Article

Affective Landscapes, Scenes, and Arrangements
Dynamics in the socio-algorithmic musical encounter

Mads Krogh
Aarhus University

Abstract
This article discusses the affective dynamics of two interwoven spheres of musical life: on the one hand, the sphere of local musical engagements, often connected to the notion of scene; on the other, the sphere of digital music promotion and distribution via social media and streaming platforms. The almost omnipresent importance of the latter raises questions about motivational investments in local music-making in digital times. The discussion takes off from three conceptions of affect in the context of digital media and music: first, the idea of ‘affective landscapes’ (Bucher 2018), which designates the experience of media environments as a locus of micropolitical contestation; second, the concept of ‘affective scenes’ (Bennett 2013), which identifies shared feelings and knowledge, and the intensity of being part of something that is alive, as integral to scene participation; third, the notion of ‘affective arrangements’ (Slaby 2019), which concerns the affordance of specific affects by constellations of, for example, commercial and techno-scientific terms. Although affective scenes may be considered a type of affective arrangement, the latter seems especially relevant to contemplating the impact of platform logics on everyday musical engagements. This is done from the perspective of a small group of Brisbane-based record labels. Specifically, it is claimed, intensive dynamics in local involvement are to some extent pressured by digital opportunities and obligations. This amounts to a striating of the affective scene and an adverse affective landscape surrounding the experience of digital platforms, a landscape marked by micropolitical tensions in addition to socio-technological circumstances.

Keywords
music scenes, digital platforms, affective landscapes, affective scenes, affective arrangements, micropolitics

This article discusses the affective dynamics of two interwoven spheres of musical life: on the one hand, the sphere of local engagements by music makers, minor labels, small-scale venues, and other scene-based entrepreneurs; on the other, that
of online music distribution, automated curation, and promotional logics in the realm of streaming services and other platforms. Decades of digitization have made the latter sphere effectively omnipresent. Streaming is the dominant medium for music consumption (as this translates into recorded-music revenue; IFPI 2022). Social-media appearance and playlist optimization condition artists’ reach (Baym 2018, Morgan 2022, Prey 2021). Even agents who are resolutely local in their interests and engagements may feel pressured by platformization and other digital-distributive logics (Nordgård 2021). Ample research documents these developments in terms of shifting commercial and mediational conditions in the ‘new music industries’ (Hughes et al. 2016, Morris 2015, Wikström 2020) and other areas of music culture (Johansson et al. 2017, Nowak and Bennett 2022, Prior 2018). Less attention has been paid to the accompanying emotive or energetic shifts, for example, as regards artists’ motivation and ability to make sense of metrics, their hopes and despair in navigating sorting algorithms, or the incentives and fatigue of social-media communication (for example, Baym et al. 2021, Jones 2021, Maasø and Hagen 2019, Prey 2020b). I refer to such shifts and their (in)capacitating implications as affective dynamics (inspired by Slaby and Mühlhoff 2019), and this article contributes to mending the research lack by asking: How can the intertwinement of local musical engagements and concerns about digital music promotion and distribution be conceived as a matter of affective dynamics?

Specifically, this question is considered from the perspective of small-scale record labels. As these are often key to local musical life while grappling, simultaneously, with issues of digital distribution and promotion, they inhabit the intersection of what I heuristically refer to as interwoven spheres. In addition, small-scale labels are often run by former musicians, producers, bookers, concert arrangers, record-shop owners, and so on, which means they represent a broad perspective on their local music environment. At least, this was the case with the group of Brisbane-based labels that forms the basis for this study. I interviewed seven label managers from as many labels between June and September 2022. All the labels were independent. Most were solo projects or run by a small group of friends-turned-business partners. All were heavily invested in local activities and motivated by a sense of community surrounding the label, often supplemented by national or international engagements. Below, I expand briefly on this basis and its methodological implications.

