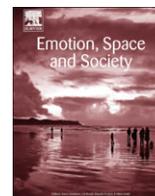




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## Re-scaling emotional approaches to music: Basque band Lisabö and the soundscapes of urban alienation

Benjamin Fraser<sup>1</sup>

Christopher Newport University, 1 University Place, Newport News, VA 23606, USA

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## ABSTRACT

Building on recent studies that have linked music, emotion and geography, this article looks at the musical production of the Basque post-punk band 'Lisabö' across its four albums: *Ezlekuak* (Bidehuts, 2007), *Izkiriaturik aurkitu ditudan gurak* (Metak, 2005), *Ezarian* (Esan Ozenki, 2000) and the EP *Egan Bat Nonahi* (Acuarela, 2002). Melding musical (cultural/textual) studies with a range of geographical and urban theory, this analysis takes on both the sonic immediacy and the lyrical content of the band's music in an attempt to re-scale emotional approaches to space and place to an urban level. Ultimately, this reading of Lisabö's emotional soundscapes highlights the role (and omission) of emotion in the production of urban places and simultaneously suggests that our emotional connections with music might form the basis for an embodied musical criticism engaged with space and place at the level of the urban.

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As has been noted by an increasing number of theorists writing across traditional disciplinary boundaries, emotions are not merely a surface disturbance of human experience but are instead an essential, if oft-ignored, aspect of our thought and cultural production. Over the past decade, geographers, in particular, have worked to "tap into the emotional content of human affairs" (Wood and Smith, 2004: 533) and to see the relevance of emotions to spatial understandings and practices (Anderson and Smith, 2001; Ettlinger, 2004; Tolia-Kelly, 2006; Wood and Smith, 2004). This 'emotional turn' has often proved to be a way of recalibrating the dualistic Cartesian schism between thinking and feeling. As Davidson and Milligan (2004) argue, "there is little we can think apart from feeling" (p. 523, original emphasis; see also Bondi, 2002, 7).<sup>2</sup> At the same time, a parallel shift in disciplinary orientation has highlighted the significance of music to issues of space and place, often intersecting with this focus on emotional geographies and highlighting musical experience as both individual and community practice. It is in this vein, for example, that Ben Anderson (2005) has looked at the experience of music in domestic everyday life, Connell and Gibson (2004) at the more global phenomenon of

<sup>1</sup> E-mail address: [fraserb2010@gmail.com](mailto:fraserb2010@gmail.com).

<sup>2</sup> The author is a member of both the Association of American Geographers and the Modern Language Association.

<sup>3</sup> There is a dualistic quality also in the dissonance between use of the terms 'emotion' and 'affect,' as can be seen in the literature. See Anderson and Harrison (2006); McCormack (2003, 2006), Thien (2005), Tolia-Kelly (2006).

'world music,' Revill (2005) at 'folk music,' and Morton (2005) at Irish traditional music. As Anderson et al. (2005, 640) suggest in their editorial introduction to a special issue of *Social and Cultural Geography*, scholars have moved beyond "music or sound as textual objects" toward musical practice and performance as a way of legitimizing "the multiplicity of ways in which musics are experienced, produced, reproduced and consumed, and to foreground the relationships between the physical presence of sound and the flow of sensory impressions." Broadening the approach to music in this way has, in effect, appropriately challenged another dualistic posture that risks conceptualizing the sonorous and the musical merely as an immaterial representation of a more fundamental, tangible and material world.

Such a dualistic posture has been similarly rejected by recent work at the intersection of sound and cognition that has pointed out the intimate connection that exists between music, emotion and the brain. As popular neuroscience authors Levitin (2006: 251–52) and Sacks (2007: x) agree, music may have evolutionary importance. As both authors underscore, there is an interesting and direct link between emotion, sound and motor activity, owing to the fact that not all of the connections between the inner ear and the brain run to the auditory cortex—some run directly to the cerebellum. Levitin writes: "The cerebellum is central to something about emotion—startle, fear, rage, calm, gregariousness [and is] now implicated in auditory processing" (p. 187). In this context, the opportunity thus presents itself to approach the connection between emotion and music not merely as a surface disturbance of

human experience but rather as a fundamental relation impacting both thought and action.

Not surprisingly, this recent biological and neurological argument for the importance of sound resonates with a growing body of geographical scholarship that has already been engaging sound at a deeper level. The theorists who have most directly synthesized emotions, music and geography are perhaps Smith (1997, 2000, 2001, 2005) and Wood et al. (2007), who have argued that “sound is as important as sight for the project of geography” (p. 502). Smith (2005: 90) turns the ocularcentric nature of knowledge production on its ear when she provocatively asks, “What would happen to the way we think, to the things we know, to the relationships we enter, to our experience of time and space, if we fully took on board the idea that the world is for hearing rather than beholding, for listening to, rather than for looking at?” Smith’s (2005: 111) question points to the opportunity presented in musical performance to reconcile both dualistic categories and divergent scales of experience. She writes that “it is through their capacity to tie the personal to the political, the aesthetic to the material, the emotional to the social, the individual body to the collective enterprise that performers make their place in the world”. Actualizing just this sort of reconciliation, the literature on music and geography has grappled just as much with theoretical and philosophical issues as it has with concrete expressions of place and identity, exploring the dialectical relationship that exists between sonorous realities and material practices. One notable contribution in this area is an essay by Nichola Wood, which clearly explores the connection between emotion and a sense of place as galvanized through musical experiences. Wood (2002: 58) highlights the “complexities of belonging to a national community” through a look at the British tradition of summer promenade classical concerts known as The Last Night of the Proms. Whereas both emotion and music have been traditionally ignored in geographical scholarship, she argues, tuning in to listening practices can allow us to discern subjectivity formations in the process of being composed.

