, as no one in a position of authority ever stopped me. And so long as the crowd cheered me on and spectators gave me money, the unofficial right to play there belonged to me as well. For street musicians, finding good spaces where they have the right to play is often the first step in putting on a good performance, and is a process that involves finding one’s place amongst all the other groups and individuals competing to appropriate it for their own purposes.

V. A SPACE OF MANY APPROPRIATIONS: THE SOCIAL ATMOSPHERE

A “NODE” OF ACTIVITY

In his book, *The Image of the City*, Kevin Lynch describes the different elements that can make up a city’s image, defining five main categories: paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks (1960). While Karlskirche certainly serves as a landmark in the city of Vienna, the distinction between “paths” and “nodes” is the key to the differentiation of spaces for the purpose of street music. On streets (often “paths”), musicians must get the attention of passers-by with other places to go, whereas in a public square they must maintain the interest of a built-in audience. These are two distinct acts which require distinct behaviors and tactics.

Karlsplatz, in a way, could be considered either a “path” or a “node.” It has some qualities of a “path,” as it often has a diverse collection of individuals passing through (Suitner 2015) as well as a constant flow of cyclists and pedestrians negotiating their way amongst one another (Hell 2015). Yet, despite the traffic of passers-by, Karlsplatz is a destination in its own right, and to a street musician, functions much more as a “node,” the “intensive foc[us] to and from which [one] is traveling” (Lynch 1960, 47). While some people certainly passed by, there were many for whom Karlsplatz was a destination, and who stayed there for hours at a time.



Figure 17: Trying to get people to stop as I play on Marienhilferstraße in Vienna, a “path”-type busking location.
(Image courtesy of Vivian Monteiro Malta)

In contrast to “path”-type busking pitches, “nodes” particularly suit me well. I would rather play at a plaza than on a shopping street. Much of my performance is built on showmanship, which my dancing and moving around being as important as

my singing and accordion-playing. Hence, I prefer to play more of a show in the foreground than a concert in the background. At a place such as Karlsplatz, I could introduce my songs and interact with the people who were already there, making it into more of a theatrical production. Additionally, as I'll discuss later, the people there were generally of a good demographic for my type of performance and were generally in no rush to get anywhere else, in contrast to the shoppers on Kärtner Straße or Mariahilferstraße.

As Oriard Colin (2018) said, "The use value of a public space is expressed through the diversity of ways it is appropriated by different groups creating a social environment" (263). This was precisely the situation at Karlsplatz, as diverse groups often coexisted in the space as they appropriated it in their own way. Karlsplatz was a space seemingly up for grabs, to be used by anyone and everyone. However, there was not a clear delineation between these social spaces – rather, as Lefebvre (1991) wrote, these "Social spaces interpenetrate[d] one another and/or superimpose[d] themselves upon one another" (86) as they carved out their own space around the church and fountain.

In addition to the aforementioned street drinking that was prevalent at the plaza, over the course of my time spent at Karlsplatz, I saw numerous uses of this space. A local inline skate crew would often use Karlsplatz as a gathering point before or after taking a nighttime ride around the city. Skateboarders would



Figure 18: A BMX biker at Karlsplatz about to jump down from a ledge as his friend looks on.

(Image courtesy of Nelson Reed)

attempt to grind on the steps and BMX bikers would make use of the ledges to either side of the church, suspending on just their back wheel for a few moments before jumping down to the ground level. On a calmer day, a few friends might throw a frisbee back and forth, and one time, there was even a salsa dance class and performance on the square.



Figure 19: A crowd looks on as a dance school gives a salsa dance performance at Karlsplatz.

Several scholars have discussed the process by which urban spaces become appropriated for “capitalistic” purposes (Lefebvre 1991; Oriard Colin 2018), and Karlsplatz is no exception. In addition to the uses of space for the purposes of leisure, this urban space was also used by those looking to make a



Figure 20: An ice cream truck stations itself at the furthest end of the fountain from the church, in the direction of Resselpark.

profit. On the far end of the church from the fountain there was a tiki bar with a seating area for drinks, which was especially popular on weekends. Beyond it, at the very edge of the area I would consider to be “my Karlsplatz,” there was often an ice cream truck on hot summer days. In the area closer to the church, the beer salesmen would make their rounds, and once or twice I saw an employee of a local pizza shop handing out flyers promoting a delivery service

to the plaza. And of course, there was me (and occasionally other musicians), trying to take advantage of this vibrant social environment to make a profit of my own.

PLAYING TO THE CROWD

One factor which permitted me to have success in this particular space was the demographics of the people there. I typically have had the most success with two types of crowds: younger adults and families with young children. For younger adults, my repertoire, which focuses mainly on modern, popular music, is the main draw, in addition to the novel way in which I perform it. Additionally, specific to this moment in time, it seemed that my street music was especially appreciated. These are the people that likely would have gone to concerts and music festivals, and with most events cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were no other outlets to hear live music. Young children are very often just excited by the unexpectedness of a street performance. Many times, while I have been playing on the street, young children have stopped in their tracks to stare in awe, at which point a parent will give them a coin, so they can run up and put it in my hat. A spot with an older-skewed population would not be as receptive to my music, as these groups do not always know the songs I play or appreciate the humor in my performance style.

As time went on, and I played more shows at Karlsplatz, I began to learn which songs worked well and which ones did not, also learning to structure them into a setlist of sorts. As can be seen by the setlists for my recorded performances on July 25 and 26 (see Table 1), there are similarities in the songs I played across performances.

My first song was nearly always “Mr. Brightside” by The Killers, as it is one of my more upbeat numbers. Beginning my show seemingly out of nowhere with such an up-tempo song served as a shock to the audience and piqued their interest, an effect I did not feel a slower song would have. Opening with this number, I would often see heads turn in unison towards me after I played the first chord, curious as to what exactly was transpiring.

Table 1: Setlists of songs from my July 25 and 26 performances at Karlsplatz.

	Saturday, July 25			Sunday, July 26		
Song #	Song Title	Artist	Time (PM)	Song Title	Artist	Time (PM)
1	Mr. Brightside	The Killers	6:45-6:48	Mr. Brightside	The Killers	7:10-7:12
2	Whenever, Wherever	Shakira	6:49-6:52	...Baby One More Time	Britney Spears	7:13-7:15
3	...Baby One More Time	Britney Spears	6:52-6:54	Low	Flo Rida (featuring T-Pain)	7:16-7:19
4	Back to Black	Amy Winehouse	6:55-6:58	Ham kummst	Seiler und Speer	7:20-7:23
	Pause for 7 PM church bells		6:58-7:05			
5	I Want it That Way	Backstreet Boys	7:05-7:08	Back to Black	Amy Winehouse	7:24-7:27
6	Ham kummst	Seiler und Speer	7:08-7:12	Umbrella	Rihanna (featuring Jay-Z)	7:28-7:31
7	Dancing Queen	ABBA	7:12-7:15	Baby Shark	Pinkfong	7:32-7:34
8	Vo Mello bis ge Schoppornau	HMBC	7:15-7:19	Vo Mello bis ge Schoppornau	HMBC	7:35-7:39
9	Wrecking Ball	Miley Cyrus	7:19-7:22	I Want it That Way	Backstreet Boys	7:39-7:42
10	My Heart Will Go On	Céline Dion	7:23-7:27	Wrecking Ball	Miley Cyrus	7:42-7:45
11				My Heart Will Go On	Céline Dion	7:46-7:50
12				Somebody to Love [encore]	Queen	7:51-7:55

The middle section of my show was always the most variable, both in song selection and song order. Some of these numbers I played nearly every time, whereas others only appeared in my performance occasionally, usually dependent on what I felt would work best for the audience on a given day. A good example of this is “Baby Shark,” a children’s song from the South Korean educational firm Pinkfong. It has gained worldwide popularity since its release in 2016, becoming “viral over children and adults alike” (Arif and Triyono 2018, 44). While children often enjoyed my music, they often did not know many of my songs. Thus, whenever I saw a family with a young child (up to about 5 years of age), I would play this song specifically for them. They would often clap along to the song or even do the hand motions from the music video, encouraging participation from the rest of the audience. Since this song was also popular

among young adults (albeit somewhat ironically), the rest of the crowd at the fountain still knew the song and could appreciate it. And more than the song itself, the sight of me playing a children's song and getting a young child to dance along often won favor with the rest of the crowd, gaining me more applause and more audience engagement leading into my next number. But, in the absence of a young child, I would likely skip this one, as it would not have that same effect.



*Figure 21: Playing “Baby Shark” for a young child and their family.
(Image courtesy of Christian Allmer)*

Continuing on the tactic of tailoring my song selection to the crowd, this middle section is where I would perform the two Austrian songs I learned to play during my semester in Vienna. Once again, even though I never knew a pre-pandemic Karlsplatz (or even Vienna really), the impression I got was that there were many fewer tourists and international residents of the city at the time, especially as borders were not as open as they usually are within Europe and across the world. Hence, the crowd at Karlsplatz was very Austrian, with the majority of non-Austrians I met being Germans who lived in Vienna for one reason or another. While there were certainly other internationals and English-speakers in the city, as an American, I was a bit more of an anomaly than I normally would be.

When choosing which Austrian songs to learn, I made an intentional choice not to learn the songs that were the most popular with or easily-accessible to foreigners, such as the music of 1980s Austrian popstar Falco. Instead, I chose to learn songs in Austrian dialects of German. One of these Austrian songs was Seiler und Speer's 2015 single "Ham kummst," which rose to number one on the Austrian charts, even beating out internationally popular English-language hits of the moment (Gazilj 2021). The other was the 2010 song "Vo Mello bis ge Schoppernaut," written by the Vorarlberg¹⁴-based band Holstunarmusigbigbandclub.¹⁵ A mixture of brass band music and pop, this song is written in the local Vorarlberg dialect (Thumberger 2014).

Playing these songs, I could sense a real appreciation. Most Austrians in the crowd appreciated that I learned some of their music by heart, especially music in Austrian dialects, which is even harder to learn and surprising that I would know. Gazilj (2021) thoroughly analyzes the use of Austrian dialect in music, mentioning humor as one of the many different purposes it serves. As with my overall performance, the choice of songs in Austrian dialects had a humorous touch. In addition to establishing a general setlist for my songs, I also began to develop a loose script for how I would present them to the audience. For example, I would often introduce "Ham kummst" by saying that I would play "ein typisches österreichisches Lied,"¹⁶ only to break into a modern folk-pop song. Additionally, before playing "Vo Mello bis ge Schoppernaut" I often said that I was about to play "ein Lied, das *fast* auf Deutsch ist,"¹⁷ alluding to Austrian inside jokes I picked up about how completely different the Vorarlberg dialect is compared to others spoken in the country.¹⁸ And while I would like to think that I did pretty well at the pronunciation of the dialects, I certainly had a foreign accent while singing, likely adding to both the charm and humor of my performance of these Austrian songs.

