Polyrhythmia, heterogeneity and urban identity: Intersections between ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ narratives in the socio-spatial practices of Australia’s Gold Coast

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Abstract

Australia’s Gold Coast typically positions itself as a luxurious, upmarket resort city or a family-friendly, ‘fun in the sun’ holiday destination. At the same time, the Gold Coast lifestyle is often associated with hedonism, sexuality and excess. Yet the city is also home to over half a million residents whose daily lives – work, education and leisure – routinely take place within and against these powerful and familiar representations. Thus, the city’s identity can be seen as constituted by a series of conflicting ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ narratives. The ‘official’ narrative is produced by how the city markets itself to tourists, and comes to include popular imaginaries of place that these representations construct and perpetuate. Beyond this, however, residents produce varied and multiple ‘unofficial’ narratives through their engagements with the actualities of their locality as well as with its metanarratives. Surfers Paradise, as the main tourist hub and entertainment precinct of the Gold Coast, is a site of convergence for these competing narratives. Drawing on Lefebvre’s rhythmanalysis, this article explores how conflicting narratives and disjunctions in identities of place manifest themselves in spatial practice in Surfers Paradise.

Keywords

Gold Coast

urban identity

rhythmanalysis

social space

imaginaries

tourism

Introduction

The Gold Coast, Queensland is one of Australia's most iconic tourism destinations. Famous for its 57 kilometres of coastline and warm, sub-tropical climate, the city is a popular holiday spot for both regional day-trippers and domestic and international overnight visitors. With a resident population of roughly 513,000 and more than twelve million annual visitors (producing AUD\$4 billion in expenditure), the tourism industry is a significant asset to the local economy (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013; Council of the City of Gold Coast 2014). As such, the Gold Coast functions as a tourist-centric resort city, designed for and catering to the needs, tastes and expectations of visitors rather than those of locals (Holmes 2001; Wise and Breen 2004).

Through its own branding, the Gold Coast sells itself as a family-friendly, 'fun in the sun' holiday destination. This produces a dominant narrative or 'official fiction' of identity focused through such tourism (Olalquiaga 1992: xiii). Another dominant narrative, as expressed through the initiatives of real estate developers and previous tourism campaigns, positions the Gold Coast as a luxurious, upmarket resort city (Wise 2010, 2012). At the same time, the Gold Coast lifestyle is often associated with hedonism, sexuality and crime (Baker et al. 2012). Obviously, this is not a narrative supported by the city in an official capacity, as it dually undermines family-friendly and upmarket sentiments. Thus, the city's identity can be seen as constituted by a series of conflicting 'official' and 'unofficial' narratives.

This plurality is characteristic of an urban formation like the Gold Coast. Due to its rapid development, which occurred in relation to its desirable, subtropical beaches, the Gold Coast stretches along the coast in a highly dispersed fashion. It is an exopolis in Edward W.

Soja's terms (1996), lacking a city centre in the traditional sense. There is no downtown or CBD, and financial, legal, governmental and cultural institutions are spread throughout the city rather than occupying their own districts (Wise and Breen 2004; Wise 2006). Its form can be described as a series of linear strips parallel to the ocean – the beachside high-rise strip at the most easterly edge, the hinterland to the West, and highways, canal estates and suburbia in between (Wise and Breen 2004; Wise 2006). Along the high-rise band, the most intensified hub for tourism, entertainment and leisure, is Surfers Paradise, also known colloquially as 'Surfers', the 'Glitter Strip', or simply 'the Strip'.

This article explores some of the Gold Coast's narratives of identity through a rhythmanalysis (Lefebvre 2004) of Surfers Paradise. Rhythmanalysis, as a means to gauge how people use urban space, makes practical use of Henri Lefebvre's perceived-conceived-lived triad (1991). Drawing on my observations of Surfers as a Gold Coast resident, I analyse the material and the lived in terms of how they link to the representational and the imaginary. That is, I want to highlight the connections between rhythms and the narratives which inform them.

I have chosen to focus on uses of space in Surfers Paradise to comment on the disparate perspectives and experiences of locals and tourists on the Gold Coast. In particular, I will be drawing on observations in the 'heart' of Surfers – along the three connected streets of Orchid Avenue, Cavill Avenue, and The Esplanade. As a shared space for residents and visitors, Surfers can be seen as a site of convergence for the interactions, disjunctions and competing narratives that can be found in the city more broadly. I examine how the city's various 'official' and 'unofficial' narratives manifest spatially and socially as polyrhythmia, and where they clash, arrhythmia. As discussed below, this is particularly evident in the transitions from Surfers Paradise's dayscape to the nightscape.

In the national and international imaginary, the Gold Coast is often conflated with Surfers Paradise, and tourism narratives are seen to define the city as a whole. As such, the city is frequently characterized (especially by national media but also by locals) as being depthless, fake, homogenous, and lacking defined senses of culture and community. Conceptions of the Gold Coast as devoid of substance ignore the varied and multiple rhythms and ‘unofficial’ narratives of residents, produced through their engagements with their locality and its metanarratives. The tensions between official and unofficial narratives, tourists and locals, dominance and resistance, continually produces and reproduces the Gold Coast as a space of diversity, juxtaposition, fragmentation and heterogeneity.

Rhythmanalysis and the centrality of lived experience

In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre posits that spatiality can be thought of as a ‘perceived-conceived-lived triad’ (1991: 40) of physical space, mental space and social space, which he also writes about as spatial practice, representations of space and representational spaces. Physical space designates that which is ‘real’ or material, such as the built environment; mental space is the ‘imagined’, including representations, imaginary geographies and place-images; while the ‘real-and-imagined’ of social space refers to lived experiences and practices (Lefebvre 1991; Soja 1996: 5–6).