Interest in such subjectivity formations has very often reverberated through the scales of the individual, the community, the region, and of course the national (Anderson, 2005; Davidson and Milligan, 2004; Hudson, 2006; Wood, 2002), but has less frequently been directed toward the urban. Appropriately, here I engage in a re-scaling of our approach to music, emotion and geography through a sustained look at (or rather a ‘listening to’) the musical production of the contemporary Basque band Lisabö. Their four albums, *Ezlekuak* (Bidehuts, Lisabö, 2007), *Izkiriaturik aurkitu ditudan gurak* (Metak, Lisabö, 2005), *Ezarian* (Esan Ozenki, Lisabö, 2000) and the EP *Egan Bat Nonahi* (Acuarela, Lisabö, 2002), are best engaged at the scale of the urban, as an expression of, and a reaction to, an urbanized consciousness. I want to show how the band’s variegated emotional soundscapes function as a complementary soundtrack to theoretical approaches to urban alienation. This re-scaling, specifically entailing a shift from the national to the urban, is not a negation of previous work, but an acknowledgement of the multiple and socially negotiated scales of experience (Marston, 2000).

At the same time that this paper attempts to re-scale musical scholarship and suggest the relevance of an urban-centered approach, it is also an attempt to return to the notion of music as a cultural product—not in the traditional sense denounced by Wood (2002: 59) as a way of ignoring music’s connection to space and place—but here as a way of supporting a recalibrated understanding of the connection between music, emotion and place. It is important to assert that recorded musical ‘texts’ and the connections formed with them by listeners, are no less emotional than performances. McClary and Walser (1990) cogently report on what

they term the “staggering” (p. 283) problems of reconciling music as a cultural artifact with social organization, noting also that “music is an especially resistant medium to write or speak about” (p. 278; see also Wood et al., 2007: 885). As Frith’s (1988: 105–06, 120–21; 1996a: 158–82) work suggests, part of the challenge of writing about music involves displacing the hegemonic position long enjoyed by lyrics in discussions of musical signification and compensating for the fact that scholars have more frequently taken to analyzing the structural and formal qualities of a piece of music rather than tackling the “the qualities of immediacy, emotion, sweat [which are] suspect terms in both the library and the classroom” (Frith, 1996b, quoted in Smith, 2005: 108). And yet it should be noted that Frith’s position clearly does not advocate abandoning lyrical content or the analysis of formal qualities altogether. Given the difficulty of writing about the elusive qualities of sound, lyrics—especially when complemented by a substantial attempt to address non-lyrical aspects—provide one pathway into the meaning of music, a direction pursued by Frith himself.

The following sections of this essay seek to work from a middle ground, grappling simultaneously with Lisabö’s music as a cultural product and as a point of entry into urbanized consciousness. This effort thus simultaneously treats Lisabö’s albums as cultural products and also as theoretical (musical) texts in their own right, blending a close-reading of the band’s musical texts with a nod to larger urban questions. In tune with broadly accepted tenets of literary/cultural studies, this blended and somewhat unconventional approach succumbs neither to the intentional fallacy that seeks to reveal the ‘essential’ meaning lurking behind a cultural product nor to the facile distinction between the form of a given work and its content. Instead, this essay underscores the band’s recorded musical production as a whole and frames it as a complex musical representation, and also a contestation, of urban alienation. This focus on the richness of recorded music itself should be seen as a complement to penetrating analyses of live music performances and national musical communities by Anderson et al. (2005) and others.

The first section, “Immediacy,” loosely approaches the relevance of music to identity formation, stepping back from the tendency of reading music too closely in relation to identity politics and simultaneously (if paradoxically) contextualizing Lisabö within a Basque tradition. Stepping back from the need to see music in terms of national identity, the second section, “Distance,” explores how the musical and lyrical content of the band’s albums intersect with the work by a number of theorists on urban alienation and so-called ‘non-places’. The third section, “Aural intimacy,” emphasizes the notion that criticism on music and place need not eschew the very emotional enjoyment of music it so often sublimates beneath a theoretical veneer of analytical objectivity. Instead, as my reading of Henri Lefebvre’s ‘rhythmanalysis’ suggests—drawing also upon the work of Henri Bergson, one of Lefebvre’s unacknowledged influences (Fraser 2008)—there is reason to acknowledge that the listener, in fact, comes to coincide with the sounds she/he hears. Hearing Lisabö’s music—and, from Lefebvre’s perspective, sound more generally—returns us to the realm of temporality, making contradiction and conflict audible, encouraging emotional connections with place and calling into question the visual logic that drives the capitalist production of urban space.

### 1. Immediacy: within and beyond Basqueness

Lisabö was founded in 1998 in Irun, a town in the province of Gipuzkoa, in the Basque Autonomous Community in Northern Spain. The founding members were Ivan (drums), Imanol (guitar and vocals), Karlos (base and vocals) and Javi (guitar and vocals). While the band’s make-up has changed over time to include other

members (such as Aida, Maite, Eneko, Ionyu and Martxel), its sound has remained relatively consistent across its three full-length albums and one EP. Incorporating aspects of musical styles that have been labeled as punk, post-punk, emotional hardcore and noise, Lisabö's songs oscillate between heavy crashes and ominous silence, grating drives and melodic progressions—throughout maintaining a consistently high level of intensity. The addition of a second drum set in 2000 notably heightened the aural intensity of their music, which has been described in a music review as “inquietante y amenazador [disquieting and threatening]” (Luna, 2001). The band's oscillation between driving crescendos and haunting lulls perhaps owes musically to the legacy of such small-label bands as Fugazi, June of 44, Godspeed You Black Emperor!, Low and Shellac—all of whom have been singled out for praise by the band members themselves (Jorge, 2002). Nevertheless, one of the most significant qualities of their sound stems from their consistent use of the Basque language. My reading sees the band's use of Basque as a musical and political decision that demonstrates both an attentiveness to the material realities of place and also a refusal to engage the excesses of the limiting discourse of identity politics on the national scale.<sup>3</sup>

An extensive literature exists concerning the dialectical tension between what numerous critics have termed place and space. Harvey (1996: ch. 11), for example, moves “From Space to Place and Back Again” in order to locate the notion of place at the intersection of both material and immaterial processes: “Place, in whatever guise, is like space and time, a social construct” (p. 293). Many other theorists have likewise approached the production of places in both material and immaterial terms, noting that places are caught up in a tension that exists between the particular and the universal. For example, there has been extensive debate of late surrounding how the differentiation and socially-constructed notion of scale intersects with processes of identity formation (see Marston, 2000; stemming from Taylor, 1982; Smith, 1984; more recently Howitt, 2003; Brenner, 2004: 9–11). There is a danger in simplifying the tension between the particular and universal in the negotiation of place. As Lloyd (1997) has argued, appealing too much to universality can lead to exclusions, such as those inherent to transitions from nationalist movements to state structures. On the other hand, lauding the particular at the expense of universality can lead to a myopic conservatism/traditionalism that encourages a restrictive notion of difference and may fuel a hatred of outsiders.