For the end of my show, I nearly always played the same two or three numbers: "Wrecking Ball" by Miley Cyrus, "My Heart Will Go On" by Céline Dion, and then if I received a request for an encore, "Somebody to Love" by Queen. These were three of the most dramatic songs in my repertoire, especially with the way I performed them. Even if I lost the crowd's interest during the middle section, I hopefully would get it back in these last numbers, allowing me to

¹⁴ The westernmost state in Austria

¹⁵ HMBC, for short

¹⁶ Translation to English: "a typical Austrian song"

¹⁷ Translation to English: "a song, that's *almost* in German"

¹⁸ The Vorarlberg dialect comes from the Alemannic branch of the language, and consequently differs from the rest of the country, whose dialects come from the Bavarian branch. Thus, even Austrians struggle to understand this dialect (Thumberger 2014; Gazilj 2021).

gain a last round of applause before I passed my hat around the fountain and asked for contributions. For instance, during “Wrecking Ball,” I would go from person to person in the crowd, singing to them in a jokingly “seductive” manner, reminiscent of Miley Cyrus in the song’s music video. I would become more dramatic later, half-singing, half-sobbing during the bridge section of the song, only to get down onto my knees for the final chorus. This overexaggerated acting, as well as interaction with the audience, formed a pivotal part of my strategy in terms of building a show and maintaining interest.

INTERPERSONAL INTERACTIONS



Figure 22: Entering and playing inside the circle of rollerbladers. (Images courtesy of Ainhoa Novella)

With so many people there for so many different social reasons, it was very easy to blend into the background after a few songs. Thus, I needed to become part of the social atmosphere, to include people in the show. As I briefly alluded to, during songs I often went up to individual people and groups and directly sang to them for a few seconds. As I will address later in Chapter VI, this reduction in social distance, albeit brief, turned those spectators into temporary “participants” in the show.

One moment that stands out is an interaction I had with a group of rollerbladers on July 12. During my performance they were generally somewhat interested, at times applauding, but also at other moments doing their own thing, skating around in the area between

the church and the fountain. As I was playing Shakira's "Whenever, Wherever," I noticed all of them holding hands together, in the process of forming a circle. In a split-second decision, I decided to walk into the middle of all of them, just before they all closed hands and formed a circle. They then proceeded to continue circling me for the next 25-30 seconds as I finished the song.

Rewatching a video captured during this moment, there is audible laughter and applause right at the moment that I enter their circle, showing the extent to which the rest of the plaza also took note of this. By combining my use of the space with theirs and effectively bringing them into my show, I was able to create an even bigger spectacle, with a bigger social presence on the plaza. Further, an unexpected moment such as this added to the unpredictability of my show, with audience members more inclined to keep watching to see what I might do next.

While I was somewhat unpredictable to the audience, so were they to me at times. There were several other instances of unforeseeable audience interactions, both positive and negative, that forced me to adapt mid-performance or even mid-song. On July 17, two young kids were very interested in my performance, so much so that one of them continuously tried to run into me while sitting on his



Figure 23: A child on a skateboard crashes into me while I play. (Image courtesy of Stefan Ablinger)

skateboard. I welcomed such an interaction, as it added a new element to my show, and surely drew the interest of the crowd. A few times, I let him roll his way toward me, only to sidestep him at the very last moment. And at the end, I even let him hit me, overdramatically pretending to be in pain, and getting a few laughs from the crowd in the process.

Occasionally, there were some negative interactions with crowd members that challenged my ability to put on a show. On May 22, as I played one of my songs, a man took my hat (with my earnings in it) and began to walk around with it. I later found out he was trying to "help me" by passing the hat on my behalf, hoping to receive a cut of the profit in exchange. However, this was not an arrangement I agreed to, nor did I know in the moment that this was his intention. While I was a bit unhappy with the situation, I had to keep playing and not show that

I was flustered, lest I lose my desired fun and upbeat image. Additionally, if I stopped the show to deal with it, I ran the risk of losing crowd interest and momentum for my performance. To get my hat back, I made its retrieval a part of the show. As it was a cowboy hat, I decided to play Lil Nas X's cowboy-themed song "Old Town Road," giving me an excuse to want it back as a "prop" of sorts. Loudly proclaiming that "Ich brauche meinen Hut!"¹⁹ I ran after the man. Once I got it back, I emptied the money into my instrument case, and put it on, continuing with that as my next number.

On June 6, I had a heckler sitting on the edge of the fountain, a few times telling me to stop and even offering me a beer to stop playing. Obviously, I did not accept, but instead made a point to play in front of him a bit more. This is something I tend to do when there are one or two unsupportive crowd members amongst an otherwise supportive group. While perhaps not the kindest thing to do, my feeling is that if they really dislike my music, there are plenty of other places to go. And in the meantime, focusing on the one heckler is humorous for all of my supporters, who are curious to see how that individual will react and amused by the gusto with which I confront my "haters."

When busking, one must be prepared for all sorts of circumstances that can arrive based on who happens to be there that day. Sometimes the door opens for a beautiful moment of pure unexpected fun, drawing the interest and excitement of the rest of the crowd, such as occurred with the rollerbladers and the child with the skateboard. In other moments, as I've discussed, negative interactions can happen, as others have their own idea of how the space should be used. As any performer has likely heard, *the show must go on*. I could not control what the rest of the users of Karlsplatz did, but I could certainly make the best of it. Incorporating these unexpected actions into my show helped me to solidify my temporary ownership of the square and to continue appropriating the space for my own performance purposes. Over my few months at Karlsplatz, I got to know others that frequented Karlsplatz, aiding me in my attempts to "appropriate" the space. One such example is the "work colleague" relationship I built up with some of the beer salesmen often there. I developed a symbiotic relationship with one of them in particular, an older man who could often be found pushing a cart around at the same time I was playing (see Figure 24). I can't say I knew him very well, but oftentimes when I

¹⁹ Translation to English: "I need my hat!"



Figure 24: A beer salesman pushes his cart by as I perform.
(Image courtesy of Christian Allmer)

played, he would give me a “contribution” in the form of a free can of beer in my hat, as well as sometimes a coin along with it. This usually elicited laughter from the crowd, and while I suspect it was a bit of self-advertising on his part, I was happy to go along with it. While we both had our separate endeavors to appropriate the space, these separate appropriations

worked together nicely. The street drinking culture at Karlsplatz, to which he certainly contributed by providing beers to the masses, is a large part of what made the space such a “node” and so suitable to my style of performance. Conversely, my shows likely encouraged people to stay at the plaza a bit longer, and perhaps to even purchase another beer from him.

In addition to the other “workers” at the space, I also got to know a few of the people who I continuously saw at the square. When I went around passing my hat, I also had a sign with my Instagram handle on it, encouraging people to follow me and keep updated on my future musical endeavors. This allowed me to pursue another tactic to appropriating the space: bringing in my own audience.

As Gehl (2011) stated, “People are attracted to other people” (23). And as Whyte (1980) wrote “When people form a crowd around an entertainer—it happens very quickly, in 40 or 50 seconds” (97). Based on my experience playing in various settings, audiences are often as attracted to each other as they are to the artist. In a space where people are passing by, the true difficulty is often getting the first 5-10 people to stop and listen. Afterwards, others are drawn in, curious as to what is happening, and the crowd quickly grows. In a setting such as Karlsplatz, it is a bit different, as there are already plenty of people there, due to its behavior as a “node” where users of the space remain for long stretches.

Audience applause can be described by a “social contagion” model, with “individuals’ probability of starting clapping increas[ing] in proportion to the number of other audience members already ‘infected’ by this social contagion” (Mann et al. 2013, 1). Thus, having even just a few vocal “fans” actively cheering can aid in gaining a greater amount of applause, and

consequently, a greater claim to the soundscape and the space as a whole (see Chapter VII for a further discussion of the sonic environment of Karlsplatz). A few times, I posted on my Instagram story that I would be performing at Karlsplatz, in the hopes that a few of my acquired fans would show up (which they occasionally did). In a few other instances, I brought some friends along to see me play. Around the time of my birthday, I had a “birthday” show where I specifically asked friends to come out, giving me a sizable group that I already knew. This built-in applause and support led to more interest from those that I did not know in the square, allowing for a much easier time in establishing my show as the primary social activity occurring in the space. This, in turn, led to a more engaged and successful performance.

Overall, the social qualities of Karlsplatz surely contributed to my success over these several months. The crowd, being quite young, was generally in the mood for live music and liked the pop music that I played. But I also took advantage of this by understanding what songs they would find enjoyable/amusing and tailoring my setlist accordingly, such as with my forays into music in Austrian dialects of German. Furthermore, introducing my songs and speaking with the crowd, I sought to make my performance into a more interactive show, rather than something in the background to be casually listened to, or worse, ignored. And my mid-performance interactions with the crowd, as well as my occasional attempts to bring my own fans were tactics to stay in the forefront of the complex social environment. At Karlsplatz, this environment was ever-changing, and while there was plenty of potential for an amazing crowd, there was also the potential to get lost amongst the numerous competing appropriations of the space. I had to do what I could to bring as many people into my performance as possible, in order to overcome these other activities and make my performance the most prominent appropriation of the space.

VI. EXPERIENCING KARLSPLATZ: THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

INVITING ARCHITECTURE

In his book *Experiencing Architecture*, the Danish architect Steen Eiler Rasmussen tells of a group of schoolboys who played a ball game against the walls of the Santa Maria Maggiore church in Rome. As he writes:

I do not claim that these Italian youngsters learned more about architecture than the tourists did. But quite unconsciously they experienced certain basic elements of architecture: the horizontal planes and the vertical walls above the slopes. And they learned to play on these elements. As I sat in the shade watching them, I sensed the whole three-dimensional composition as never before. (Rasmussen 1962, 17)

Just as the boys playing their game learned to make use of their elements, so too does the street performer. A street performer will often judge the viability of a performance space based on an “indescribable feeling about it” (Harrison-Pepper 1990, 10). And with her further accounts of performances in various spaces within Washington Space Park (for instance, one comedian performing in the basin of a circular fountain as if it were an amphitheater), Harrison-Pepper (1990) makes it clear that a busker’s actions also can be influenced by their physical surroundings.