To commence the article’s inquiry, I consult existing conceptions of affect in the context of digital media and/or musico-cultural engagement. First, I consider the idea of affective landscapes advanced by Tania Bucher (2018) in a discussion of experiential encounters with algorithms. Though partly a methodological devise, this idea directs attention to affect as a feature of media environments and the subtle transitions in power which constitute ‘micropolitical’ negotiations of subject positions and possibilities of action. Bucher stresses the interweaving of algorithmic systems and users’ everyday engagement in the creation of affective landscapes, which indicates a sense of corelated spheres in the experiential register
somewhat parallel to my focus on the experiential intersection of the sphere of local musical engagements and that of digital concerns. Second, I consider the concept of affective scenes developed by Andy Bennett (2013). This signifies participants’ feeling of being part of something that is alive, the embodied and/or imaginary sense of shared feelings and knowledge, the communal intensity of musical events like concerts and the intensive quality of scenes transcending classificatory delimitations (for example, in terms of genre). As may be perceived from this description, the concept of affective scenes speaks particularly to the sphere of local musical engagements, even though it is in no way divorced from trans-local or virtual concerns (Bennett and Peterson 2004). Third, I consider the idea of affective arrangements, devised by Jan Slaby (2019), as a means of addressing stable, repeatable, and even strategic configurations of affect. Although this is an aspect of scene-based infrastructures, it is even more – in both systematic and explicit terms – a feature of digital platforms’ commercial and techno-scientific procedures. For example, personalized curation aimed at music-mood management and contextualized advertisement targeting illustrate two ways of leveraging users’ momentary feelings, as read from listening patterns.

The concepts of affective landscapes, scenes, and arrangements provide different and to some extent complementary perspectives for conceiving of affective dynamics throughout the aforementioned spheres of musical life. The micropolitical implication of affect, which Bucher describes, takes a particular form in the experiential constitution of affective scenes; that is, in the capacitation of [a sense of] local musical engagement, potentially at odds with digital demands. The intersection of local musical engagement with streaming-based affective arrangements suggests issues of territorialization (that is, the ordering or seizure of dynamic forms). For example, labels’ dependence on digital distribution may ‘striate’ local feelings, attitudes, or perceptions by imposing delimitations (to suit online classification) on what is otherwise a more fluid or ‘living’ sense of scene. In turn, such striating influences scene participants’ experience of digital platforms – as the manifestation of a sometimes adverse and conflicted affective landscape – which impacts on the meaning of music-making and musically-enacted socialities. I substantiate this and other points in the analysis of statements by Brisbane-based label managers, inquiring about affective dynamics in their perception of online promotion and distribution, compared to local engagements. As I will argue, the pressure from digital demands is – fortunately – complemented by a sense of potential, and even hope.

On Interviews and Method
The label managers interviewed for this study were engaged over the course of – and, in one case, immediately following – a three-month research stay in Brisbane from June to August 2022. A total of twelve managers were contacted (by e-mail), of whom seven kindly responded. The selection of labels was based on their local engagement, determined through desktop research, recommendations, and
participation in local events. Additionally, a certain diversity was intended in terms of experience, from industry veterans to relative newcomers, and in their emphasis on genre demarcations, spanning from specific interests in experimental music, alternative rock, hip-hop, or EDM to crosscurrents or relative genre agnosticism. This diversity speaks to potential differences in how local musical engagement and digital developments are perceived.

The relevance of Brisbane as the locus of investigation is suggested not only by the presence of a broad range of active small-scale labels, but also by the rich portfolio of prior research documenting the vibrancy of local musical life (for example, Bennett and Rogers 2014, 2018, Green 2021). This research constitutes a – mostly silent – background for the present study, particularly resonating with (and in) the concept of affective scenes (as suggested by the recurring authors). Also, the choice of Brisbane was motivated by the possibility of the aforementioned research stay.

To establish an empirical context for this article’s inquiry, qualitative, semi-structured research interviews were employed. While acknowledging the more-than-linguistic character of affect, this method is recognized as a way of interpretively engaging (‘tuning into’) emotive, energetic and in a broader sense relational dynamics as they resonate in social arrangements (e.g. Kahl 2019). Interviews were in-person, on-site or via Zoom, depending on the interviewees’ preferences. All label managers willingly consented to participate and to appear by name. In this and other respects, the article adheres to Aarhus University’s standards for ethically responsible research, and I would like to express my gratitude to all the interviewees.