Lefebvre and Soja work against a long-standing convention of treating the perceived and the conceived as a binary. That binary is not only problematic in itself, it also largely ignores how space is felt and lived (Lefebvre 1991). Soja (1996) asserts that a ‘thirthing’ of the spatial imagination works not simply to undo the binary, but to restructure it. Social space (or in Soja’s terms, Thirdspace) combines both spaces of the traditional duality, but also advances the scope and meaning of spatial thinking:

Everything comes together in Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history. (Soja 1996: 56–57, original emphasis)

Thus, taking a centrifugal approach that focuses on Thirdspace – the lived, the social – can elucidate a number of connections to the wider social structures which underpin it.

Lefebvre's method of rhythmanalysis is useful for how it captures what analysis of conceived space and perceived space alone cannot – how urban spaces are sensed, felt and lived (Allen 1999; Lefebvre 2004). As Ben Highmore puts it, 'rhythmanalysis is dedicated to the living, breathing, dynamic existence of cities' (2005: 157). For these reasons, especially in the light of renewed interest in materiality, rhythmanalysis as a method has gained considerable attention in recent scholarly work (see Smith and Hetherington 2013; Chen 2013; Lehtovuori and Koskela 2013; Stavrides 2013; Wunderlich 2013; Simpson 2012; Edensor 2010; Vergunst 2010; Lashua and Kelly 2008; Edensor and Holloway 2008; Highmore 2005).

Lefebvre (2004) broadly defines rhythms as the connections between space, time and energies. He distinguishes between linear and cyclical rhythms – linear being routine social activity and imposed structures of organization, or 'the daily grind' (Lefebvre 2004: 30); cyclical being things in nature, such as day and night, seasons, tides, and so on. This also includes rhythms of the body, such as respiration, circulation and hunger. Obviously, there would be no capacity to measure the linear without the cyclical, and the two 'exert a reciprocal action' (Lefebvre 2004: 8). There exists a plurality of simultaneous, interwoven rhythms, interacting in different ways – what Lefebvre calls polyrhythmia.

With this focus on lived experience, the rhythmanalyst must be anything but passive or detached – the researcher’s subjectivity is central to the research process as his/her own body becomes the reference point for experiencing and analysing rhythms. Rhythmanalysis, then, is at once concerned with internal and external, micro and macro, and surface and depth, recognizing the inter-implication of these. In Highmore’s words, ‘Rhythmanalysis oriented to the specific and to its connectivity with the totality – it is never simply particular, but finds the totality through the particular. Its concentration on the body grounds it in an active and already rhythmic assemblage that provides a complex perspective on the larger rhythms of the city’ (2005: 157). Rather than the particular or the experiential being privileged over the universal or the structural (or vice versa) this approach highlights the interconnectedness between them (Smith and Hetherington 2013; Soja 1996).

I am primarily concerned with the relations between the conceived (the macro, the structural) and the lived (the micro, the experiential) which I explore using the concepts of ‘narratives’, ‘imaginaries’ and ‘rhythms’. Each of these concepts is distinct but they are nonetheless interconnected. In my usage here, a narrative refers to a particular set of ideas (or story) about a place and its identity – ideas about what it means, what it looks like, what goes on there, what kinds of people occupy it and so on. Narratives are key constitutive elements in urban imaginaries (Highmore 2005; Soja 2000) or imaginary geographies (Shields 1991), which are mental perceptions and mappings of particular locations. Imaginaries are formed at a singular level, such as through subjective experiences and memories, and at a collective level, such as through media representations, other kinds of texts and myths. Thus, urban imaginaries are informed by both ‘realities’ and ‘fictions’ (Donald 1997; Highmore 2005).

Multiple narratives and imaginaries clearly exist in any urban setting, but some are more pervasive and/or dominant than others. That is, different people and groups have varying perceptions of and attitudes towards particular places/spaces depending on the range

of stories they have encountered about those places/spaces. First-time visitors to the Gold Coast will therefore have an array of expectations about what they will experience, but given the significance of the Gold Coast as a holiday destination, their strongest expectations are likely to be based on a convergence of tourism advertising with other representations in popular culture (including film, television and the news media) of the city as a site of leisure, and accounts from friends, family and online sources about other people's Gold Coast holidays. Visitor expectations will, in turn, differ markedly from how any local perceives the Gold Coast, and even among locals, there are myriad imaginaries and attitudes contingent on the diversity of people's everyday experiences.

While imaginaries and narratives are in the realm of the conceptual, they have material consequences in that they shape the built environment and the expectations of, responses to, and everyday practices within spaces (Highmore 2005; Shields 1991; Soja 1996). The imaginaries and expectations people carry with them influence their social and spatial practice: people enact the representational. In urban settings, spatiality and performativity are richly correlative. This creates different rhythms.

A rhythm is lived and material, and thus can be sensed or observed. At the same time, however, a rhythm is always connected to the conceptual and the representational.

Representations of the Gold Coast work to shape the imaginaries and narratives associated with it, and this informs how the city's rhythms manifest. In turn, how the city is lived contributes to how it is imagined and represented. Spaces, bodies and representations exist in a mutually constitutive, mutually transformative relationship: 'they are all composed of (reciprocally influential) rhythms in interaction' (Lefebvre 2004: 43). Further, their dynamic interactions produce, and are produced by, the city's narratives of identity.