In my own personal experience, the average person does not see a space the same way as a street musician. Walking through a space, I often get a gut feeling as to if it would work for my performance based on its physical characteristics, such as nearby seating, flows of pedestrian traffic, and surrounding noises. And then while playing, I try to take advantage of that same space in an effort to attract interest from nearby people. At Vienna’s Karlsplatz, I found not only an ideal physical environment, but one that could be played with mid-performance. Additionally, even though it was an ideal physical space, my interactions with it were never the same on a day-by-day or even minute-by-minute basis. Indeed, the architecture of Karlsplatz did not change during my time there. However, its use by others was constantly in flux, meaning my tactics as a street musician also were.

In many ways, the architectural design of Karlsplatz facilitates social interaction, making such appropriation possible. As mentioned before, it was designed by the Danish landscape architect Sven-Ingvar Andersson. Upon looking at Andersson's sketches for the entire area, one shape is extremely prominent: the oval.



Figure 25: Drawing from architect Sven-Ingvar Andersson's 1971 competition entry to design Karlsplatz.

(Image courtesy of Danish National Art Library

<http://kunstbib.dk/en/collections/architectural-drawings/samlingen/000037010>)

of the oval predates the Baroque period. This shape can be seen in the design of Roman amphitheaters,²⁰ with the Colosseum serving as the most well-known example of this. An obvious advantage of the oval for amphitheaters is the ability to give viewers somewhat far away a good view of a singular focal point, which would be the stage below.

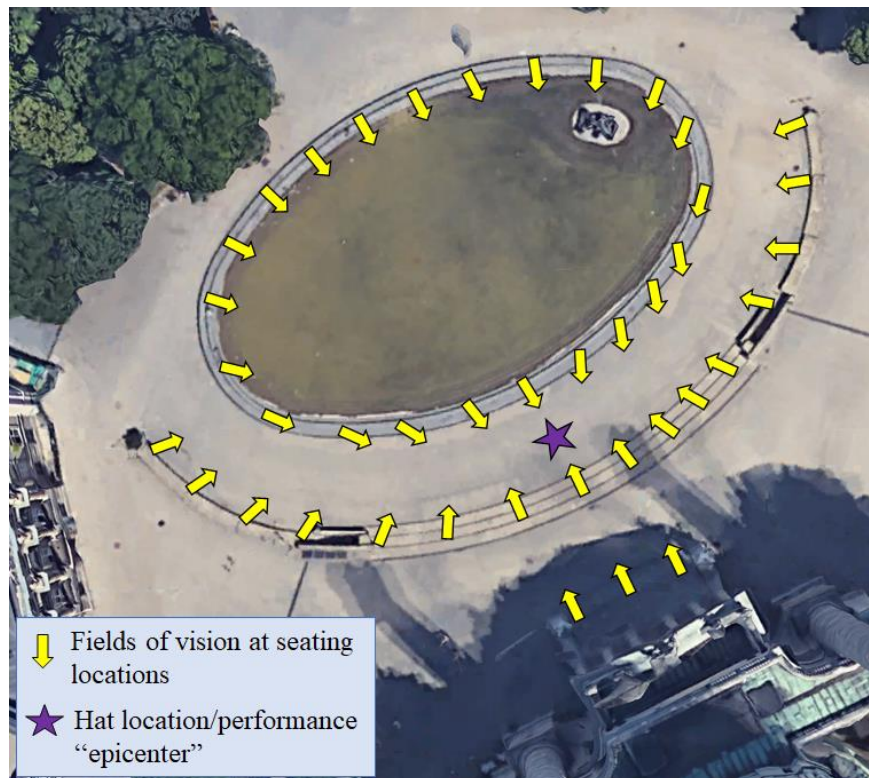
Throughout the other parts of "greater Karlsplatz," this shape repeats itself in the various grassy sections designed by Andersson. Most prominently in my performance space, this shape can be seen in the fountain as well as in the dome of the church. Even beyond the ovular structures present, the negative space also has a curved nature. Looking at the drawings, the only linear pathways of movement are at the fringes of the space. The rest of the space forces the user to meander through the square, unable to take a direct route from point A to point B, thus making chance encounters more likely. Similar to Harrison-Pepper's (1990) description of Washington Square Park in New York City, Karlsplatz is a "sociopetal" space, one which promotes social interaction, as opposed to a "sociofugal" one, a space which discourages it. Especially with the

The ovular nature of the space matches with the shape of the church itself. Indeed, the oval is a particularly common feature of Baroque architecture, as evidenced by the dome and interior of Karlskirche (Schürmann 2017). However, the use

²⁰ While there is debate as to whether such structures were ovals or ellipses (Barrallo 2011), for the purposes of this paper I will not dwell on the mathematical distinction and will simply refer to such shapes as ovals.

picturesque views of the fountain and church, people at Karlsplatz are drawn to this area, and their eyes are even drawn in certain directions.

Like the Roman amphitheater, this inviting architecture creates a center of attention, a sort of stage upon which the surrounding crowd looks. The ovular shape of both the fountain and



*Figure 26: Fields of vision for people sitting at Karlsplatz converge to the space between the church and the fountain.
(Image courtesy of Google Earth, with markings added afterwards)*

the ring of seating space around it direct the vision of the crowd inwards. With many people directing their eyes to take in the beautiful backdrop of either the church or the fountain, the area in between serves as a crossroads of fields of vision, a natural space to perform in this manner of “theater-in-the-round.”

SPACE TO SIT DOWN

While these ovals in Andersson’s architectural design provide a socially uniting framework for the plaza, this specific section of Karlsplatz is especially suitable for my style of musical performance due to its abundance of “secondary seating.” While seats and benches are examples of “primary seating,” secondary seating includes other elements such as ledges, stairs, monuments, etc. that can also be used as seating (Gehl 2011). Looking around Karlsplatz, it is clear that there is no shortage of places to sit. In my main performance space, there are five regions of seating spaces: the edge of the fountain, the steps of the church, the “middle ring” steps in between, and the two outer ledges on either side of the “middle ring” steps.

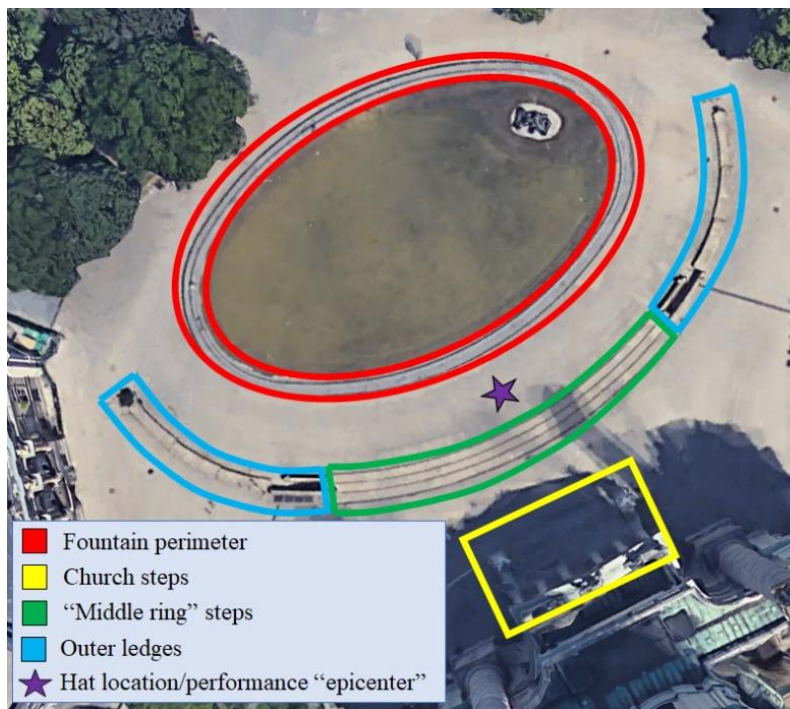


Figure 27: Map of secondary seating at Karlsplatz.
(Image courtesy of Google Earth, with markings added afterwards)

The ample secondary seating provides a sensation of levels to the plaza. Even though the difference in height is not particularly extreme, my performance epicenter was on the lowest level, with the "middle ring" steps and church steps elevating in the direction of the church. Even the outer ledges had a decent height to them, adding once more to the feeling of Karlsplatz being an

amphitheater, with a center of focus right at the location of my hat. The raised nature of the seating at Karlsplatz contributed to a convivial theatrical surrounding, as it provided a clear sightline to a performance at the lowest level. In the words of Gehl (2011), it "give[s] every person optimal conditions for seeing what is going on in the space" (163).

In addition to providing inviting architecture to make use of the physical space, the ample secondary seating also helped to provide a built-in audience for my shows. With this plentiful space for sitting, people are encouraged to gather at Karlsplatz. Indeed, the secondary seating allows for flexibility in terms of the use of the space. In contrast to benches, which have a finite limit of occupants, these stairs and ledges had seemingly no limits. Even on the most crowded of evenings, there was always space to be found for new groups to sit down and congregate. Indeed, this ease of movement aided me in my performances. The location of my hat, and thus the epicenter of my performance, usually was located between the "middle ring" steps and the fountain. This was the best possible midway point between the furthest possible reaches of my audience, namely the groups seated on the church steps and those on the far end of the fountain. Realistically, a true midway point would be in the fountain, but it is generally filled with water, making it a void of a space into which I cannot go.