Even such a brief presentation of particularity and universality is useful in that it allows us to push further into the more fluid notion of place engaged through Lisabö's music. It is significant, in this regard, that the band both continues and contests the legacy of Basque punk music. During the period known as the ‘destape’/the ‘uncorking’ (known also as ‘la movida’), which unfolded shortly after the 1975 death of Spanish dictator Francisco Franco, Basque punk flourished “in those areas of Euskadi [The Basque Countries] which were exposed to strong urbanization and industrialization, to internal segmentation and marginalization” (Lahusen 1993: 266). Just as in the tradition of the gritty and socially conscious origins of American punk, Basque punk groups were similarly

committed to overtly political content. Lisabö's more recent music, however, succeeds in striking a middle ground between the explicitly political punk movement of the 1980s (according to Lahusen, a movement that coincided in many respects with the aims of the various strains of Basque nationalism) and a new generation of popular musicians on the Iberian peninsula who prefer to sing almost exclusively in English instead of their native Basque, Catalán, Valencian or even Castilian Spanish (some of these such groups include: *Maple*, *Zeidun*, *No More Lies*, *Standstill*, *Half-Foot Outside*, many of which have released albums with the labels *Acuarela* [Madrid] or *bcore* [Barcelona]). The advantages of singing in English are understandable. In all probability such a decision would contribute to a larger fan-base, wider appeal and distribution, and ultimately greater album sales (see Berger and Carroll, 2003).

Defying the directly political content of more traditional punk music, Lisabö's lyrics are more often than not enigmatic, such as in the first track of their *Ezarian* album (their debut release) titled “Narrazti gizakiaren sehaska kanta [Cradle song of the reptile man],” wherein the words are delivered in a faint Basque whisper: “Egizu lo maitia, ez izutu Egizu lo Ez dut ez eskurik. Eskurik lantzantzeko. Ez dut ez besorik. Besorik zu besarkatzeko. Eta ezin zu hitzez maitatu. Mutuak ezin kantatu. Egizu lo maitia, ez izutu. Egizu lo. [Sleep love, don't fear. Sleep. I have no hands. No hands to caress you. I have no arms. No arms to hug you. And I cannot talk to you of love. The dumb do not sing. Sleep love, don't fear. Sleep.]”<sup>4</sup> Significantly, the lyrics of songs on all four of the band's albums are throughout delivered in Basque, with the exception of infrequent phrases in English and many of the songs on the collaborative album *Izkiriaturik aurkitu ditudan gurak*, where guest artists sing also in Spanish, French, English and Polish.

It is important here to return to Frith's (1996a: 269) assertion that “the academic study of popular music has been limited by the assumption that sounds somehow reflect or represent ‘a people’”. Taking on Lisabö as a Basque band requires a more subtle approach than the hard lines of identity politics proper are able to provide. While the band conserves some of the musical inheritance of previous Basque punk, it also manages to break away from the tradition of explicit, politically charged lyrics. The decision to sing in Basque is itself thus neither an essentialization of, nor a retreat from, the place-bound histories of the Basque Countries, with which the band has linguistically maintained a metonymical connection. This more subtle position on the ‘Basqueness’ of the band means that the critic is no longer fettered by the need to have Lisabö speak for an entire ‘people’ (whether region or nation), and may instead attend to the particularities of their musical/lyrical production. As the next section explores, this musical/lyrical production splendidly renders the realities of urban alienation in audible form.

## 2. Distance: urban alienation and the emotional deficiency of the non-place

In *The Urban Revolution*, Lefebvre (1970) makes the lucid comment that “Urban alienation contains and perpetuates all other forms of alienation” (p. 92), which is best understood in relation to his critical project as a whole. Throughout his works the twentieth-century philosopher and geographer sought to recalibrate Marxism to more closely grapple with contemporary relations of capital—and the two entwined areas of Marxian

<sup>3</sup> Lahusen (1993) warns the English language reader of the paucity of sources on Basque culture in English, explores the relationship of Basque punk to Basque political divisions, and directs the reader to work on Basque Nationalism (Darré, 1990; Ibarra, 1989; Sullivan, 1988; and especially Jáuregui, 1986). Since Lahusen's article was published, many more English language articles of interest to scholars of Basque Studies have appeared, most notably in the volume *Basque Cultural Studies* (Douglass et al., 2000) and other titles in Basque Studies printed by the University of Nevada Press, but also in the *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, the *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* and the *International Journal of Iberian Studies*, among others. See also Linthroth (2002), Kashmir (2002).

<sup>4</sup> All lyrics cited are in the original language, with English translations in brackets included exactly as they have been published in the liner notes to a given album—except where I have provided the accompanying note, ‘my modified translation.’

thought upon which he expanded most were spatiality and alienation. In his other works, Lefebvre (1947: 249) argued for a multifaceted understanding of alienation as at once economic, social, political, ideological and philosophical and pointed to the legacy of modern urban planning as being itself a form of alienation. City planning, he argued, was predicated on a reductive bourgeois conception of knowledge that was harnessed in the act of a top-down approach that failed to create “an urban reality for users”—instead, it constructed the city in the interests of “speculators, builders, and technicians” (Lefebvre, 1968: 168). Capitalism survived the twentieth-century, he later argued, with the complicity of city planning “by producing space, by occupying a space” (Lefebvre, 1973: 21). The priority Lefebvre assigns to urban alienation thus needs to be understood as a qualitative change in the whole of post-war experiences in the advanced capitalist countries, one that is just as relevant to the production of space as it is to the pattern of history described by Lefebvre (1947) as the dialectical oscillation between alienation, dis-alienation and new forms of alienation.