While the interviews inform the article’s analysis, it should be emphasized that my aim is not to provide a comprehensive empirical investigation. Instead, this article seeks to develop theoretically motivated points in the juxtaposition of the concepts of affective landscapes, scenes, and arrangements, which furnishes the conception of the intertwinement of local musical engagements and digital concerns as a matter of affective dynamics. These points are then further explored – exemplified and to some extent substantiated – in the context of empirical observations.

1 Recommendations came from colleagues intimate with the Brisbane scene(s) along with managers suggesting each other. I especially thank Ben Green, Libby Myers, Remy Boccalatte, and John Russel. Desktop research included business listings (such as the members of Australian Independent Record Labels Association; https://air.org.au, accessed 6 June 2022), label webpages, managers’ LinkedIn-profiles, etc. Events included small-scale festivals such as the Sonic Masala Fest, 13 August 2022. It should be noted that the gender imbalance of those interviewed – with one female to six male label managers – parallels and, unfortunately, exaggerates well-known gender imbalances in musical life (see McCormack 2020).

2 On the complexity of the notion of affective methods, see Knudsen and Stage (2015). As these authors argue – and as I concur (Knudsen, Krogh, Stage 2022) – investigations of affect may also call for approaches or experimentation beyond the repertoire of conventional social-science methods.
Affective Landscapes

Bucher’s concept of affective landscapes connects to broader concerns with algorithmic power and politics, which she describes as a matter of how ‘software and algorithms […] condense and construct the conditions for the intelligible and sensible in our current media environment’ (Bucher 2018, 3). In other words, algorithmic power is productive. It shapes possibilities for action and subjectivity (Bucher 2018, 33), and in doing so governs the ways of world-making that, according to Bucher, make up politics. For example, by ‘ranking, classifying, sorting, predicting, and processing data, algorithms are political in the sense that they help to make the world appear in certain ways rather than others’ (Bucher 2018, 3). Obviously, such politics may concern artists or labels seeking exposure via digital platforms (Baym 2018).

More specifically, Bucher identifies a form of power that contrasts ‘top-down or macroscopic view[s]’ (Bucher 2018, 116); a power that is not, in other words, a matter of macro-social conditions, imposed political logics, commercial strategies or technological infrastructures restricting peoples’ actions, for example, when it comes to accessing or utilizing online platforms. Instead, this power resides in the barely-perceived transitions that take place in situated encounters, in the way that ‘different qualities of encounter do different things’, and as such it constitutes a ‘micropolitics’ (Bucher 2018, 94; quoting Bissell 2016). For example, for an artist going online to chat with fans, subtle differences in wording, the pace of likes, order of comments, or context of other posts curated by the algorithm, all may tweak the artist’s attitude, setting the tone of the engagement.

The realm of micropolitics is affective, in the sense that it regards “the more-than or less-than rational” in life, including “mood, passion, emotion, intensity, and feeling” (Bucher 2018, 94; quoting Anderson 2006). This sets off micropolitics from prevailing understandings of the political as involving rational processes of decision-making. Micropolitics, in their affective capacity, concern experiential encounters, which are intensive in the triple sense of being felt (that is, dynamically perceived or passionately lived), being somehow beyond conscious, conceptual, and, thus, extensive demarcations (in other words, unclassified), and being environmental (that is, residing in the encounter, beyond the control of whoever has the experience). The latter implication makes plain that the issue of power or of who or what affects cannot be reduced to a matter of specific (f)actors, as agency resides in the environmental in-between. Similarly, the experiential intensity of that which is not (yet) conceptualized or submitted to extensive demarcations may be conceived as indexing an open, undetermined ‘smooth’ space (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 371). Finally, the energetic or passionate aspect of affect correlates with Spinozist–Deleuzian ideas about (in)capacitation, again, as implications of micropolitics: ‘Some encounters are constructive and might

---

3 The idea that ‘different qualities […] do different things’ suggests a more-than-human conception of agency. In this respect, Bucher’s inspirations from affect theory parallel other strands of post-human and new-materialist thinking, for example, actor-network theory (Latour 2005), assemblage theory (Bennet 2010) or agential realism (Barad 2007).
enhance a body’s capacity to act, which Spinoza called joyful encounters. Others are destructive and diminish its capacity to act, which Spinoza termed sorrowful’ (Bissell 2016, 397, see also Deleuze 1988, 50).