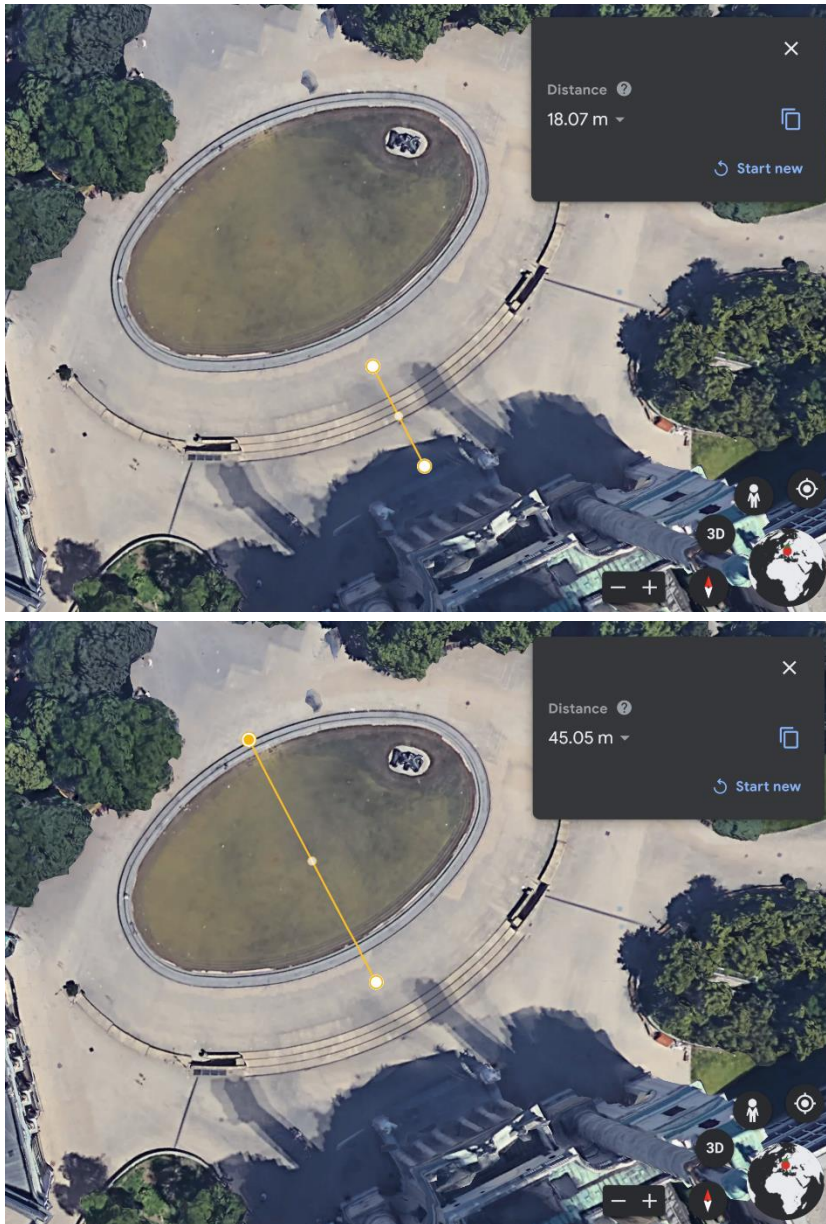


Figure 28: Distances from my hat location to the church steps and the furthest end of the fountain
(Images courtesy of Google Earth)

From this location, my entire audience could generally hear me from a distance. Even if they were not necessarily at an intimately close level, those interested could move to a different seating area closer to me. Although there are benefits to this ample seating arrangement, there were certainly challenges as well. One is that even if everyone can hear me, it is not quite loud at such large distances. Using Google Earth to measure, the distance is roughly 18 meters from my hat location to the church steps, and 45 meters from this same spot to the opposite side of the fountain.

BRINGING THE SHOW TO THE PEOPLE

As Jan Gehl (2011) stated in his work, *Life Between Buildings*, “Beyond 35 meters (100 ft.), the ability to hear others is greatly reduced. It is possible to hear people who shout loudly but difficult to understand what is being shouted” (64). Additionally, “The distance between the stage and the farthest audience seats in a theater is usually a maximum of 30 to 35 meters” (65). Based on this theory as well as my personal experience, those at the far end of the fountain

were able to hear my loud singing and playing, but not with the same clarity and prominence as those closer by. They also could not perceive my facial expressions or emotions in a very detailed manner, only able to notice from a distance that there was a performance occurring. Indeed, these areas were generally only a peripheral part of my audience, with their participation and engagement largely dependent on other factors in the soundscape. When I later discuss the soundscapes of Karlsplatz in Chapter VII, I will come back to this idea.

Even focusing on my main audience on the “middle ring” steps and the side of the fountain nearest to me, physical distance was an issue. Those far away were not very likely to give money, simply because they did not have the motivation to get up and walk over to my hat. But beyond that, the further away crowds were less likely to pay attention and certainly less likely to feel an intimate connection to my show. I learned this early on, during one of my first days ever playing at Karlsplatz.

On May 7, I played a set between the “middle ring” steps and the fountain. As can be seen from Figure 29, there were plenty of people sitting in the different regions of secondary seating at Karlsplatz. I played a set of approximately an hour and a half, staying entirely in that one spot. After the first song I played, I received a large amount of applause due to the novelty of my performance starting. However, as time went on, the audience gradually lost interest, with the applause waning with each successive number until eventually there was no cheering at all. Towards the end of my set, there were only small scatters of applause amongst a larger trend of disinterest. As I packed up my



Figure 29: Playing in a stationary location on May 7, one of my first days at Karlsplatz. (Images courtesy of Lena Denk)



Figure 30: Passing the hat at the end of a performance.
(Images courtesy of Nelson Reed)

would have gotten up to give me something. But after the man told me this, I gave his suggestion a shot, going around the church and fountain with my hat. I immediately earned another 20 Euros or so, convincing me that I needed to actively ask for tips in the future.

Of perhaps even greater importance, I needed to make my performance more dynamic and engaging, doing everything I could to keep the interest of the audience and make the entire area of the church and fountain “mine.” From this moment forward, throughout the rest of my time playing at Karlsplatz, one major tactic I turned to was movement. There was no way I could make Karlsplatz more architecturally intimate or force people further out to come a bit closer to my show. Thus, I had to bring my show to them, to eliminate that physical distance in order to increase audience interest.

The distance between two individuals has a strong correlation with the type of relationship they have, and the intimacy of their interaction. Gehl (2011) references four different types of “social distances”:

accordion after my last song, a man from the top of the church steps approached to give me some money, and as he did so, he gave me some crucial advice. He explained that he loved my performance and that a lot of others likely did too, but that I needed to change it. I needed to keep it to only 30-45 minutes, and then physically go around with my hat to all the people in the various seating areas of Karlsplatz.

I previously had found it a bit rude to go around asking for money, feeling like it made me somewhat of a beggar, a stigma which, as previously mentioned, is often attached to street performers (Simpson 2011b; McNamara and Quilter 2016). I figured that people that liked my music enough

Intimate distance (0 to 45 centimeters): intense feelings are expressed

Personal distance (0.45 to 1.30 meters): conversation between family and close friends

Social distance (1.30 to 3.75 meters): ordinary conversation among friends, acquaintances, etc.

Public distance (greater than 3.75 meters): one-way communication with public figures; individuals wish to see event but not participate

A key for me in terms of audience intimacy was crossing that threshold between *public distance* and *social distance*. When I was far away, it was easy for audience members to lose interest after a song or two. The users of Karlsplatz had the option to engage with my performance and pay attention, or to instead ignore it. But, once I zeroed in on one person or group and broke the proverbial fourth wall between the performer and the audience, the audience members lost a lot of their ability to ignore my presence. Whether or not they sang and cheered along, they were part of the performance, as the eyes of the rest of the public were drawn to them, curious as to how they would react.

With so many different people spread out in the various areas of secondary seating, this meant that constant motion throughout my



Figure 31: Decreasing physical distance between myself and the crowd to encourage a more personal interaction. As I iterated upon my show, I did this increasingly often. (Images courtesy of Stefan Ablinger)

performance was a necessity. For most of my playing time, I would go back and forth between groups. I would specifically play in front of one group at the far-right end of the fountain, but then would make sure to go back to the left end. Occasionally, I would work my way back to the middle ring of steps and ledges, and even all the way back to the church steps. I would repeat this continuously over the course of the whole performance, meaning that everyone close enough would be the focus of my attention at some point in time.



Figure 32: Strava tracking of my July 3 performance.

For my July 3 performance, I used the popular fitness tracking app Strava ²¹ to track my movements during my show (see Figure 32). The largest concentration of my time was spent going back and forth between the fountain and the “middle ring” steps and ledges.

A handful of times I went onto the “middle ring” steps or even back to the church steps, but for the most part, I went back and forth to the people in my immediate vicinity. The singular ring around the fountain captures my passing of the hat at the end of the performance. The far end of the fountain was not usually part of the core of my audience, but there was still the chance that someone over there liked my show and wanted to give me something for it. Generally, my results on the other side were mixed from a monetary perspective. Sometimes I would be pleasantly surprised and would receive plenty of contributions from these outer reaches of my audience. Conversely, there were also times that they did not even know I was playing, due to the presence of other loud noises in the area. In the following chapter, I will discuss the sonic environment of Karlsplatz, and the impacts it could have on the exact space I would attempt to appropriate on a given day.

²¹ Strava is normally used to track runs and bike rides, where an error of a few meters likely does not matter too much, not to track small movements over the course of a musical or theatrical performance. Thus, the accuracy of the mapped lines may not be perfect. However, it still demonstrates the extent to which I moved around the space during my performance.

TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE TERRAIN

Another benefit of the architecture of Karlsplatz is that it is interesting. There are various levels, and beautiful backdrops with both the fountain and church. As a performer, I like to play with the architecture around me, similar to Bywater's (2007) account of a "red-headed guitar player known only as William, who would perform wide-ranging gymnastics, leaping on and off the benches...alarming passers-by with his display of ownership of the space" (116). Over the years playing on the streets, I have jumped on and over benches, fountains, flower beds, and more in the attempt to entertain my crowds.

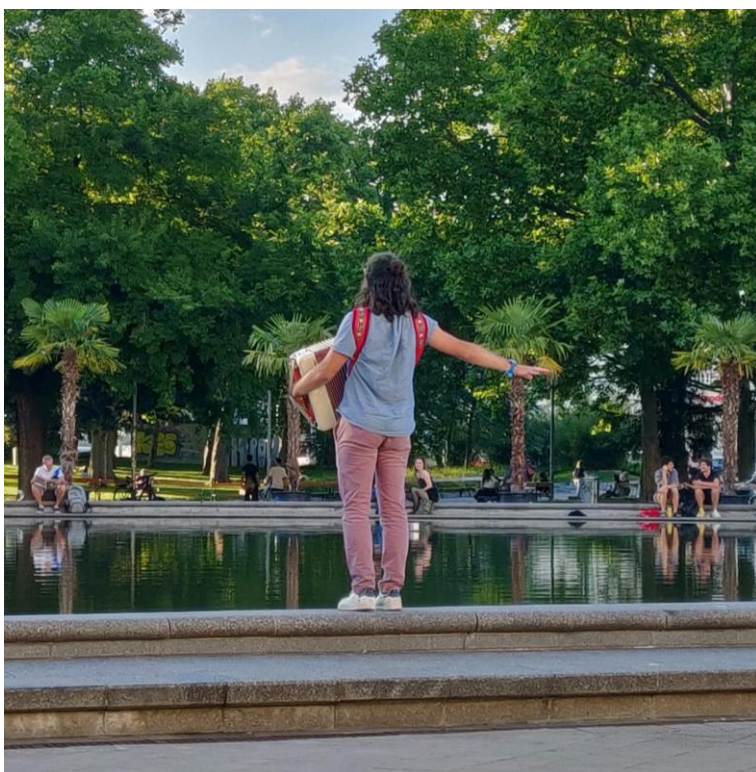


Figure 33: Using the fountain to reenact a scene from *Titanic* as I play Céline Dion's "My Heart Will Go On."
(Image courtesy of Birgit Fritz)

below to coincide with the exact moment of the last chord. During my rendition of Céline Dion's "My Heart Will Go On," the theme to the 1997 blockbuster film *Titanic*, I would often step up to the edge of the fountain during the first chorus. Momentarily playing my accordion one-handed, I would stretch my other arm out while overlooking the water, reminiscent of the scene in the film where Jack holds Rose at the bow of the ship. Each creative use of my surroundings was a tactic to make my show even more novel, to keep up the intrigue as to what I might do next.