The urban experience itself was described in terms of alienation in Georg Simmel’s classic 1903 essay “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” which has since achieved foundational importance within the developing multidisciplinary tradition of urban studies. Simmel observes the burgeoning formation of a specifically urbanized consciousness, noting that “The psychological basis of the metropolitan type of individuality consists in the *intensification of nervous stimulation* which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli” (original emphasis):

Lasting impressions, impressions which differ only slightly from one another, impressions which take a regular and habitual course and show regular and habitual contrasts—all these use up, so to speak, less consciousness than does the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions. These are the psychological conditions which the metropolis creates. (Simmel, 2000: p. 150)

As a necessity wrought of the confrontation with the overstimulation and fast pace of city life, the “deeply felt and emotional relationships” of small town life are effectively rendered obsolete. Simmel thus characterizes a newly urbanized consciousness in terms of the adoption of what he calls a “blasé attitude”—a “state of indifference” required in dealing with the chaos of urban life. Reconciling Lefebvre’s perspective on the primacy of urban alienation with Simmel’s explicit characterization of urban life in terms of emotional deficiency requires that we pay attention to what various critics have called ‘non-places.’ Tellingly, these spaces where capitalist production has cultivated an atmosphere of emotional detachment constitute the title of Lisabö’s (2007) most recent album *Ezlekuak* [Non-Places]. The following discussion thus engages the album as an angry response to urban alienation in general and to the emotional deficiency of the non-place in particular.

In the critical interdisciplinary literature on the space-place dialectic, there is, perhaps, no concept as intriguing as that of the ‘non-place.’ The term reaches us today after having been popularized by the French anthropologist Augé (2005: 87), who dedicated an important work to exploring the non-symbolic space of “the real non-places of supermodernity” (Augé, 2005: 99).<sup>5</sup> Michel de Certeau had previously noted that the non-place “is a space devoid of the symbolic expressions of identity, relations and history:

examples include airports, motorways, anonymous hotel rooms, public transport... Never before in the history of the world have non-places occupied so much space” (Certeau quoted in Bauman 2000: 102; see de Certeau 1984[1980]: 103–05). The critic of modernity Zygmunt Bauman uses the term ‘non-place’ more generally, almost coming to equate it with places of consumption that are characterized only by “tamed, sanitized” differences—“the comforting feeling of belonging—the reassuring impression of being part of a community” (p. 99). His description of these “non-places” gives them the power and privilege of being able to influence subjects. Non-places themselves thus “reduce behavior,” they “colonize ever larger chunks of public space and refashion them in their own likeness” (p. 102). Non-places are best understood as proxies for places, created to satisfy one specific need rather than privileging multidimensionality and manufactured in such a way as to constrict or limit human behaviors and even to encourage or discourage emotions, thoughts and patterns of relating.<sup>6</sup>

On Lisabö’s (2007) provocatively titled album *Ezlekuak* [Non-places], two songs in particular make reference to such emotionally-barren sites. The song “Nekearen teoria [The theory of tiredness]” immerses a reference to a hotel within a stream-of-consciousness-style meditation on alienation, fear and darkness. “Beldurra da, besterik ez, sexual, gosea, iluntasunari eusten, tinko oratzen hutsuneari. [It’s just fear, nothing else, sex, hunger, holding on to darkness, holding to the void tightly.]” The hotel is not a dwelling but a stop along the way that encourages no emotional attachment:

Nik jakin badakit hau ez dela hotelik aproposena. Jakin badakit, nik, zirkulazioak ez duela sekulan atsedena hartzen eta pintura paretetik erortzen dela. Beldurra da, besterik ez. Ez-lekuak. [I know perfectly that this one isn’t the most appropriate hotel. I do know, myself, that traffic never takes a break and paint falls off of the walls. It’s just fear, nothing else. The non-places.—*my modified translation*”]

The song’s remaining lyrics make reference to pervasive fear, wailing creatures, the quick passing of time and, through it all, the ongoing presence of non-places: “Ezlekuak, oraindik, orain [The non-places, still [adverb], now.—*my modified translation*]” In “Alderantzizko magia [Inverse magic],” the lyrics again specifically reference non-places, this time using more disturbing images:

Ezlekuak, eskuko marren bitartean. Gaixo bati bisita lez, erditzeko leku bat iragaten duzu. Ezpainak josi ondoren, kartetan aritu ginen butano-kamioi hartan. [Non-places, among the lines of the hand. Like visiting a sick person, you cross a place to give birth. After sewing our lips, we played cards in that butane gas-truck.—*my modified translation*]

As elsewhere, the lyrics are delivered in a controlled yet anxious and evenly punctuated shout that occasionally breaks into a yell or a scream, even pointing directly to the erasure of identity: “Nork lapurtu dizkizu hatz-markak? Ezlekuak, eskuko marren bitartean. [Who has stolen your fingerprints from you? Non-places, among the lines of a hand.—*my modified translation*]” Where the image of

<sup>5</sup> In Spain, the term has been used by Delgado Ruiz (2004, 2007a,b). On Delgado see Fraser (2007, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> As Certeau states in a section subtitled merely “Indeterminate” at the end of his *Practice of Everyday Life*: “every urban ‘renovation’ nonetheless prefers a *tabula rasa* on which to write in cement the composition created in the laboratory on the basis of discrete ‘needs’ to which functional responses are to be made. [...] This is the logic of production [...] It rejects the relevance of places it does not create” (p. 201). The univocal vision that characterizes this kind of instrumental spatial production has been critiqued thoroughly by Lefebvre (1974) and a number of other contemporary thinkers (e.g., David Harvey, Edward Soja, Jane Jacobs, etc.; see Fraser 2007, 2008, 2009b).

a hotel (a classic representation of the non-place, according to Certeau) with peeling paint was used in “Nekearen teoria [The theory of tiredness],” here the lyrics point alternately in direct and indirect terms to the cleansed environment of the hospital. The song closes with the lines: “Ezlekua, enigma, obsesioa eta argazkia. Itsaso-kaian labain egin du nortasunak. [The non-place, enigma, obsession and photography. Identity has slipped into the seaport.—my modified translation]”