Present and presence, representation and reality

My position deviates from Lefebvre's understanding of reality and representations as explored through a presence/present binary in *Rhythmanalysis* (2004). For Lefebvre, 'presence' is the ideal, pure embodied experience of the autonomous human – the immediate, the affective and the material. It refers to 'authentic', even transcendent, moments of feeling and being in the world (Lefebvre 2004; Shields 1999). As Rob Shields observes, 'In contrast to current positions that unveil the socially constructed nature of nearly everything, Lefebvre had complete, and even naïve faith in the primacy of authentic experience' (1999: 62).

'Present', on the other hand, is the image, the representation or the imaginary. For Lefebvre (2004), the present is an imitation of the real, a misleading fabrication which simulates presence. Lefebvre explains this in terms of television:

The quasi-suppression of distances and waiting periods (by the media) amplifies the present, but these media give only reflections and shadows. You attend the incessant fêtes or massacres, you see the dead bodies, you contemplate the explosions; missiles are fired before your very eyes. You are there! [...] but no, you are not there; your present is composed of simulacra; the image before you simulates the real, drives it out, is not there. (2004: 31–32)

He argues that through rhythmanalysis, one can 'avoid the trap of the present' so as not to mistake the present for presence (2004: 23). Thus, Lefebvre constructs his argument on the basis that a distinction can continue to be maintained between presence(s) and the present, or in other words, reality and representation, authentic and fake. This is where Lefebvre's idea of simulacra differs from Jean Baudrillard's (1994). Baudrillard (1994) argues that hyperreality collapses the distinctions between original and copy, referent and signifier, real

and imaginary, fact and fiction. The imitations in question have no original counterpart: simulacra do not hide the truth, because there is no truth. In contrast, Lefebvre's presence/present binary insists on the survival of, and indeed on the romanticizing of the real and the authentic. My approach to understanding the relations between reality and representations sits somewhere between Lefebvre's and Baudrillard's contrasting perspectives. Rather than treating these concepts as a binary opposition, or conversely arguing that they are no longer distinguishable, it is useful to consider how they are distinct yet inter-implicated.

In a place like the Gold Coast, presence and the present are folded together. As Soja posits, this is characteristic of an exopolis, in which 'the real and the imagined, fact and fiction, become spectacularly confused' (1996: 19). The present is made into presence as imaginaries and representations are entangled with sensorial, embodied experiences. People's *in situ* experience of space is always already informed by their histories, expectations, knowledges, daydreams, memories and desires, and in this way the immediate is intrinsically bound up in the past and the future (Vergunst 2010). This is true not just for those I observe in Surfers Paradise, but in my practice of observing them – my own presence and ontological analysis of space is mediated by, for example, my subjective positions, theoretical knowledge, expectations based on past observations, television I've watched, anecdotes I've heard, news articles I've read and photographs I've seen.

The Gold Coast is a place that invites bodily experiences and intensive expressions of hedonism and leisure – whether that is swimming and tanning at the beach, drinking heavily and dancing in night clubs, or the adrenalin rush from a roller coaster. However, this presence always occurs within a context of immersion in the representational and the imaginary. Further, it often also occurs in staged tourist spaces, which are typically considered to be inauthentic. In other words, people can have 'real' experiences in 'fake' settings.

Polyrhythmia

Every city has its own unique rhythms (Allen 1999). Although cities are always changing, their rhythms mark a degree of regularity and routine, and this is part of what comes to define a place's distinctiveness (Edensor 2010). City rhythms consist of flows of people, such as tourists, shoppers, clubbers and those going to and coming from places of employment and education, transport schedules and traffic lights, but also things like smells, sounds and moods (Lefebvre 2004; Edensor 2010). How these rhythms shift throughout the day and night alters the meanings made available for cityspaces, and thus how people act within them (Allen 1999). In Surfers Paradise, multiple rhythms intersect, interplay and sometimes clash in a polyrhythmic assemblage. These rhythms are the socio-spatial manifestations of several distinct narratives of identity – the Gold Coast as a family-friendly tourist destination; as a luxurious, upmarket resort city; and as a sleazy, seedy, hedonistic playground. Each of these narratives will be explored below in terms of their existence in the popular imaginary, their representation in the media, and their enactments by people on the street.

Family-friendly narrative

During the daytime, families stroll up and down Cavill Avenue past the souvenir shops and alfresco dining areas, heading to or coming home from the beach. Some stop for ice cream while others pose for a group photo in front of the famous 'Surfers Paradise' sign. The families seen here are considerably more ethnically diverse than the official marketing material depicts. There are westerners in board shorts, bikinis, sunglasses, flip flops, fanny packs and beach towels slung around their necks, but it is also common to see young families with women in hijabs and men in fezzes, or hear groups speaking in Mandarin and Japanese.

In a pluralistic society like Australia, one can't assume who are the international visitors, who are domestic visitors and who are locals.

<<insert Figure 1 near here>>

In the early evening, tourists crowd the beachfront markets made up of locally run stalls selling jams, iPhone cases, crystal dolphins and unicorns, colourful scented candles set in cocktail glasses, and regular market fare like craft work, clothing and ceramics. Back on Cavill, large groups form around street performers. The usual acts lately include a mime making balloon animals for children, a Latin guitarist, a few young men doing tricks on their unicycles, and an Indigenous man playing the didgeridoo with a stuffed Kookaburra perched on his shoulder.