Just like the many bikers and skaters at Karlsplatz who would make use of the steps and ledges, the varied architectural features were tools I could play around with, and with which I could craft a more interesting performance than if I were on a simple flat ground. Often, I would use the steps for effect, dramatically walking down them one by one as I played the final chorus of a song. Sometimes I would jump from the ledge of the fountain right before the end of a song, timing my landing on the ground

While I used the physical space at Karlsplatz in a very specific manner, it was not the only way to put on a performance there. Manuel Buda, the guitarist from Italy about whom I wrote earlier, used the space very differently. Instead of playing in the center like I did and attempting to take ownership of the entire



Figure 34: Guitarist Manuel Buda plays at one corner of the fountain. A woman buys one of the CDs he is selling, and a man comes up to speak to him.

area, he focused his energies on a single corner of the plaza. From the far ends of the fountain, his music was hardly (if at all) audible, but in that one corner, it created a calm atmosphere, serving as an appropriate backdrop to an evening by the picturesque church and fountain.

Although the spatial scope of his audience was smaller than what I attempted to claim, his hold on it was arguably stronger. It is difficult to keep the interest of people so far apart, thus forcing me to keep moving around, getting to different crowd members every few minutes. Buda, in contrast, was able to create a concert-like atmosphere in his fixed position, with his audience seated across from him on the edge of the fountain. In his open guitar case, he had CDs of his music available for sale, and several times crowd members went up to enquire about them. Between the two days I saw him play, he moved

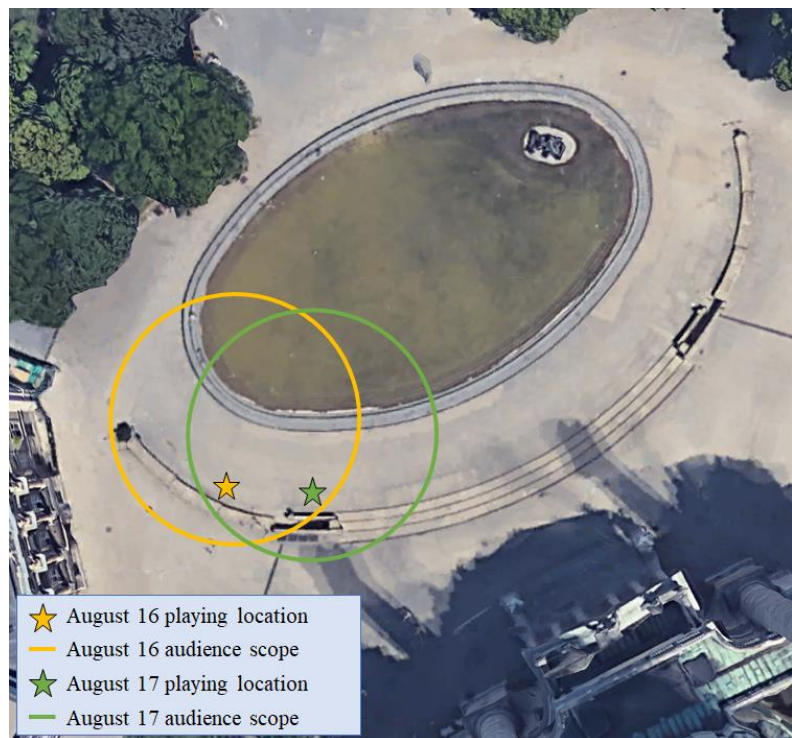


Figure 35: Playing locations of guitarist Manuel Buda on August 16-17. He attempts to occupy only a corner of the fountain, not the entire area. (Image courtesy of Google Earth, with markings added afterwards)

spots slightly, experimenting to see if moving a few meters over would serve him better. But in both locations, he had success in capturing the interest (and the contributions) of the public.

A large part of the attractiveness of Karlsplatz as a busking location was due to its physical environment. Its ample secondary seating contributed to the large numbers of people often spending time there. Without so many spaces to sit, I doubt Karlsplatz would be the popular hangout spot it was. And with so many people drawn to the space, specifically young people, there was nearly always a solid crowd for a performance. The architectural setup of the space permitted for a movement-based performance like mine, but still worked for a more traditional street musician setup. Furthermore, the interesting backdrop and varied terrain allowed for creativity in the use of the space. While its spaciousness caused challenges in maintaining an audience, this was not unsurmountable. Whether by making use of motion to be periodically closer to more people, or by defining a smaller audience scope from the start, there were ways to make this big space feel smaller. In summary, the physical environment of a space is vital in allowing for a street musician to create a lively performance. It is a major factor both in choosing a place to play, as well as in determining how to spatially position oneself to best engage the audience.

VII. FILLING A VOID IN THE SOUNDSCAPE: THE SONIC SURROUNDINGS

SOUND AS POWER

Whenever I go to a new city and search for a spot to play, I ask locals for suggestions. Most people assume that I want to play where there are as many people as possible, as more individuals means more opportunities for someone to stop and give me some money. However, it is not quite so simple. Obviously, it is difficult to have a successful street performance with few people present, as the musician relies on audience feedback to turn their one-sided music-playing into the two-sided give and take of a performance. But too many people can also be a problem. A street or square that is too busy often has too much background noise, reducing the amount which the street musician's instrument and voice stick out, and the distance from which they can be heard. And while I have focused on the emission of sounds, the receivers also play a large part in allowing themselves to be wrapped up in a street performance, with a large difference existing between "hearing" and "listening" (Simpson 2009). With an increasingly cluttered external soundscape, as well as pedestrians having their own personal soundscapes in the form of headphones, it is an increasing challenge for street musicians to get audience members to pay attention and "listen," as well as to subsequently own the space they are playing in.

Simply put, competing noises threaten the street musician's ability to appropriate the space. Schafer (1994) details the imperialistic capabilities of sound, going so far as to say that "if cannons had been silent, they would never have been used in warfare" (78). While street musicians are not necessarily very similar to cannons in acoustic quality, they certainly use sound in a similar way, to try and take ownership of a space. The further and clearer their sound can be heard, the greater of an area and the more people they have under their control.

PLAYING LOUDER

To better be heard, street musicians have essentially two options: to play louder, or to try to minimize the competing ambient noises during a busking session. One of the simplest ways to play louder is by using an amplifier, which in many busy urban spaces, has become a necessity

to be heard. It “allow[s] street musicians to create a greater presence in busy urban street settings, cutting through the noise of motor vehicles, the sound bleed-over from retail stores and other aspects of the urban soundscape” (Bennett and Rogers 2014). For instance, the guitarist Manuel Buda, whom I saw perform at Karlsplatz on August 16 and 17, connected his acoustic guitar to a portable Roland Street Cube amp. This allowed him to increase his volume and reach further areas of the fountain, ensuring that he did not need to intentionally alter his tranquil playing style in order to play louder.

While I have since experimented with amplification, at this point I had never tried it, and I still to a certain extent have more success without it. A large part of this decision was pragmatic, as it can be cumbersome to carry around an amplifier and my accordion at this time did not have any microphones in it. But more importantly, avoiding the use of all microphones and amplifiers allowed me to keep my performance mobile. Instead of being tied to a microphone stand or even a wireless range of a certain number



Figure 36: Guitarist Manuel Buda performs with a portable amplifier, as seen on the ground next to him.

of meters, I could lean into my dynamic performance style, moving (and even running and jumping, sometimes) as I played. With this simplicity also came a cost, as there was only so loud my voice and accordion could be. Opera singer Rainer Kohut, whom I saw perform on Kärtner Straße on August 20, was able to command an entire busy shopping street with his unamplified voice, only using a speaker to play backing tracks. However, unlike him, I have not had the same level of vocal training to make this possible. Thus, without the ability to rise high above the rest of the urban soundscape, it was vital for me to find spaces that were sufficiently silent.

FINDING A QUIET PLACE TO PLAY

The space of Karlsplatz is very quiet in relation to many of the assigned spots in the licensing system. For instance, several times I played at Bundesländerplatz, located along

Mariahilferstraße, a pedestrian shopping street in Vienna's 7th district. Located in a highly trafficked area, one would think that it would be the perfect spot to busk, as there would surely be many people passing by. Unfortunately, the assigned spot was a hotspot for noise, making it impossible to take ownership over the space and generate a crowd. My field notes from June 19 at that location, taken immediately before a busking session, highlight the many noises:

Construction...White noise of cement pouring...Non profit workers stop pedestrians, trying to get them to donate to a children's charity...About 75 people walk by in a minute, with bikes interspersed throughout. Sounds of conversation blend into the background. Cement pouring is also in the background but a bit louder. Construction workers yelling rises above, as well as the non-profit workers and certain individuals' conversations as they pass by. I'm afraid my singing will add to the cacophony, and that I will have to be loud to be heard. Very unlike Karlsplatz where I don't have to strain. Tall buildings may provide echo. A trash truck with a man in orange drives in front of me, adding some noise. Water hose to go along with cement pouring is quite loud. Mix of families and all ages passing by – some dogs as well. Bike wheel clicking is a consistent noise. Further down the street I hear someone with a microphone, but not sure what it is...Other part of Mariahilfstrasse is much quieter without construction. Unfortunately, my permit isn't for there, and the police would likely tell me to move if I play there.

When I began playing there, I could feel myself straining my voice, my mind subconsciously noticing the cacophony of ambient noise and increasing the volume of my singing slightly beyond a comfortable level. And while occasionally, some individuals stopped to listen to my music, many people seemed somewhat disinterested. I was just another sound in an overly cluttered soundscape. Of all the sounds there, the noise of construction was especially jarring. Unfortunately, I knew I would not be allowed to play in a different area of Mariahilferstraße, further away from these noises. In a previous session at this same spot (on May 27), I tried playing ~100 meters down the street, but the police stopped me because it was not the exact location listed on my permit. Even though my assigned spot was full of noise, it was the only place I would be allowed to play.