Furthermore, in many other songs off of the album *Ezlekuak*, Lisabö points less directly to non-places through references to urban worlds devoid of meaningful interpersonal connections and emotional belonging. The song titled “1215. katean [On Channel 1215]” depicts a man lost in himself watching television; “Sekulan etxean izan ez [Never have been at home]” explores the reality of “Inon ez gustura, nahiz ta lurrag egiten duen argi gure begien aurrean [Feeling comfortable nowhere, though the floor shines in front of our eyes]”; “Bi minutu [Two minutes]” describes the ubiquity of alienation recalling the classic imagist poem on the modern experience by Pound (1913) titled “In a Station of the Metro.”<sup>7</sup> The remaining songs similarly point to the cold, cleansed environments of modernity, as in “Hazi eskukada II [A handful of seeds II]”, wherein the lyrics juxtapose the emotional significance of a handful of seeds to a series of barren sites: “Nahiz ta meazuloan, museoan, harreralekuan, lantegian, putetxean, bulebarrean, haitzuloan, ispilu-gelan, aldarean, espaloi distiratsuetan, gure begiek etengabe hazi-eskukada eskatu. [Although in the mine shafts, in the museum, in reception, at work in the whorehouse, in the boulevard, in the cave, in the mirrors room, in the altar, on the shiny sidewalks, our eyes ask continuously for a handful of seeds.—my modified translation]” The content and form of these songs work together to engage a distinctly urbanized and urbanizing consciousness that produces non-places in which emotional attachments are discouraged.

The band’s earlier releases certainly resonate with this more recent focus on non-places. Both *Ezarian* (2000) and Lisabö’s EP *Egun Bat Nonahi* (2002) make a point of highlighting the extreme isolation that characterizes the modern experience. The lyrical denunciation of both modern alienation and the growing trend of producing spaces unreceptive to establishing and maintaining emotional connections resonates with the formal musical structure of the band’s songs as well as with the sonic immediacy of its blaring sound. Take the song “Gezur Erraza [Simple Lie]” (from the *Ezarian* album), for example, where after a lulling intro extending well past the two-minute mark, an unannounced wave of thunderous screaming, accompanied by drums and loud guitar, suddenly shouts “Lehen erraza zen guztia, zaila bihurtu zen. Gezur erraza. Ez zen inoiz aise izan hitz egokiak aurkitzea, biluztea, egia absolute guzti horietatik alde egitea. [Everything that before was so easy has become difficult. The simple lie. It was never easy to find adequate words, to bare oneself, to flee from all those absolute truths.]” Over and over, the band’s lyrics return to a familiar range of questions, asking whether there is room for a complex and rich emotional life in a modernity that alienates the individual.

Lisabö’s masterful oscillation between sheets of thick amplified rock and waves of distant ethereal chaos is best understood as a specific type of emotional reaction to the frustrating isolation and rapid changes wrought of a modern experience that in many cases

is driven by an emphasis on consumers over people. Consider the song “Goiz euria [Early morning rain]” (from the EP *Egun Bat Nonahi*) where one male and one female voice simultaneously chant the following lyrics in unison over a sparing drumbeat and thin layers of ambient noise:

Bagoaz anaitasunari oraindik beldurra dion desfilean bulego, biltegi, pabilio, idazkaritza, ikasgela, dende gainontzeko eremu hesituetara gure hatsa eta izerdiz eta keinuz eta begiradez zitaltasunez goxotasunez ere tarteka ezjakintasunez uneoro zein ezinegenez inertzi amankomun nekagarri nardagarriaz gure mugimenduak elbarritzera instituzioari maitasunari baino zilegitasun gehiago emanaz konbentzioei ausardiari baino legeei zuzen bideari baino komunikazioa gezurra da komunikazioaren garaian.

[We march in the parade that still fears brotherhood toward the bureaus, stores, pavilions, secretary’s offices, classrooms, shops the rest of the closed spaces to mutilate our movements by our breath and sweat and gestures and looks misdeeds sometimes sweetness as well as both by ignorance and restlessness all the time by tiring abominable common inertia giving more rightness to prostitution than to love to conventions than to courage to laws than to justice communication is a lie in the era of communication.]

The effect of the two singers, one male the other female, singing the same lyrics but with seemingly no emotional connection either to their own words or those of the other, is to at once critique the lack of community between the two and hint through this absence to the possibility of a future reconciliation.

The trend of Lisabö’s lyrics overall is to critique the demands of an instrumentalist society that prohibits the development of deeper emotions, encouraging only those that can be merged with capitalist accumulation strategies, the production of needs and the products sold to satisfy them. The band’s emotional and musical response is an angry one that can be clearly heard upon listening to their albums—even if it is one only insufficiently described through academic writing, which is, after all, a visual and not an aural medium (see, McClary and Walser (1990) on the difficulty of writing about music). As scholar Henderson (2008: 29) writes in the article that she calls her guarded defense of anger, it is important “to defend anger because it can locate blame for injustice and tends, more than other emotions, to motivate punitive and/or preventative demands against the unjust treatment of others (p. 30). Moreover, “The argument that anger is incompatible with democratic process stems from a tradition which considers emotions to be disruptive of, rather than collaborative with, reason” (p. 31). Anger can in fact work together with hope, she argues, and may as such be a key component of effecting social change. Lisabö’s anger—stemming as above from the band’s theoretically informed critique of urban alienation—is not merely heard but also actually felt by listening to the band’s music. This is not to say that music represents emotional states, but that it simultaneously induces them to an extent; it is to say that music does not merely mean something but that it *does* something.

For Lefebvre’s unacknowledged influence Bergson (1912[1896]: 57), emotion was itself an action: “Affection differs from perception in that it is real instead of virtual action.” Although explored by Bergson over a century ago, this perspective turns out to have quite a contemporary resonance, even with recent work by Thien (2005) who coins the phrase the “motion of emotion” (p. 451; see also Fraser, 2009a). In *Time and Free Will*, Bergson writes:

How will the expressive or rather suggestive power of music be explained, if not by admitting that we repeat to ourselves the sounds heard, so as to carry ourselves back into the psychic state

<sup>7</sup> “Bi minutu” begins: “Leku galduak. Garai bateko une bat, nahiz eta jendetza arrotzari begira, gogora ekarri nahi [Lost places. An instant of other time, though looking at the foreign crowd wanted to bring it to memory].” Pound’s (1913: 1) poem reads: “The apparition of these faces in the crowd/Petals on a wet, black bough”.

out of which they emerged, an original state, which nothing will express, but which something may *suggest*, viz. the very motion and attitude which the sound imparts to our body?" (Bergson, 1889: 44, emphasis added).