As noted, considering algorithmic power and politics as matters of affect allows Bucher to look beyond ‘macroscopic view[s]’; that is, to address the realm of micropolitics as opposed (or supplement) to macro-social conditions, infrastructural terms – what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as ‘macropolitics’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 213.) However, it also allows for an insistence on the productive implication of the environmental encounter; that is, the way algorithms’ capacity to affect is constituted partly in or by the experience of users. ‘[A]lgorithms do not just do things to people,’ nor is it the case that people simply ‘do things with the help of algorithms. By using algorithms, they […] do things to them – modulate and reconfigure them in both discursive and material ways’ (Bucher 2018, 94-95). This legitimizes the consideration of user experience as valid knowledge about algorithms or – in this study – consulting the experience of scene participants, who are grappling with social media and online music distribution.

Bucher introduces the concept of affective landscapes to designate micropolitical dynamics, which are – to some extent – prevalent as a quality or tuning of the experience of algorithms among some group of users. In addressing this prevalence of certain moods or energies, she expands on the idea of a structure of feeling, which is manifest and can be studied in collective discourses about algorithms. Specifically, via the notion of landscape, she adds a ‘scenographic’ sensibility meant to direct attention to the ‘scenes, situations, episodes, and interruptions that give rise to the felt presence of algorithms in everyday life’ (Bucher 2018, 99). In this respect, the concept of affective landscapes functions as a methodological device that prompts the inquiry into personal algorithm stories; that is, user accounts of situations, episodes, and so on. Additionally, it establishes the idea of an emotional geography stretching beyond individual encounters and resonating in a broader landscape of algorithmic affordances and user expectations (Bucher 2018, 102). We might think about such resonances as sensual or energetic keynotes in the way a certain media ecology is inhabited by various people, and, accordingly, in how they feel (in)capacitated. For example, Massumi talks about how bodies can be attuned to a certain sense of ‘tendency, futurity and potential’ (Massumi 2015, 57) in their environment, which in the case of artists may regard their (dis)belief in efforts at social-media exposure, or the feelings of hope or despair, joy, or loathing, which surrounds social-media work (Haynes and Marshall 2018). Emotional resonances add a sense of cross-situational collectivity or temporospatial continuity to the environmental implication of the concept of affect. As again Massumi notes, bodies may be ‘induced into inhabiting the same affective environment’, for example, by the

---

4 The idea of a structure of feeling is drawn from Zizi Papacharissi, who in turn refers to Raymond Williams.
interruptive signs or triggering cues of commercial logics or techno-scientific infrastructures, ‘even if there is no assurance they will act alike in that environment’ (Massumi 2015, 57). This latter point underlines the potentially contested character of affective landscapes as contexts of political negotiation. In the Deleuzian terminology used by Massumi, there will always be ‘minor lines that won’t be emphasized or come out into relief or be fully enacted but that everyone will have felt [...]. Those are left as a reservoir of political potential’ (Massumi 2015, 57). Minor lines could be the barely-perceived qualities of encounters – in the context of social media, for example, subtle cues of in the wording of comments, their order or the number and pace of likes. The way these qualities tone the encounter, for example, between artist and fans, (dis)incentivizes future action. Moreover, even if barely noticed, such qualities may accumulate in the experience of users, catalyzing later shifts in the direction of (micro)political encounters.

**Affective Scenes**

Whereas Bucher investigates power and politics in the context of new-media ecologies, Bennett is more concerned with formations of music culture. Accordingly, his idea of affective scenes is applicable to what I initially described as the sphere of local musical engagements, even though it may also comprise trans-local or online associations. In his initial formulation of this concept, as part of an investigation into aging popular-music audiences, Bennett emphasizes imagined relationships much in the manner of Benedict Anderson’s imagined communities:

> [A]ffective scenes are underpinned by a knowingness on the part of isolated individuals that many others are listening to the same music, reading the same music literature, watching the same music-related films and documentaries, and – above all – making a similar sort of sense from what they are hearing, reading, and watching, based upon their shared generational memories and cultural experience of that music. (Bennett 2013, 60)