Listening back to an audio recording I took at Mariahilferstraße on July 9, this cacophony of noise is audible. And putting the audio file into Audacity, an audio-editing software, it is even visible.²² Before I play my set, there is constant noise from construction, traffic, and the various people passing by. Every so often, there is a sharp rise in the volume recorded, due to a loud

²² Audacity displays the sound recording from each of the two microphones on my Roland R-07 High Resolution Audio Recorder, hence the two separate waves for each recording. A larger waveform corresponds to a larger amplitude of sound. Due to potential inconsistencies in calibration between recordings, I will only be qualitatively analyzing sound waves within an individual recording – I will not be quantitatively comparing exact sound levels across different recordings.

“clang” from the nearby construction workers. In the waveform, there is a decent variation in amplitudes. Comparing this to later in the same recording, after having finished my busking set, there is a noticeable difference in sound levels. The construction has ended and there are fewer people shopping, resulting in much less noise. Compared to before the performance, the waveform after I have finished playing is much smaller and more consistent.

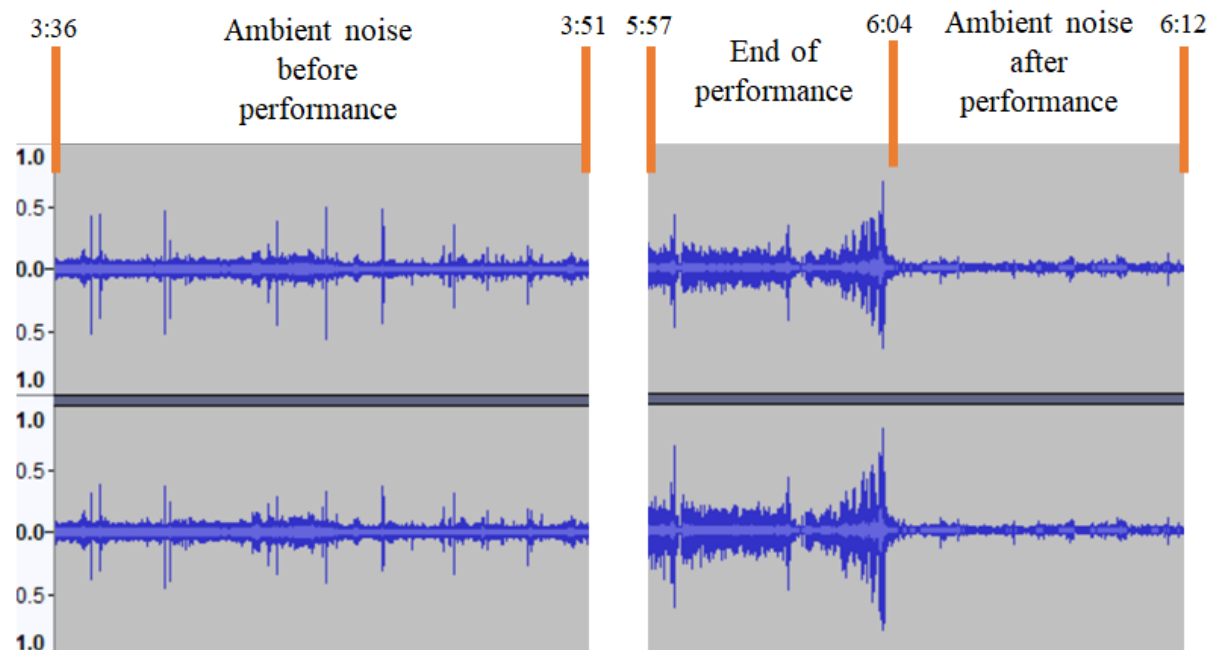


Figure 37: Waveform of sound at Bundesländerplatz on Mariahilferstraße on July 9 from 3:36-3:51 PM and 5:57-6:12 PM.

(Recorded on Roland R-07 High Resolution Audio Recorder and imported into Audacity)

In contrast, Karlsplatz is a nearly ideal sonic environment, with no businesses, construction, or cars in the vicinity. Of course, there are noises at Karlsplatz, but the scale is different, and much more at the human level. From my May 30 observation, the difference in types of noises is clear:

Sounds of skateboard around fountain, kid screeching in distance, most people chatting at a low murmur. Horn from some kind of vehicle, clicking of kid's bike...Laughter from church steps...Still hear sound of jump rope scraping ground, skateboard rolling by...bike clanks by. More birds chirp. Chatting and laughter from steps and from the ledge to my right (looking at the fountain)...Super loud laughter from group on right...Girls to my left loudly chat in English. Crickets in distance, or maybe they're frogs? Lots and lots of bikes go by. To my left dog barks and yanks on leash. This stands out a bit from the soundscape. It's jarring compared to murmurs of conversation and smooth moving of bikes...a lime scooter goes by next to a bike, but the scooter is much quieter.

FINDING A TIME TO PLAY

Despite the calm soundscape of Karlsplatz, there are some challenges that directly affected the timing and exact location of my performances. Repeatedly going back to the space, I noticed the transformation between daytime and nighttime Karlsplatz. During the day, things were much calmer and quieter, but there often were not enough people. In contrast, at night (especially on weekends), the space would fill up with young people who would drink and party outside, playing loud music from their own personal speakers.

As I became more familiar with the patterns of the space, I realized that I needed to appeal to both the daytime and nighttime crowds, and to perform in the transition period between the two, starting my show around 6 or 7 PM, depending on the weather and the crowdedness of the square. The calm atmosphere of families enjoying a nice day outside was usually there when I started, and the youths looking to party generally arrived while I was already playing. Since I mainly play covers of pop songs, young people very much enjoy what I do and often cheer loudly at my songs, thus helping me establish the type of atmosphere that I want. However, if I were to start playing too late, once they had already begun their louder partying, it would be impossible to be heard to the same extent, and to maintain their attention in the same manner.

The weather sometimes had an impact on how individuals used the physical space as well, specifically as the sun set and the shadow crept in from the nearby buildings. On a cool day, the crowds would be concentrated in the remaining pockets of sun, but on a particularly hot day, they would mainly sit down wherever there was shade. Sometimes this caused a bit of a dilemma for me in the timing of my performance. On particularly hot days, I was afraid of starting too early, as there were often few people around my main playing area when the shade had not yet covered it. Conversely, I had only limited time with which I could delay my start, as it would very soon get louder as the rowdier youth crowds arrived.

Occasionally, someone would already be playing a speaker when I started, meaning that they had already claimed the sonic space as theirs. For example, on July 12, the aforementioned group of rollerbladers were already there when I arrived, listening to their own music. I explained that I was a street musician and was going to put on a performance, so they kindly turned off their speaker when I was ready to begin. Not everyone obliges in such a situation, but it is extremely helpful when they do. The damage a single speaker can do to my claim on

a space (and thus a performance) is much greater than one might imagine. Obviously, it is a competing sound, meaning that the people in the vicinity of the speaker may not pay attention to the music that I am playing. Even more crucially, it will reduce the applause I receive from not only those people, but the other users of the space as well, relating back to Mann et al.'s (2013) “social contagion” model for audience applause.

As mentioned in Chapter V, one person or group that really enjoys my music can set the tone for a performance, as their applause encourages others to applaud as well, and to stay engaged while I play. Conversely, that singular speaker eliminates one group's applause, making it less likely that other groups will be engaged as well. And to a large extent, this applause is likely the greatest factor in my claim to the space as my own. When I play a song, I alone am attempting to occupy the sonic environment, as previously described. But when the audience cheers and sings along, it is an acknowledgement of my claim, and an acceptance of my performance as the primary activity in the space.

In addition to the partygoers drinking around the fountain and church, there were plenty of other sounds that forced me to alter the timing of my performance. One of the most prominent of these sounds was the ringing of the church bells. Over the course of my months playing at Karlsplatz, I attempted to document the times that they ring. The exact time was sometimes exactly on the hour, but also often not. Based on my notes, I have documentation of bells ringing at the following times during the late afternoon/evening: 5:00, 5:46, 5:54, 6:00, 6:18, 6:25, 7:00, 8:00. Most of the times the church bells rang, it would be only a few short seconds, and would not necessarily be very loud. Listening back to the recording of my July 18 performance, I noticed that the 8 PM bells went off while I was playing. Since they only lasted ~30 seconds, and their volume never reached a level that disrupted my performance, I was able to play through them without any trouble.

In contrast, the 7 PM bells became an important factor in the timing of my performance. As can be seen based on the sound recording from my show on July 25, they lasted for approximately five minutes and were quite loud, with an amplitude rivalling that of my instrument and voice. If I had played at the same time as them, I would probably still have been heard, but with nowhere near the same clarity. Additionally, it would have strained my voice a good deal to try to sing over the bells, as I would have needed to sing louder to compensate. Thus, when deciding when to play, I took them heavily into account. My “sweet spot” for when to play was in the early evening, between 6 and 8 PM or so. With the 7 PM bells right in the

middle, I had to make sure they would not interrupt my performance. The last thing I would want would be for the bells to start ringing mid-song, ruining all the momentum I had built up with the crowd. Especially in my final numbers before pitching for contributions and passing the hat, an interruption of that magnitude could be catastrophic for my monetary success. With this in mind, I had three options: I could either make sure to finish before 7 PM; wait to begin until after the bells entirely had finished around 7:05 PM; or start at a time where I could play a significant part of my program before 7 PM and have the bells serve as an “intermission,” finishing my program after they had ceased. I tried all three options at some point, depending on the dynamics of a given day.

On July 25, I went for this last strategy (see Figure 38), beginning my performance at 6:46 PM, giving me 14 minutes before I knew the bells would begin, enough time to play a few songs. After finishing my third song at 6:54 PM, I knew I would have time for just one more before starting. I went straight into Amy Winehouse’s “Back to Black,” during which I tend to dramatically sprint around the area in the last chorus, drawing a lot of attention and usually ending with a lot of applause. I figured this would be a good song to end on before the pause for the bells, and sure enough there was a larger than normal audience response. At 6:58 PM, I finished the song and announced that I would take a short break while the bells rang.