<<insert Figure 2 near here>>

The ubiquity of spectacle and the flow of international and domestic tourists engaging in leisure consumption constitutes the dominant rhythm of the Surfers Paradise dayscape. This is closely aligned with the city's family-friendly tourism discourses, or its 'official' narrative, as typified by the current tourism campaign, 'Famous for fun'. In the words Gold Coast Tourism Chairman Paul Donovan, 'We're an exhilarating, fun holiday destination for families mainly, and this theme is something Las Vegas would kill for' (quoted in Bartlett 2010). Labelling the Gold Coast as 'Australia's endless playground', Tourism and Events Queensland's 'brand story' states that:

There's absolutely nowhere in Australia that is so indelibly connected with the word 'fun' than the Gold Coast. For generations, the warm sun, inviting sea and golden beaches of the Gold Coast have meant escape and freedom for holidaying Australians. Add in the excitement and laughter of the theme parks, the natural wonders of the

hinterland and the non-stop entertainment of the destination and nowhere delivers as many smiles or happy memories as the Gold Coast. (2013: 4)

Images and texts in tourism brochures, websites and television advertising focus on the Gold Coast's warm weather, iconic beaches, and its numerous theme parks, dining precincts and shopping complexes. There is also an increasing emphasis on the hinterland's idyllic rainforests, described as a tranquil escape from the already escapist excitement and adventure of the Coast. This may signal an ongoing attempt to diversify the Gold Coast's image (to set it apart from Surfers Paradise) by capitalizing on nearby natural assets, offering a holiday with 'a variety of experiences' (Tourism and Events Queensland 2014) and 'the full spectrum of interactive entertainment' (Gold Coast Tourism 2013: 4). Clearly, however, whether beaches or forests, there is an ongoing emphasis on commoditizing nature for touristic consumption.

Acknowledging the limitations inherent in only selling the city's physical attractions, Tourism and Events Queensland (2014) are also aiming to appeal to 'the consumer's emotional response'. Through marketing material, a touristic experience characterized by play, excitement, adventure and escapism is cultivated for the future traveller to fantasize about in relation to what their Gold Coast holiday will entail. Further, the experience is touted as one that not only guarantees a 'joyous feeling' (Tourism and Events Queensland 2014) in the moment, but produces lasting memories and stories to be retold long after the holiday is over. By recognizing the allure of daydreaming and playing pre-emptively on a sense of nostalgia, the designers of the campaign exhibit an acute awareness of the importance of the imaginary and representational in the experiential.

Taking into account the practices, movements and flows of people in Surfers Paradise as described above, there are clear parallels between these rhythms and the dominant tourism narrative that the city produces for their consumption prior to their arrival. The rhythms that emerge in the sites of daytime fun highlight how reality and representation (or in Lefebvre's terms, presence and the present) are inextricably bound up in one another. The 'official' narrative is alluring and successful because it was developed in response to how the Gold Coast is already lived by tourists – the demographics it attracts, what kinds of activities they are drawn to, what kinds of experiences they are seeking, and so on. The 'presence' of the visitor is thus informed and enhanced by the representational. The tourist experiences pleasure in making the imagined (the anticipated) real – in gazing upon spectacle first-hand, in feeling the humid air and the sun on their skin, in experiencing the fun and relaxation that has been the focus of holiday fantasies before the trip. The dominant tourism narrative is reified and perpetuated by tourists performing in the space as they are positioned to perform.

Upmarket narrative

The Gold Coast has also attempted to position itself as a fashionable, upmarket resort city, characterized by luxury, glamour and sophistication (Baker et al. 2012; Gold Coast City Art Gallery 2012; Wise 2012). This narrative is most readily observable in the excess of wealth exemplified by the city's high-end real estate market (Baker et al. 2012) – not only high-rises along the beach, but waterfront mansions lining the man-made canals and islands. As Patricia Wise (2010) suggests, the real estate advertising of the Gold Coast is as much about selling a particular lifestyle as it is about selling a property. In terms of tourism, there are a number of five star hotels that similarly cater to upmarket sensibilities, such as the Palazzo Versace, Hilton and Marriott. One of the newest of these is Soul, a 77-floor mixed-use property providing both five star hotel accommodation and permanent residences on the Surfers

Paradise foreshore. According to their website, the building is '[s]pectacular in its grandeur and superb in its fine detail', offering visitors and residents 'unsurpassed luxury', 'refined opulence' and an 'unbeatable lifestyle' (Soul 2013).

In official marketing material, the city often boasts great shopping with a mix of international high-end designers, local boutiques and markets. Walking around Surfers Paradise, it is clear that chain stores, cheap souvenir shops and novelty shops (like Condom Kingdom) are thriving. On the other hand, there are a striking number of empty shopfronts and 'for lease' signs in the fashionable dining and shopping precincts attached to luxury resorts – in particular, Mantra Circle on Cavill's piazza, The High Street under the Hilton, and The Mark Centre leading to Soul. An equally striking absence of both tourists and locals in these spaces produces an unusual, unexpected rhythm – as sites made by the collective gaze (Urry 2002), the 'normal' atmosphere of shopping malls depends on the presence of people. While the lack of success of these precincts is likely due in part to the global financial crisis, it also signifies a disparity between the high-end vision of developers and the kinds of tourists who predominantly occupy the city.