Following as much from Bergson's writings as from the immediate experience of listening, Lisabö's loud crashing sheets of sound both produce a bodily effect on the listener, inducing a state of tension, as they simultaneously *suggest* (in the Bergsonian sense, above) the emotion that motivated the music—namely a mixture of the haunting experience of a pernicious urban alienation and an angry response to that alienation.

In a sense, the alternately hot and cold, heavy and soft character of Lisabö's music—its more grating sequences taken together with its more melodic ones—reflects a number of such dualisms: not only the distance between passive acceptance of urban alienation and angry critique but also that between love and desire, the individual and the community, places and non-places, and between the sense of belonging characteristic of the home and the emotional deficiency of the hotel mentioned in their lyrics. The contrast between the highs and the lows of the band's sound point not to a simplistic unity, but rather, paradoxically, to the possibility of resolution and reconciliation. In light of Henderson's defense of the democratic potential of anger, Lisabö's musical production is the complementary inverse of hope, pointing critically and consistently to a world in which individuals are able to connect with one another, and where the production of space does not hinder this process.

There is even reason to consider the potential of Lisabö's music being harnessed in reshaping city spaces. McGaw and Vance (2008: 68) have recently argued not only that those who are 'emotionally robust' have a greater capacity to shape the city but also that the social and physical environment of urban places may affect the emotional state of individuals for the worse: "It seemed that while my collaborators exhibited emotional deficits that affected their capacity to shape the city, the city, in turn, was complicit in shaping their emotional states". Understood in relation to this dialectic, the Basque band's robust emotional soundscapes not only reflect the emotional deficits that shape the city, but also function as a potential contestation of those deficits. Lefebvre believed that the dialectical reshaping of such a world required not merely changes in social relations but also as Lefebvrian geographer Harvey (1990: 322) writes concisely, "new ways of thinking and feeling". Part of this challenge is to find a place for emotion in scholarship itself, as an antidote to the instrumentalization of knowledge labeled by the theorist as 'analytical.'

### 3. Aural intimacy – rhythmanalysis, from music to temporality and emotion

In the introduction to the volume *Music and Emotion: Theory and Research*, Juslin and Slobada (2001: 4) draw attention to what they call 'evaluative processes', that is "the determination, or awareness of music as eliciting liking or disliking; preference; emotion and mood; and aesthetic, transcendent and spiritual experiences". These important qualities of our relationship to music suggest that we approach it with a greater degree of critical intimacy. Music does not merely mean something cognitively, it also *does* something. This perspective emphasizes the intersection of emotion, the body and place. The body itself is a place, as suggested by Lefebvre's elaboration of rhythmanalysis and Bergson's statement that affect is a real action, occurring where it is felt. This is not to say that geographical analyses of musical production as a cultural practice are inappropriate, but rather that a complementary engagement of music might arise. In this engagement, the critic does not

momentarily ignore the power that music has to move us, attempting to formulate a detached and therefore more objective perspective. Instead, acknowledging the emotional connection we have with music becomes the starting point for an understanding of theoretical issues, more broadly conceived.

If, as DeNora (2003a: 59–82, 2003b) has argued, music has the power to "reorient consciousness", then Lisabö's emotional soundscapes offer to reorient consciousness in tune with the multifaceted critique of urbanization launched by Lefebvre. As is evident from recent interest in the resonance of music with issues of space and place (Connell and Gibson, 2003), music is a commodity and a social practice, a hybrid artifact tied into processes of identity formation and global exchange. While music certainly does not exist "beyond the worlds of politics, commerce and social life" (Connell and Gibson, 2003: 18), it is nevertheless important to assert our emotional connection to music and to avoid instrumentalizing musical production as being a mere cipher for larger issues. Moreover, there is room not merely for criticism to leap from music to theory, but also to see the theoretical potential of music itself. All too often given the close link between emotion and music, criticism reconciling music and space adopts a distancing perspective, reflected in a clinical approach that purports to function only within the sterile void of emotional detachment. As Wood et al. (2007, p. 868) point out "Even academic musicologists such as Cook (1999), McClary and Walser (1990) and Shepherd and Wicke (1997), for example, are critical of the extent to which, within their own musical disciplines, scholars have distanced themselves from the sensual and emotional experience of participating in, or practicing and creating, musical events (whether as performers, listeners, or audience members)". While analytical distance has its place, there is a way of maintaining a deep level of theoretical commitment while engaging music from a closer distance, thus preserving the emotional capacity of music to please or displease us as listeners—something from which even the critic is not immune.

It should be clear by now that I write about Lisabö's albums not only as a critic and scholar, but also as a fan. Even in this assertion there is a parallel with Henri Lefebvre's mode of critique labeled rhythmanalysis, through which he pointed to a more embodied theoretical practice. This mode of criticism, which is in Lefebvre's explanation an act of listening, should be understood as a complement to, and not a substitute for, more critically distant analyses that tend to downplay the capacity of music to move us all. Lefebvre's lifelong interdisciplinary project is well-suited to this endeavour, and particularly well-suited is the volume *Rhythmanalysis*, published posthumously in 1992, and intended as a fourth volume of his *Critique of Everyday Life* (see Lefebvre, 1992, p. viii). While very much in tune with his earlier rejection of overly analytical approaches, Lefebvre's later writings elaborated upon the method of 'rhythmanalysis' he had articulated in volumes two and three of the *Critique* and signaled a further departure from the reductive notion of knowledge commonly pursued by traditional criticism. To the extent that Lefebvre's rhythmanalytical project is a logical continuation of his distaste for traditional philosophy, it is foreshadowed in earlier work (Lefebvre, 1974: 117, 1981: 130, where he even terms it "a new science").<sup>8</sup> Yet in Lefebvre's (1992) appropriation of the notion, rhythm became a way of reconciling the body ("each segment of the body has its rhythm," p. 38), with larger processes ("The body? Your body? It consists in a bundle of rhythms. [...] But the surroundings of the body, the social just as

<sup>8</sup> Of course Lefebvre, who had broached the subject of 'rhythmanalysis' in both the second and third volumes of his *Critique*, borrowed the term from Gaston Bachelard, who had in turn borrowed it from Portuguese writer Lucio Alberto Pinheiro (Lefebvre 1992: xiii, 9).

much as the cosmic body, are equally bundles of rhythms” (Lefebvre, 1992: 80)).