Knowing that other people (may) make the same ‘sort of sense,’ or that they have (had) similar experiences, establishes a feeling of connection or of communal coherence, despite individual isolation and lack of the ‘tangible collective life,’ which is otherwise considered fundamental to the concept of music scene (Bennett 2013, 61). This idea fits the investigation of aging scene participants whose private and memory-dependent involvement escapes the three-tier model of local, trans-local, and virtual scenes. Still, Bennett remarks that ‘all scenes embrace some level of affectivity’ (Bennett 2013, 60), and in this regard, later publications note the

---

5 A point supported by scene-theory pioneers such as Will Straw (1991) and Barry Shank (1994).
significance of embodied relations (Driver and Bennett 2015), the intensity of communal musicking (for example, concerts; Green 2021), and the feeling of being ‘part of something that is alive’ (Bennett and Rogers 2016, 2). In other words, affective dimensions of scene participation are brought out in a way that makes the idea of affective scenes less of a supplement to the three-tier model – as a fourth tier – and more of an experientially transverse dimension.

Bennett draws his understanding of affect from Lawrence Grossberg (Grossberg 2013, 61, Bennett and Rogers 2016, 79), who characterizes affect in terms of intensities or ‘the energy that defines our investments in reality’ (Grossberg 1997, 28). Intensities may manifest variously as moods, desires, pleasures, and other ‘qualitative states’; the organization of intensities is what gives rise to various ‘cultural affects’ and a model of ‘cultural practices as “busy intersections” or, more accurately, as places constructed by the multiple foldings of different affective planes – each with its own imposed organization – into one another’ (Grossberg 1997, 28-29). Affect is differentiated from aesthetics (for example, as a matter of style) and communication (or discourse) and thus provides an alternative explanation of what animates music-cultural ‘bonding’ even across geographical and socio-political divides (as in the case of rock culture; Grossberg 1984, referenced by Bennett 2013, 53). In the context of scene theory, this may also be read as a departure from ‘hard infrastructure’ (that is, industrial or institutional conditions) as the main explanatory factor, prompting instead a perspective of ‘soft infrastructure – that is, the affective dimensions associated with […] socio-musical experience’ (Stahl 2004, 55).

The organization of intensities or the folding of affective planes into cultural practices can certainly be regarded as political, in that such organization may ‘control people’s conduct’ and accordingly be the object of contention (Grossberg 1997, 28). While this accords with Bucher’s concern with affective politics, it should be noted that Grossberg dismisses the slightly more radical idea about ‘affect as anarchic excess threatening to disrupt the structures of power’ (Grossberg 1997, 28). In this way, he departs from, for example, Massumi – as illustrated by the latter’s description of micropolitics as ‘fostering an excess of conditions of emergence’ (Massumi 2015, 81). Grossberg orients himself more towards the ‘plane of organization’, the Deleuzian term for a plane of discernable and to some extent established formations, as opposed to the ‘plane of consistency’ marked by radical excess and intensive flows (Grossberg 2010, 315). As such, he also considers affect as a means of ‘territorializing’; that is, of ordering and identifying said formations (Grossberg 2010, 314).

Still, in scene theory, there is a recognition of intensive openness, for example, when it comes to genre delimitations. There is an acknowledgement of processual provisionality or ‘a more fluid notion of scene,’ for example, where hard infrastructure is lacking; similarly, there is a call for conceptualizing ‘scenes as dynamic forms’ (Bennett and Rogers 2016, 96). Indeed, the aforementioned feeling of ‘being part of something that is alive’ indicates these aspects of affect as
something always on the verge of shifting, virtually en route to other states. Perhaps we might align these qualities of affective scenes with Grossberg’s thinking by noting the processual character of territorialization; that is, the way in which identity is not (merely) given, but maintained through continuous adoption and adaptation, which requires a certain margin of openness. In this perspective, fluidity should be perceived as integral to the experience of scenes – to the feeling of aliveness – as long as it does not escalate into pervasive deterritorialization (that is, as long as it retains some sense of identity and continuity to the scene). Fluidity or openness may reflect positively on the experience of scene participation, as long as encounters – that adopted and adapted to – yield ‘common notions’ (Deleuze 1988, 55); that is, a sense of communality in the encounter, increasing participants’ power to affect and be affected.6