<<insert Figure 3 near here>>

Evidently, there is a disjunction between the narratives and the rhythms that actually emerge. The strange rhythm described here is a product of a combination of factors resulting from different responses to the 'upmarket' narrative. The success of this kind of physical space (in Lefebvre's terms) is largely dependent on the associated imaginaries, which are crucial in producing the desired rhythms. The developers/planners have apparently made one or more of these assumptions: that a narrative of indulgence in luxury consumption accurately reflects reality for a viable segment of Gold Coast tourists and residents (when actually there have been significant efforts to manufacture this imaginary, as described below); that there is unfulfilled demand for luxury; that supplying high-end precincts will

attract a viable proportion of high-end consumers to Surfers Paradise. In contrast, most tourists and locals place little value in the upmarket narrative, tending not to associate the Gold Coast with a refined sense of luxury. Even though there are a proportion of visitors to the Gold Coast who seek high-end accommodation and shopping, they are more likely to shop in one of several large shopping complexes elsewhere on the Gold Coast, such as Marina Mirage (located a fifteen-minute drive north of Surfers Paradise and abutting two of the city's most exclusive five star hotels). Wealthy residents tend to prefer these same complexes since they have a greater variety of stores, are in much less congested areas than Surfers Paradise, and are much closer to where they live.

An element of glamour and luxury certainly exists in the ways outlined above, but it is hardly considered to be a defining feature of the city's identity in the national imaginary or in local experience. In 2005, the city endeavoured to reinvent its image based on this narrative by adopting the 'Very GC' tourism campaign, aiming to 'appeal to non-traditional Gold Coast visitors and promote the destination's higher-end offerings' (Johnson 2010). This is an example of a narrative being imposed on a place, and in this case, not cohering effectively with the imaginaries already associated with it, and thus not manifesting as the anticipated rhythm. Not only did the campaign fail to attract significantly greater numbers of the desired visitors, it did not resonate with the largest segment of the existing mass tourism market of regional day-trippers and Australian family vacationers (unlike the current 'Famous for fun' campaign, which targets both directly). The 'Very GC' campaign was frequently mocked by locals who saw it as embarrassingly unsophisticated and pretentious. Ironically, designing a campaign that tried so hard to be chic that it came off as tacky is actually a very typical, 'very Gold Coast' thing for the city to do.

Sex, sleaze and crime narrative

In contrast to the dayscape, the Gold Coast's nightscape is associated with hedonism, sexuality, violence and crime (Cantillon 2015; Baker et al. 2012; Ditton 2010). This narrative can be seen as something of an 'unofficial' – but still a dominant – narrative of identity. While it is rarely promoted by official tourism bodies, a rhythm analysis of the Gold Coast reveals that this narrative aligns with the reality of how the city is lived. For example, the Surfers Paradise Alliance marketing group have recently distanced themselves from one of the Gold Coast's most famous icons, the Meter Maids, by not publicly supporting them or inviting them to events (Larkins 2013a). No longer topping up parking meters as they did in the 1960s, the Meter Maids – young, slender women in gold sequin bikinis, hot pants and cowboy hats – remain a consistent part of Cavill Avenue's dominant daytime rhythm, chatting to tourists and selling merchandise on a daily basis. Once a key part of the city's marketing strategy, they are now seen not to fit with its family-friendly image (Gold Coast City Art Gallery 2012; Larkins 2013a).

Despite the city's efforts, within the regional and national imaginary the Gold Coast nevertheless has a long history of association with sexualized bodies, excessive partying and seedy behaviour. This narrative is rooted in the actual rhythms of the city, and is readily observable in Surfers Paradise. In addition to scantily clad Meter Maids, the barely dressed bodies sunbaking on the beach and the athletic bodies in the surf and jogging down The Esplanade also become a part of the tourism spectacle. The Surfers Paradise holiday invites the tourist to gaze voyeuristically on the beach, in the street, and from their high-rise balconies (Gold Coast City Art Gallery 2012). After the sun goes down, bodies are on display in the highly sexualized spaces of nightclubs and strip clubs (Cantillon 2015).

Although nightlife is a popular drawcard for tourists, and thus a valuable source of revenue, it is routinely obscured in Gold Coast Tourism's promotional materials. For

instance, the official tourism website endorses numerous activities, events and establishments for dining, shopping, theme parks, spas, tours and attractions, but does not advertise a single nightclub or bar (Gold Coast Tourism 2014). The Surfers Paradise Alliance (2014), however, acknowledges the popularity and importance of the nighttime economy, proclaiming Surfers to be ‘Australia’s nightlife capital’. The built environment (or the ‘perceived’) provides ample further evidence of nightlife’s prominence in Surfers Paradise – one of the only two clubbing districts on the Gold Coast, Surfers has twelve nightclubs, four strip clubs¹ and a number of bars, the great majority of which are located on the main clubbing strip, Orchid Avenue. However, of the nightclubs, there is one gay club and one ‘alternative’ club, with the rest being what can be described as ‘mainstream’ clubs.

These mainstream venues cater to tourists through internationally familiar music and style that is a part of a globalized youth culture (Cantillon 2015). They play a mixture of top 40 hits, hip hop, commercial dance, electro and house music, and share a number of commonalities in terms of lighting, design and atmosphere, encapsulating a particular kind of glitzy aesthetic that is associated with the Gold Coast. Further, they aim to reproduce the same type of temporary, indulgent, ‘wild’ experiences visitors have come to expect from the city.

While easily being able to appeal to tourists, nightclubs in Surfers Paradise are sustained by the patronage of residents. With little other options for nightlife venues on the Gold Coast, these clubs have become significant social spaces for local young people. As a result of these spatial practices, locals strongly associate Surfers with the seediness and sleaze of clubbing. These local rhythms (and the narratives which tie into them) dominate the nightscape and counteract the city’s preferred dominant rhythm of family-friendly fun.