Viewing the critical distance that continues to subtend traditional disciplinary knowledge with suspicion, Lefebvre articulated his method by drawing extensively upon musical metaphors and sonorous realities as a way of restoring a distant critical perspective to the world from which it has been detached. Sound is in no way peripheral to Lefebvre’s new science, as he underscores in a chapter of *Rhythmanalysis* titled “Music and Rhythms” (pp. 57–66)—his fundamental incorporation of the sonorous occurs significantly in the book’s first chapter. Therein, the philosopher who is so often fond of emphasizing relational triads (Hegel’s ‘thesis-antithesis-synthesis,’ Marx’s economic-social-political,’ Lefebvre, 1992: 12) suggests an appropriate triad for this new science: “melody-harmony-rhythm” (p. 12). The importance given to this relational triad underlies his discussion of such concepts as measures (p. 8), harmonics (p. 60), musical time (p. 64), of arrhythmia, isorhythmia, polyrhythmia, eurhythmia (pp. 16, 31, 67) and more generally of rhythm throughout the volume. While the rhythm analytical method was at once biological, psychological, social, urban, political, metaphysical and, to use Lefebvre’s own assessment, medical, historical, climatological, cosmological and poetic (p. 16), it was also musical.

Ultimately, Lefebvre uses the notion of rhythm analysis to combat the tendency of thought to think in terms of space alone and not time.<sup>9</sup> For the rhythm analyst,

nothing is immobile. He hears the wind, the rain, storms, but if he considers a stone, a wall, a trunk, he understands their slowness, their interminable rhythm. This *object* is not inert; time is not set aside for the *subject*. It is only slow in relation to our time, to our body, the measure of rhythms. An apparently immobile *object*, the forest, moves in multiple ways: the combined movements of the soil, the earth, the sun. Or the movements of the molecules and atoms that compose it (the object, the forest). The rhythm analyst calls on all his senses. He draws on his breathing, the circulation of his blood, the beatings of his heart and the delivery of his speech as landmarks. Without privileging any one of these sensations, raised by him in the perception of rhythms, to the detriment of any other. He thinks with his body, not in the abstract, but in lived temporality. (Lefebvre, 1992: 20–21, original emphasis)

Thinking not in the abstract, but with the body, presents challenges for traditional analysis, which must now open itself up to alternative ways of knowing. The paradigm of traditional intellection strove for a pure and even disembodied knowledge, through prioritizing visual knowledge, that which can be observed from a distance. Rhythm analysis, although it does not completely lack a visual component, downplays it. Lefebvre subverts the hegemony of the visual field, embracing the tactile, embracing sensations and especially sound, the act of listening (“He hears the wind,” above). Recognizing the significance of sound is a particularly important way for the researcher to plunge into the mysteries of time, and Lefebvre’s (1992: 20) text returns time and time again to the act of listening. As he elaborates, “The object resists a thousand

aggressions but breaks up in humidity or conditions of vitality, the profusions of miniscule life. To the attentive ear, it makes a noise like a seashell”; and also “He will come to listen to a house, a street, a town, as an audience listens to a symphony” (p. 22). Rhythm analysis constitutes an attempt to reach the corporeal and the sensible,<sup>10</sup> both the tactile and more importantly given the present attempt, also the sonorous.

Recent years have seen the proliferation of numerous studies in cultural geography that implicitly or even explicitly invoke Lefebvre’s rhythm analytical project. For example: Tiwari (2008) uses Lefebvre’s method to construct what she calls “experiential maps” of the city (p. 289); and Sturt (2006) even applies it to the maritime archaeology of prehistory. Edensor and Holloway (2008) look at the multiple rhythms (some institutionalized) of the tourist experience, highlighting the audio narratives of coach drivers (pp. 491–93). Other articles have taken advantage of the concept of rhythm analysis to look at such topics as street performance and street life in London (Highmore, 2002; Simpson, 2008), sidewalk talk on Calle Ocho in Miami (Price, 2007), the rhythms of breakfast in a city café (Laurier 2008) and sound and the television-viewing experience (Obert, 2008) as well as other aspects of the sonorous realities of city life (Fortuna, 2001, 1998; Rihacek, 2006). Nevertheless, it is appropriate also to apply Lefebvre’s (1968, 1970, 1973, 1974) notion of rhythm analysis to musical texts themselves. Read in tandem with his critique of capitalist spatial production, the effect of Lefebvre’s remarks on music and the audible is to suggest that we might understand space differently through sound. “[Music] gives itself above all else in return for a time: in return for a rhythm” (Lefebvre, 1992, p. 60).<sup>11</sup> In time, in rhythm, contradiction and conflict are not subjected to the univocal logic that sustains, for Lefebvre, the production of space.

In the context of Lefebvre’s emphasis on listening and his suspicion of the visual, Lisabö’s albums provide a way of hearing the sounds of urban alienation—the haunting echoes of today’s urban non-places—rather than seeing them. Their songs thus invite a rupture with the visual logic of the capitalist production of space. Whereas the latter routinely elides conflict through the presentation of seemingly pleasing environments that are destined to be consumed visually, the band’s albums put that conflict first. In “Sekulan extean izan ez [Never have been at home]” off the *Ezlekuak* [‘Non-places’] album, the lyrics reference an emotional state of “Inon ez gustura, nahiz ta lurrak egiten duen argi gure begien aurrean [Feeling comfortable nowhere, though the floor shines in front of our eyes].” This is also evident in “Hazi eskukada II [A handful of seeds II],” where the singer uses the phrase the “espaloi distiratsuetan [on the shiny sidewalks—my modified translation].” Lisabö’s lyrics return again and again to the alienated distance of urbanites from their feelings: in “Murgilduta [Submerged]” (off the *Ezarian* album), for example, they speak to the impossibility of achieving love (“beti amodiozko ametsak) [always dreams of love]” or even happiness (“Zoriona itsasoko arraign handiena da soilik [happiness is just the biggest fish in the ocean]”). Ultimately, Lisabö consistently points to a disconnect resulting from the fact that feelings have little or no place in the cleansed environments of modernity. For example, in the song “Ideiak itotzen dira [Ideas are drowned]” (*Ezarian*) the singer notes “Galtzen dira sentimenduak [Feelings are lost]” but also contradictorily, “eta nik denbora osoan maite zaitut [and I... all the time, I love you].”