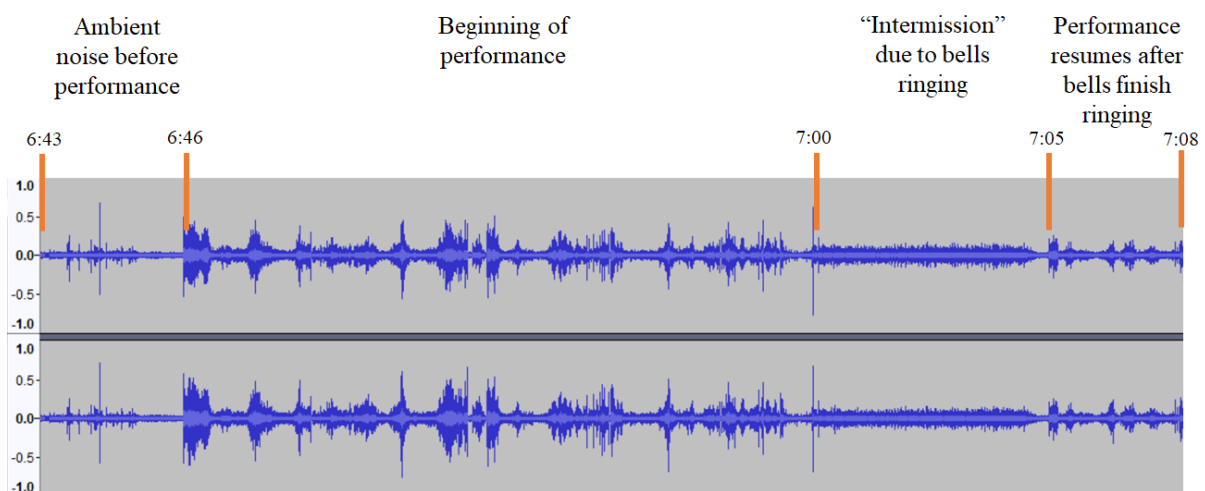


Figure 38: Waveform of sound before and during my performance at Karlsplatz on July 25 from 6:43-7:08 PM. (Recorded on Roland R-07 High Resolution Audio Recorder and imported into Audacity)

Over the course of my performances, I would often receive plenty of applause for the first few songs, seeing the excitement wane as time went on. In the beginning, my music would seem to come out of nowhere, serving as an abrupt change to the previously serene soundscape. Thus, it naturally attracted the attention of the public. As time would go on, the ear would get used to the sound of my music, with each successive song less “novel” than the previous one. When

I did not take a break, I relied on physical actions to keep my performance intriguing – jumping running, and dancing throughout my various numbers. As I previously explained, my song choice also facilitated this, with my last few songs always being the most “exciting” ones I would play, in order to regain the audience energy from the beginning of the program and to end on a high note before making my pitch for contributions. However, a break of a few minutes could give the audience a bit of time to “reset” for the second half of my show. As their ears would get used to the calmer background sounds of Karlsplatz and even the “white noise” of the bells ringing, the sound of my accordion and voice would fade from their mind, allowing me to shock them once again by abruptly starting after the break. Resuming my show after the “intermission” on July 25, I disturbed the temporary silence with my rendition of “I Want in That Way” by the Backstreet Boys, an upbeat number that I hoped would keep up the audience engagement I had before the break.

Not all external sounds are as predictable as the 7 PM church bells. On July 18, a dance school put on a salsa demonstration to the side of the fountain and church. It was not quite in my normal area, but they were playing loud enough music that it was clearly audible from where I was. If I had tried to play over them, it likely would have taken away from what I was doing, and I would not have gotten a great crowd reaction. Thus, I waited until their performance was finished and was only able to begin at 7:34 PM, a bit after my normal start time immediately after the 7 PM bells.

As can be seen, in terms of the sonic environment, *when* is almost as important as *where*. Some sounds are predictably avoidable. I knew when to play to avoid my performance being disrupted by the 7 PM church bells and learned over time that trying to play too much past 8 PM could result in competition from young people with their speakers (especially on a Friday or Saturday night). Unfortunately, not all sounds could simply be avoided by playing at a different time. Sometimes, external sounds had spatial implications for my performance, limiting the area that I could try to occupy.

CARVING A PHYSICAL SPACE IN THE SONIC ENVIRONMENT

As Bennett and Rogers (2014) allude to, ambient noise severely limits the extent to which a street performer can be heard, thus hurting their ability to establish their presence as the primary user of a space. During most of my performances there was some sort of sonic competition which I needed to deal with. On busier weekend nights, the tiki bar on the far side of the

fountain would often play loud music and be full of customers having loud conversations. On these nights, it was next to impossible for individuals across the fountain to hear me. I recall one evening when I went across the fountain to pass my hat, only for people there to tell me they could not hear me and had no idea that I was even performing. On July 26, while I was based around my normal spot between the church and the fountain, there was an older clarinetist playing at a different part of the fountain. Listening to the audio recording of this performance, his music is clearly audible from the distance, even though my voice and accordion were the prevailing sounds in my vicinity.

All of these competing sounds altered the physical space which I attempt to occupy on any given day, serving to “condense” and “shift” my performance area. For instance, on both June 25 and July 3, there was already a large contingent of youths drinking and playing music on their own speakers at the time I was playing. Generally, I made less of an attempt to appropriate these areas. Playing in front of the church steps and competing against a battery-powered speaker would create an unenjoyable cacophony of noise and would be a waste of my voice. Instead, I mostly focused on the areas which I could truly take temporary ownership of, where there was less competition for sonic space.

Figure 38 shows an example of this effect, detailing some of the various sonic “disruptions” that I documented on different performance dates, as well as an example of what a “condensed”/“shifted” stage looks like. While these sounds were not all on the same day, they illustrate how I adjusted my exact location in response to the sounds around me. If there were loud sounds coming from the church steps or further out ledges, I would focus on the space unoccupied by sonic competition. Conversely, a lack of sound could open up possibilities, allowing me to push the envelope in terms of the physical space I considered to be my stage, and in turn, the people I considered to be part of my audience. I made a major discovery in this regard on July 18. After the aforementioned salsa dance performance and as I was about to start playing, I noticed the crowd was unusually sparse for a Saturday night. It was a bit cloudy and rather cool for a summer evening, with the temperature only around 20° C. I chatted with one of the usual beer salesmen I had come to know over time, and he mentioned that there was a noticeable lack of people around the fountain that day, which obviously would not bode well for his profits. I had similar fears of the day’s paltry audience, as it seemed that there were simply too few people to get significant crowd response and financial contributions.

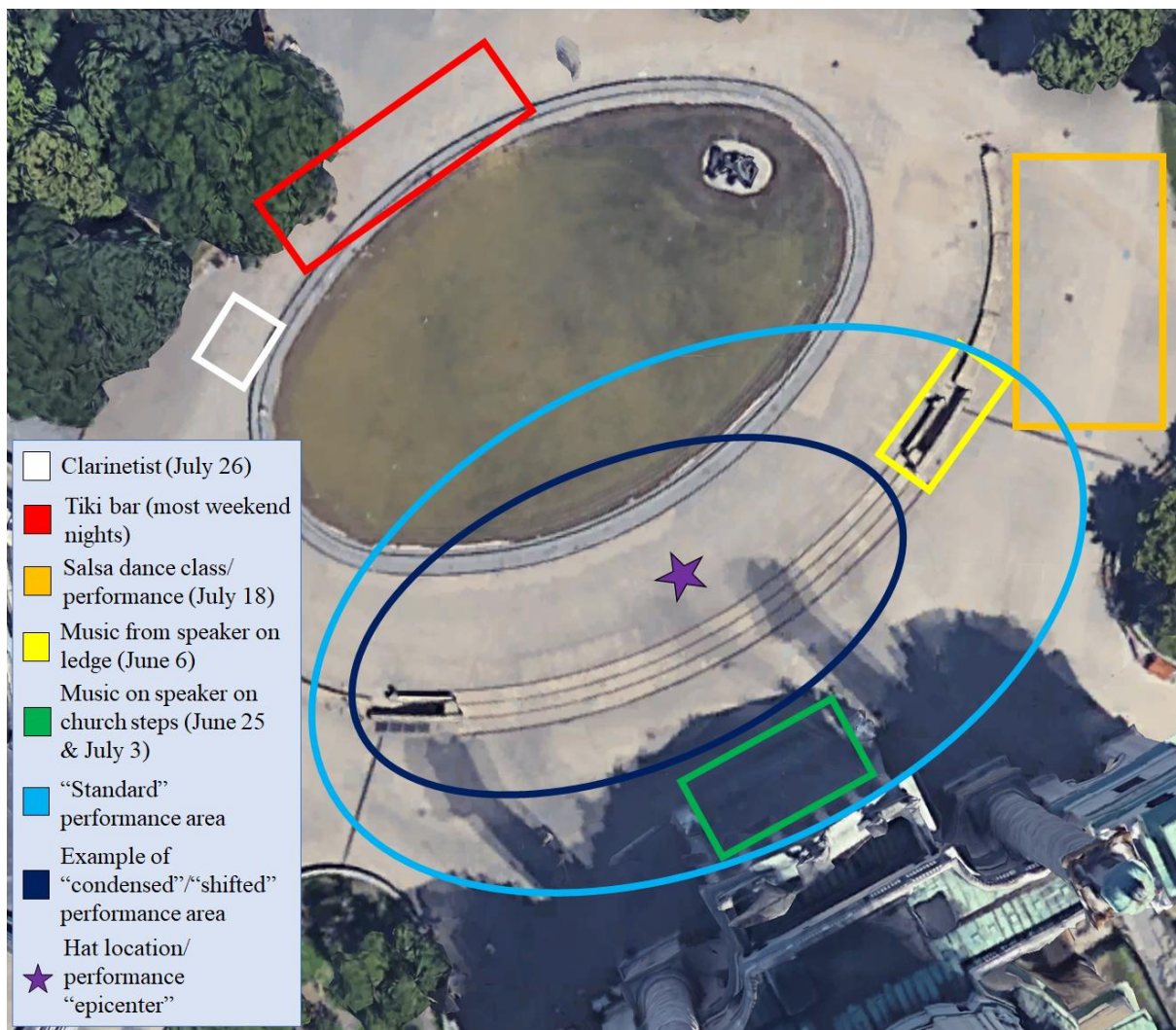


Figure 39: Some of the competing sounds I encountered at Karlsplatz. These sounds would “condense” and “shift” my performance area, altering the physical space I could take ownership of during my performance. (Image courtesy of Google Earth, with markings added afterwards)

As I played my first few songs, I noticed that despite the small crowd, a larger percentage of people than usual sitting around the fountain were cheering and engaged in my performance. Fewer people meant fewer competing sounds, allowing the sound of my voice and accordion to reach further than usual, even to the people all the way across the fountain. These sonic conditions of the moment spurred me to try something completely new, to go to the other side of the fountain. While movement had long been a vital part of my act, most of my movement was generally concentrated between the fountain and the church. On this day, my show was a bit different, as I constantly circled the fountain, getting to members of the public that I normally would not reach.