A typical night out in Surfers entails drinking, dancing, taking illicit drugs, ‘picking up’ and ‘hooking up’. Due to the high density of clubs in this area, the sociality characteristic

of nightclubs pervades the nighttime streets of Orchid Avenue and Cavill Avenue as well (Cantillon 2015). Young people shouting, smoking, stumbling, crying, eating fast food and vomiting produce a seemingly disorderly rhythm in the very same spaces occupied by families and their prams during the daytime. Incidents of alcohol-fuelled violence, usually fistfights but occasionally stabbings, are widely reported by the news media and tabloid current affairs programmes. That is, the media perpetuate the ‘sex, sleaze and crime’ narrative by representing these aspects of city rhythms in particularly sensationalized ways.

<<insert Figure 4 near here>>

This reporting reinforces a traditional ‘youth as problem’ narrative, creating a moral panic over the threat of young people in public spaces participating in supposedly ‘risky’ behaviours (Baker et al. 2012; Nilan et al. 2007; Wyn and White 1997). Such a narrative is not only associated with Surfers Paradise’s nightlife, but with annual events such as the Gold Coast 600 V8 Supercars race (colloquially still referred to by its former name, Indy) and the annual Schoolies period from late November to early December. The latter refers to an Australian rite of passage in which as many as 40,000 (Red Frogs 2014) final year school leavers (17–18 years old) descend on the Gold Coast for a week of partying to celebrate the end of high school. In the media and the national imaginary, Schoolies is associated with excessive drinking, drug-taking and casual sex, and highly publicized (although not necessarily common) criminal incidences of rape, drink spiking, accidental deaths, physical assault and the destruction of public and private property. However, just as with the nightlife, the degree of disorder and transgression is highly regulated and monitored by techniques of surveillance such as a strong police presence, nightclub security, and registration processes to attend official Schoolies events.

Beyond the ‘youth problem’, an association with criminal activity and dodgy deals has earned the Gold Coast labels such as Australia’s ‘crime capital’ (Larkins 2013b) and

‘fraud capital’ (Butler 2013). As the perceived seedy underbelly of the city, Surfers Paradise has long been rumoured as the main site for drug trafficking in bars and nightclubs, involving local ‘bikie’ gangs and corruption among lower-level police officers (McKenna 2010). Recently, a multi-million dollar drug bust exposed the connections between several prominent Surfers Paradise nightclub owners and the trafficking of cocaine and amphetamines (Fineran and Stigwood 2014; Stolz et al. 2014). In addition to the drugs, ‘millions of dollars in alleged drug assets including luxury homes, cars, boats and jewellery’ were seized in the operation (Fineran and Stigwood 2014). That is, drug trafficking was proven to be deeply implicated in both the ‘sleaze’ of Surfers Paradise and the extravagance of high-end living on the Gold Coast.

Arrhythmia

Clearly, a multiplicity of competing narratives exist as the Gold Coast is simultaneously associated with family vacations, sunny beaches, theme parks, high-rises, glamour, luxury, night clubs, partygoers, violence, crime and corruption. In spite of their apparently contradictory nature, these narratives nonetheless share an emphasis on hedonism, excess, escapism, fantasy and indulgence, which may be the only consistent characteristics of a Gold Coast identity. Juxtaposing narratives intersect and begin to transform one another; sexy and sleazy slide together, glamour and opulence have a tendency to appear gaudy, spectacle can easily be perceived as banal, and there is a fine line between adventurous and out-of-control.

Most notably, the official image of an ‘innocent, positive, youthful’ (Tourism and Events Queensland 2014) family-friendly paradise is sullied by a reputation for crime, public drunkenness and sleaze. Because the competing narratives clash ideologically, disjunctions in the uses of space begin to emerge. Narratives and imaginaries provide the social actor with cues as to how the space is conventionally used (and by whom, and when). Since different

groups have different perceptions of the same space based on these narratives, they act within them in different ways, producing multiple rhythms. These rhythms overlap and interrupt each other's sequence, resulting in arrhythmia. As John Allen (1999) points out, arrhythmia is often the result when rhythms are 'enforced' or imposed on existing ones, such as with the city privileging through its branding a favourable touristic rhythm generated by daytime family fun.

Arrhythmic moments in Surfers are, in fact, most readily visible in transitions from day to night. This is anything but a smooth shift as characteristic parts of the dayscape and nightscape bleed into one another. The presence of meter maids and young men touting club crawls represents an element of Surfers' 'seediness', typically associated with the nighttime, creeping into the daytime. In the early morning a similar contrast also presents itself as drunk stragglers linger on the beach at the same time as others go for their morning jogs or learning to surf. There are also times when this seediness becomes the dominating rhythm of the dayscape, as with Schoolies and the Gold Coast 600 discussed above. During these times, drunken, rowdy partyers conspicuously occupy the same spaces as relaxed tourists and families. For these reasons (among others, such as increased traffic and road closures), many locals try to avoid Surfers during these times of year, disrupting their usual everyday rhythms in the interests of maintaining a sense of order.

Of course, the rhythms typically associated with the daytime also assert themselves at night. From 9 p.m. onwards, the streets of Surfers Paradise become increasingly occupied by young people dressed for a night out, heading to bars and clubs. Still, there are always families with young children and infants in strollers ambling around Cavill Avenue and Orchid Avenue as late as 11.30 p.m., a time at which the dominating rhythm is undoubtedly that of the intoxicated, disorderly clubbers. As young Gold Coast locals, my friends and I frequently comment on how bizarre and awkward this seems to us. We find ourselves saying

things like, ‘don’t tourists realize how gross Surfers is? This isn’t a family-friendly environment!’ What this demonstrates is a discontinuity between how young locals, like myself, see the city, and how visitors see the city. The city rhythms that emerge around the day/night transition reveal a significant aspect of resort cities like the Gold Coast. That is, how it is imagined and experienced by locals not only differs markedly from how it is imagined and experienced by visitors, but the rhythms of tourists constrain the leisure practices and lives of locals.