This disconnect and contradiction is evident even more powerfully in the actual sound of Lisabö’s rhythms—including both the musical and structural elements of their compositions and also

<sup>9</sup> In this respect his work resonates with that of Henri Bergson (Bergson, 1889, 1903; Fraser, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> “One could reach, by a twisty road and paradoxically beginning with bodies, the (concrete) universal that the political and philosophical mainstream targeted but did not reach, let alone realize: if rhythm consolidates its theoretical status, if it reveals itself as a valid concept for thought and as a support in practice, is it not this concrete universal that philosophical systems have lacked, that political organizations have forgotten, but which is lived, tested, touched in the sensible and the corporeal?” (Lefebvre, 1992: 44–45; see also p. 67).

<sup>11</sup> Note that even in *Rhythmanalysis*, Lefebvre is similarly interested in the relationship between capital, time and space. See particularly pp. 51–56.

their emotional components. The dualistic character of their oscillating sound resonates with Georg Simmel's characterization of modern urban life, in which the overstimulation of the city necessitates adopting a blasé attitude (see above). Just as the heavy sections of Lisabö's music contrast with complementarily lulling sections, a confrontation with the chaos of the urban is juxtaposed to the detachment required of the urbanite. In this way, periods of emotional engagement thus contrast with the state of indifference that, for Simmel, was necessary for urban life, or, according to Lefebvre, the urban alienation that trumps all other forms of alienation. Many times, on Lisabö's albums, the listener is brought slowly from a detached state of indifference to a more visceral engagement with a song, as happens with the first track from the *Egun bat nonahi* EP, "Gau minean [In the midst of the night]." After an initial 25 seconds of silence, a lone guitar begins to patiently intone a minor interval before carefully accentuating a range of notes. The drums and base come in only at the 1'20" mark, adding definition to a subdued but sharp middle-section (approximately 1'20"–2'57") and leading into a period where each beat is more highly punctuated and where the music has grown noticeably louder. Initial whispers (2'51") then give way to voiced lyrics that are soon complemented by counterpoint lyrics delivered in a muffled scream by another distant singer (3'45"). The two voices engage in a manner of call and response over an extended period of time, while the intensity of the song builds (3'45"–5'50"), subtended by the repetitive brush of a bow against a stringed instrument. Finally, at the end of the song, the musical structure is slowly dismantled piece by piece, layer by layer as if a scaffolding somewhere is being broken down for transport (5'50"–6'31"). The third and last song on the EP, titled "Egunaren begietan [In the eyes of the day]," initially suggests a return to the theme of the first song in its tone and instrumentation, although the subsequent unmuffled delivery of the lyrics soon enters a cacophonous range unreached in the first track. Taken together, these songs are typical of the band's musical style as a whole. In each case, there is an attempt to recalibrate the emotions of urban life, to reorient the consciousness of the urban listener who has been split in two by alienating forces that oppose indifference and engagement.

The opportunity is for the listener of Lisabö's music to coincide with a song and thus to participate in an attempt to draw the urbanite out of her or his alienation, forcing an engagement with the original chaos of the city. While the lyrics interrogate the future ("Zer eitekoteko gai gara? [What things are we capable of?]," *Ezarian*), Lisabö's music, as does all music, thrusts us into temporality itself, pointing both to the inadequacy of current urban realities and also to the possibility of future action. Listening to music is potentially a subversion of the visual and spatial order of contemporary urban capitalism, in that contradiction may exist in time in a way that is impossible in space. These contradictions involve the dualisms of engaging with or detaching from the urban experience, of embodied feeling versus analytical thinking. Lefebvre (1981: 135) noted capitalism's "crushing of natural rhythms and cycles by linearity", from which comes the illusion of time as reversible. "Time is projected into space through measurement, by being homogenized, by appearing in things and products" (Lefebvre, 1981: 133, 1961). Thus the need for restoring the irreversibility of time, Lefebvre argues, is asserted through dance, the festival and through music. At a fundamental level, the act of listening to music reaffirms the reality of the temporal, reinforcing that the world is always in movement and that it only appears to be static when subjected to an analytical framework. For Lefebvre (and for Bergson), music delivers us into time from space. It is in music, in temporality, that emotions dwell. And where there are sounds and emotions, as geographers and neuroscientists seem to agree, there can be the momentum for changing our urban realities.

#### 4. Conclusion

The musical production of the Basque band Lisabö provides a compelling introduction to engage the production of space at the urban scale. Connecting with scholarly work on urban alienation, non-places and emotional geographies, Lisabö's heavy/soft songs chart out a new path in contemporary popular music on the Iberian Peninsula. Their unique position amongst various musical styles—bringing together post-punk, emotional hardcore and perhaps even the musical style known as noise—and within and beyond the tradition of Basque punk, points to an inclusivity that posits a larger notion of community without adhering overtly to a particular identity formation (Basque, pan-European). Critiquing the characteristic alienation of today's urban spaces implicitly and even explicitly (through dialoguing with the critical literature specific to the 'non-place'), rejecting the commodification of desire and the categorical rule of exchange-values, they suggest a loosely defined emotional community centered around the hope for a more emotionally connected world not yet realized and motivated by an angry rejection of the staid and lifeless places which are commonplace in today's cities.

If, as Harvey (1996: 322) has written, explicitly evoking the Lefebvrian tradition, "Materiality, representation and imagination are not separate worlds", then Lisabö's necessarily oral/aural engagement of Basqueness is neither an essentialist reduction of the place-bound history of the Basque Country nor an uncritical acceptance of larger-scale engineered European identities. The band thus positions itself at the level of the urban, at intersection of place and space, of the particular and the universal, in a dialogue that, while angry and full of uncertainty, nonetheless evokes the complex process through which place is imagined, produced, represented and contested. The result is a hard-hitting emotional soundscape that, "inquietante y amenazador [disquieting and threatening]," functions to reorient consciousness, to develop an awareness of the role that emotion plays in our attachment, or lack of attachment, to urban places. It is at this scale that the production of space must be challenged. In addition to further investigation of musical practices, a nuanced understanding of music as a cultural product and even a 'text' is crucial as we continue to gauge the theoretical resonance between emotions and cities.

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