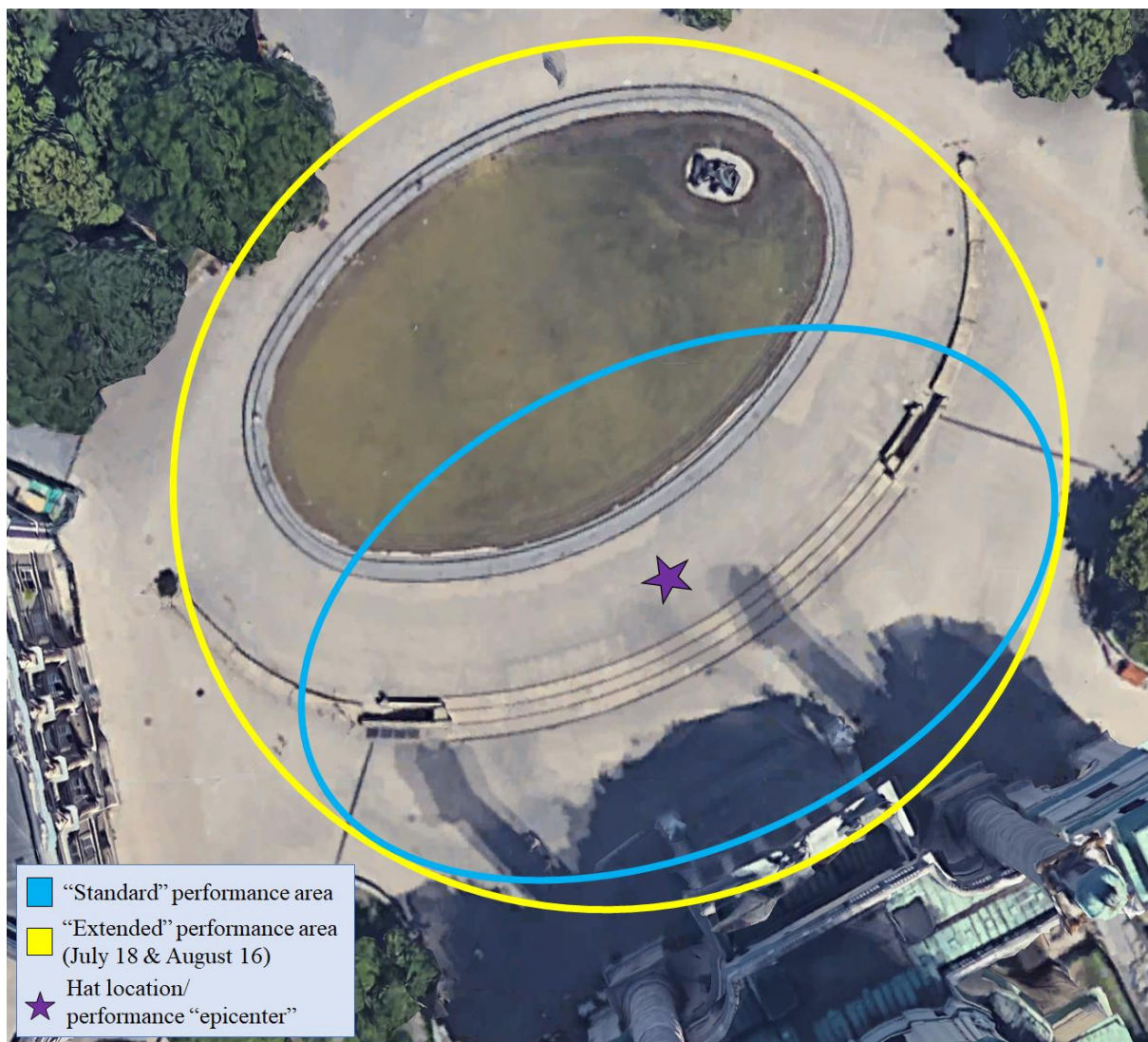


Figure 40: Days and times with minimal sound occasionally allowed for an “extended” performance area, as I appropriated a larger than normal space for my show.
(Image courtesy of Google Earth, with markings added afterwards)

I made the entirety of Karlsplatz my stage for this performance, instead of focusing solely on the area between the church and the fountain. Several times I ended a song at the other end of the fountain, only to introduce and begin the next one from that very spot. Only occasionally did I return to where my hat was, the standard “epicenter” for my performances at Karlsplatz. If I had stayed at my normal location, I doubt the public at the far end of the fountain would have shown as much interest or enthusiasm. And in fact, this change of location into an “extended” performance area was a necessary tactic to overcome the lack of people there on this day. There were simply not enough people in my “standard” performance area to count as a real “crowd,” so the move across the fountain allowed me to boost those numbers, in the process gaining more applause and contributions.

Figure 40 shows the difference between my “standard” performance area and this “extended” one I occupied. As I took advantage of the empty soundscape to go across the fountain, I succeeded in transforming the entire square into my own personal performance stage. In addition to my July 18 show, I repeated this act on August 16, my very last performance at Karlsplatz. Even though the August 16 performance had more people in the crowd than the July 18 one, it was still relatively calm and quiet.



Figure 41: Playing on the other side of the fountain on August 16. (Image courtesy of Florian Amon Clement)

Being a Sunday as opposed to a Saturday, the crowd was much more tranquil and there was less competing noise. At this performance as well, I made the entirety of Karlsplatz my performance space, making several laps of the fountain in order to get everyone “involved” in the performance. Both in terms of monetary earnings and crowd response generated, this was one of my most successful shows. If I had stayed in Vienna longer and played future performances at Karlsplatz, I likely would have built on this tactic, attempting to broaden my reach to a larger geographic space when the sonic environment permitted.

The sonic environment of Karlsplatz permitted me to play there, yet simultaneously limited me to an extent. On one hand, Karlsplatz offered a near-optimal balance between activity and tranquility, as there were often plenty of people there, but not too many extremely loud noises (such as cars and construction) competing for control of the soundscape. On the other hand, there were still imperfections in the plaza’s sonic conditions which I had to learn to account for. Since the volume of my accordion and (especially) my voice was limited, and because amplification would have limited the dynamic element that movement brings to my performance, I learned I could not take control of the soundscape through force. I could not be like the cannons that Schafer (1994) referenced, booming over a quiet sonic environment, as often enough there were plenty of other “cannons” competing with me. Instead, I had to be

creative to occupy the soundscape of Karlsplatz, attempting to limit the other sounds around me. I could ask one group of youth drinkers to turn down their music, but when the whole square was filled with loud music at night on a multitude of speakers, such a tactic would be unrealistic. I often had to take what I was given, with the soundscape dictating many of my performance tactics, specifically influencing the timing of my performance, as well as a given day's exact geographic location. Instead of overpowering the sounds around me, I had to seek the moments and spaces where they were at their weakest, attempting to find a void in the sonic space that I could fill with my music.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

CONCLUSIONS

In an urban environment, a street musician's success is not just dependent on their abilities, but also on the qualities of the space in which they play. The legal, social, physical, and sonic conditions of an urban space affect every aspect of a street musician's performance. True to de Certeau's (1984) definition of a "tactic," the musician must creatively work with the spatial conditions they encounter, both overcoming challenges and seizing opportunities in order to claim ownership of the space. Yet, in contrast to de Certeau's idea of a "tactic" as an "art of the weak" (1984, 37), I would refer to a street musician's tactics as an art of the *resourceful*. Wees (2017) uses the term *bricolage* to describe the actions of the busker: "working with the at-hand" in a process that is a "fundamentally creative act" (3). Part of the charm of the street musician is their improvisatory nature, their ability to create something unexpected despite the challenges. Thus, a successful busker is someone who succeeds in recognizing the opportunities a space presents and maximizing its potential from a position of limited power. While the musician usually does not have full control of the conditions in which they play, there are still ways they can stack the deck in their favor in order to put on a successful show and entertain the public.

For myself at Karlsplatz, this was an involved process. Over time I learned when to play, what songs to play, and what space to take up based on the sonic environment. I figured out how to engage the crowd, and more specifically, how to get a few people involved so that others would follow suit. The process of appropriating the square did not begin and end with the first and last note of a given day. Rather, it included everything from choosing the spot, to playing there for the first time, to the iterative process of coming back and making tweaks to my show. By the end of my time in Vienna, I had it down to a science, and knew almost exactly what to do to eke out every bit of applause and money possible from a performance there. But if I had stayed longer in Vienna, I surely would have kept iterating, constantly adapting my show with more playing experience.

To turn a space into a stage for musical performance, a street musician must also understand how they fit into the space, and what qualities in an urban space help them to thrive as a

performer. It was at Karlsplatz that I realized the difference between a “path” and a “node” as it relates to performance spaces, that plazas and squares where people *stay* are much better for me than shopping streets where they *pass by*. I understood the value of built-in seating and a quiet acoustic background for me to put on a successful performance. I realized that I need to seek out spots with younger individuals, as my music and style caters more to them. However, street musicians are not a monolith, and what works for one will not work for all. Many buskers have great success on large shopping streets, in noisier environments, and with older crowds. Yet, even if another street musician’s performance style differs greatly from mine, their process of finding and cultivating a pitch to play in is likely quite similar. Just as I did at Karlsplatz, they must discover what spaces work for them, and then through trial and error, learn how to adapt and optimize their performance based on the peculiarities of those spaces. It is through this understanding of self and surroundings that the street musician can ultimately create a convivial atmosphere, thereby succeeding in turning an urban space into a stage for musical performance.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Having established the dependency of buskers on their surroundings, a natural progression in research would be to look at something more actionable, namely how we can facilitate street music in our cities. Assuming that street music is, in fact, desired for its contribution to convivial urban spaces (and not denounced as a blight on the urban soundscape), what actions can be taken to provide street musicians with spaces that work for them? From a legislation perspective, it is clear that a system such as Vienna’s does not achieve this goal – arbitrarily assigning spots to musicians does not take into account the heterogenous of nature of the artists and the spaces, and as a result, does not put musicians in the best position to be successful. Yet, more research would be needed to determine what optimal legislation (if any) would look like, and to understand the obstacles such legislation would face from various actors. Going beyond legislation, this study encourages discussion about the qualities of public spaces. How can we design public spaces that encourage street music? And even beyond street music, what are the qualities that can lead to the production of a vibrant urban space? Karlsplatz was not just a great busking spot – it was ideal for many other appropriations as well, likely for similar reasons. By understanding how to better foster street music in our cities, we can also gain a greater understanding of how to encourage other uses of public space.

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