<<insert Figure 5 near here>>

Responses to the metanarrative: Resistance and stereotypes

Despite the importance of tourism dollars to the local economy, it is not uncommon for residents to express significant distaste for ‘tourist-y’ areas and events. As Wise and Breen put it, ‘for residents, Surfers Paradise is where tourists go, and thus where locals go only when they want to do what tourists do’ (2004: 163). In this context, residents can feel like strangers in their own city (Holmes 2001). Perhaps in response to these dynamics, locals contest the city’s own ideas of what its identity is. Lefebvre indicates that these relations are characteristic of polyrhythmia and the conflicting narratives that give rise to it, ‘Polyrhythmia always results from a contradiction, but also from a resistance to this contradiction – resistance to a relation of force and an eventual conflict. Such a contradictory relation can be defined as the struggle between two tendencies: the tendency towards homogenisation and that towards diversity’ (2004: 99). The metanarrative produced by the Gold Coast through its branding and tourism representations can be seen as having homogenizing effects, fostering particular kinds of spatial practice and producing a dominant rhythm. However, this is always destabilized by opposing narratives and marginalized rhythms. As Edensor argues, attempts at ordering cityspace through dominant or ‘normative’ rhythms are ‘always only ever partial

and susceptible to disordering by counter rhythms and arrhythmia' (2010: 2). In Foucault's terms, a form of power or discursive domination invariably produces resistance (1990, 1991). As he observes, 'discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it' (1990:101). The Gold Coast's intensive focus on its image for tourism purposes has consequently generated readings of the city as fake, superficial and depthless, a cultural desert (Baker et al. 2012; Ditton 2010; Wise 2006). Such sentiments are expressed by scholars, the news media, the Australian people, and quite commonly, Gold Coast locals themselves, perhaps out of resentment for feeling displaced by tourist rhythms.

These stereotypes are reinforced by, for example, the city's multiple theme parks, its packaged holidays, the uniformity of design in multinational hotel chains, and a pastiche of reappropriated international architectural styles scattered along artificial canals and islands (Gold Coast City Art Gallery 2004; Wise and Breen 2004). As a consequence, the Gold Coast (and other resort cities more broadly) has been read as an Americanized, Disneyfied consumer monoculture (Holmes 2001) characterized by a certain 'commonplaceness' (Urry 2002). In other words, it is seen as a 'generic space' lacking its own distinct identity, at once anywhere and nowhere, with sites that are interchangeable with others across the globe (Lash 2002).

This reading tends to produce an over-simplified view of the Gold Coast and of processes of globalization. In this view, not only is there moral panic surrounding mass media and technology, but an often repeated concern about an apparent lack of originality or death of authenticity. On the contrary, however, the Gold Coast is neither depthless nor homogenous. As demonstrated by the rhythm analysis undertaken here, even supposedly 'fake', staged spaces like Surfers Paradise are 'real' because they are lived and experienced, in varying and unexpected ways informed by different imaginaries and narratives. Like a

product of bricolage, the Gold Coast is a heterotopic space that represents and juxtaposes several other sites or icons while simultaneously recontextualizing and inverting them (Foucault 1986). It is unique, a singularity that is nonetheless connected to the totality. Global trends in resort architecture, tourism and popular culture are not simply exported (Morris 2001) or copied, but reappropriated and reassembled in idiosyncratic ways. How these manifest in various cities depends on a place's 'local specificity' (Massey 1998: 122) or 'urban spatial specificity' (Soja 2000: 8) – its unique geographical, social, political and cultural contexts, histories and trajectories. In turn, these local manifestations affect how global elements evolve (Massey 1998).

Underpinning such ironically superficial readings of the Gold Coast is the belief that the city lacks a history or cultural heritage in a traditional sense (Gold Coast City Art Gallery 2004, 2006). Because, in order to cater to visitors, it positions itself as escapist and dislocated from everyday life, the touristic metanarrative has rendered the Gold Coast as a conventionally dehistoricized space (Wise and Breen 2004; Wise 2006). However, while traditional architectural artefacts are scarce, the city preserves its narratives of self through popular cultural memorabilia, such as 'celluloid histories, neon signs, photographs of meter maids and lifesavers, transformations in the bikini' (Wise 2006: 181). Its history is that of a city that is continuously rebuilding, reinventing and redefining itself alongside rapid tourism development (Wise and Breen 2004; Wise 2012). In a contradictory movement, the only sense of permanence is to be found in transience, and in ongoing, unpredictable shifts and transformations – not only in the built environment, but in lifestyles, identities, imaginaries, narratives and rhythms.

Heterogeneity of urban spatiality

Stereotyping the Gold Coast as homogenous, generic, superficial and inauthentic concentrates primarily on how it is represented and imagined, ignoring how it is embodied and lived (Yakhlef 2004). This is not to downplay the significance of tourism narratives – indeed, the centrality of the tourism industry to the city’s economy means that catering to the needs, tastes and expectations of visitors can outweigh other concerns. Consequently, locals’ everyday lives, practices and senses of belonging are mediated by tourism to a large extent. For example, residents can readily enact touristic behaviours on a regular basis if they so desire (Wise and Breen 2004), and expressions of hedonism and escapism characteristic of the transient tourist population can become a part of everyday sociality.

However, the most familiar metanarrative is only one facet of a city’s identity. Metanarratives and stereotypes operate to make the illegible city legible and dispel ‘the exceptional and the wayward’ rhythms (Highmore 2005: 7). Despite how the tourism industry frequently attempts to control and regulate popular imaginaries and urban rhythms, and how local government and city branding complies with that, a multiplicity of other experiences, senses of community, and unofficial narratives of local identity exist, albeit often marginalized by ‘louder’ expressions. This is not to say, either, that the metanarrative is a facade that conceals the ‘reality’ of the Gold Coast, or a somehow more authentic identity hidden beneath the surface. On the contrary, even the most contrived narrative can nonetheless become internalized, made concrete through spatial practice, and repeatedly enacted to become a ‘natural’ city rhythm.

How competing narratives overlap and intersect can be understood in terms of Elspeth Probyn’s description of the heterotopic as ‘the coexistence of different orders of space, the materiality of different forms of social relations and modes of belonging’ (1996: 10). Cities draw different groups of people, competing narratives, contrasting rhythms, and ‘official’ and

‘unofficial’ identities into proximity with one other (Allen 1999; Pile 1999; Tonkiss 2005). In traditional urban formations, this manifests in what Robert E. Park called ‘moral regions’, ‘moral milieux’ or ‘social worlds’, which compose a mapping of the city as ‘a mosaic of little worlds which touch but do not interpenetrate’ (1967: 40). On the Gold Coast, distinct social milieux also exist but are considerably more spatially dispersed in their formations. Creative communities, or groups with subcultural affinities based in musical tastes or common interests, are mobile and fleeting – they may converge in one space for a period of time, claiming ownership over it temporarily, before scattering again. This is due in part to the Gold Coast’s decentred geography, but also to its lack of a cohesive identity (Ditton 2010).

More than anything else, the Gold Coast is marked by multiplicity and heterogeneity. Like any city, it cannot be thought of as closed, fixed or coherent, but as a product of interrelations, and thus always in process and always made up of a plurality of experiences, identities and trajectories (Massey 2005). The interplay between these distinct, coexisting narratives produces coalescences, disjunctures and contestations in the imaginaries of spaces and how they play out rhythmically (Massey 2005; Sheller and Urry 2004). What defines ‘Gold Coast identity’, and urban identity more broadly, does not settle, and cannot be fixed or regulated, because it is constituted by a diverse series of connections, fragmentations and juxtapositions. As Highmore observes, ‘It has constantly been necessary to insist that plurality provides the only *essence* to the urban life-world of modernity, even when (maybe especially when) there are dominating forces striving to regulate and homogenize urban life’ (2005: 158). This plurality may well be at its most intensified in tourist-centric resort cities like the Gold Coast.

Conclusion

A tourist-centric city like the Gold Coast cannot be interpreted simplistically as a homogenous example of a globalized generic space. Similarly, citizens of tourist-centric cities cannot be thought of as depthless or disconnected themselves (Wise 2010). In this context, traditional conceptions of ‘reality’, ‘authenticity’, ‘culture’, ‘heritage’ and ‘community’ can be rethought in terms of how they are articulated in new and unconventional ways, rather than in negative terms of how they have disappeared. For Gold Coast residents, an immersion in superficial or ‘fake’ touristic narratives and spaces is embedded in an experience of their real, everyday lives and practices. As Patricia Wise and Sally Breen observe:

Even when people reside in completely re-engineered terrains, as they do in the ubiquitous canal estate suburbs, they do not perceive the ground beneath their feet, or the water that surrounds them, to be anything less than real. The fish still jump and you can still be taken by a shark. The manufactured and injected tributaries still connect to the sea. The point is not that new frontier cities are total simulations, but that they are utilised as if they were simulations. (2004: 165)

Thus, on the Gold Coast, presence and the present are always bound up in one another. The representational and the imaginary are fundamental parts of lived experience, simultaneously shaping city rhythms and reinforcing, redefining or destabilizing narratives of identity. This set of relations is by no means limited to the Gold Coast, but speaks to many contemporary urban spaces. I have explored this example because it is where I live; it is the space I am endlessly (and inadvertently) deconstructing on a daily basis. Although it is impossible ever to represent any city comprehensively, given that they are exceptionally heterogeneous and constantly shifting, rhythmanalysis provides a tool through which to capture some of the

city's diversity and various component parts. Understanding a city's identity requires an acknowledgment not just of the stereotypes, metanarratives, global influences and dominant rhythms, but of the micro-complexities of lived experience which may never be reified in representation or reach the level of collective popular imaginaries.

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Suggested citation

Cantillon, Zelmarie (2015), 'Polyrhythmia, heterogeneity and urban identity: Intersections between "official" and "unofficial" narratives in the socio-spatial practices of Australia's Gold Coast', *Journal of Urban Cultural Studies*, 2:3, pp. x–xx.

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Notes

¹At the time of writing, the nightclubs operating in Surfers Paradise were Shooters, Vanity, SinCity, Cocktails & Dreams, CD's, Melbas, Escape, Elsewhere, Basement, Blush, Bourbon Bar, and Club Boutique. The strip clubs were Hollywood Showgirls, Toybox Showgirls, Players Showgirls and Crazy Horse. The only other clubbing district is in Broadbeach (about a ten-minute drive south of Surfers Paradise), with four nightclubs: Platinum, East, Love and Envy.