**Affective Arrangements**

The final concept to be considered here is that of affective arrangements, as introduced by Slaby and his colleagues. In another departure from understanding affect as anarchic excess, the idea of affective arrangements specifically aims to address the configuration of affective dynamics as semi-stable configurations, and, consequently, the role of affect in upholding existing societal formations. The term arrangement refers to Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of *agencement* (commonly translated as assemblage; Slaby 2019, 109). Accordingly, an affective arrangement emerges in the co-functioning of heterogenous elements: ‘persons, things, artifacts, spaces, discourses, behaviors, expressions or other materials that coalesce into a coordinated formation of mutual affecting and being-affected’ (Slaby 2019, 109). Though arrangements are ‘performatively open-ended,’ the affects they sustain are nevertheless ‘patterned, channeled, and modulated in recurrent and repeatable ways,’ which means that ‘[o]ne might speak of affective arrangements as affective affordances as they present “prepared occasions” for getting affectively involved or immersed in specific ways’ (Slaby, Mühlhoff, and Wüschner 2019a, 5; italics in original).

Affordances derive from socio-material settings, as well as from discursive coding. They may be strictly local, but also of a cross-contextual or even societal reach.7 Accordingly, we might consider the affective scenes that Bennett discusses as one type of arrangement in and of musical life, variously afforded (for example, by hard and soft infrastructures). Even more so, the affective landscapes that Bucher describes speak to the existence of various arrangements of or surrounding the socio-algorithmic encounter (for example, artists’ encounters with social media),

---

6 I suggest this reading of intensive openness in affective scenes noting that the relation between Grossberg’s understanding of affect and that of Deleuze needs further unfolding – as Grossberg himself notes (Grossberg 1997, 28).

7 Slaby mentions examples such as the arrangement of street protests during the 2011 Egyptian uprisings, but also common phenomena such as open-floor, corporate work environments and "the automobile arrangement" (Slaby 2019, Schütze, Jörg, von Maur, and Slaby 2022).
arrangements that may cut across scene engagements, effecting a sense of
deterritorialization (for example, by rubbing against artists’ local commitments).

As noted, online music services excel at monitoring patterns of user behavior and
music-cultural trends. They do so by means of computerized music information
retrieval (MIR), by web-scraping cultural keywords, accumulating data on on-site
activity, collaborating with other platforms (for example, social media), and so on. 
Musical engagements are datafied and, consequently, abstracted into measures
and classifications, which drive recommendation algorithms, for example. In turn,
this affords the affective arrangement of everyday listening via playlists – whether
automated or listener-generated – as a key offering to end users (Siles et al. 2019).

In broader terms, a ‘contextual turn’ (Pagano et al. 2016) in the development of
recommender systems (Prey 2018) has prompted music-streaming services to
promote mood- and activity playlists over, for example, genre and other
identificational or music-cultural designations (Krogh 2023). The contextual turn
relies on increased opportunities for the real-time collection of data points – on
listeners’ location, activities, current emotional states, and so on. Simultaneously,
services promise to accommodate and, in fact, predict intentions, sensibilities, and
vibes. A statement from Spotify Advertising illustrates these promises and,
concurrently, the convergence of user desires (mapped and marketed by the
platform) and third-party (for example, advertiser) interests:

[W]e’re constantly learning about how people listen in real-time through our streaming intelligence—first-party, contextual data that reveals moods, mindsets, habits, and
tastes in the moment. On the other end of the headphones, the flexibility of streaming audio allows people to match the vibe of, or even shape, key moments throughout their day with a personalized soundtrack. [...] Context advertising is all about understanding how to match the vibe of the playlist the listener is listening to. (Spotify Advertising n.d.)

For artists, labels, and other music-industry agents, the platformed arrangement of
musical affects extends into requests for content. Producers may – as American
writer and critic Liz Pelly notes – be compelled to streamline their music for
popular playlists and, more specifically, for promotion via ‘data-driven systems of
mood-enhancing background music’; that is, they may be compelled to produce ‘chill-pop-sad-vibe playlist fodder’ or ‘stream-bait pop’ (Pelly 2018). Such ‘sonic
optimization’ may be supplemented by other strategies, for example, ‘(meta)data
optimization’ (that is, labelling of music to suit platform infrastructures and
successfully game the sorting algorithms; Morris 2020). Indeed, research suggests
that such strategic effects of platformed music distribution on music-making are
becoming more prevalent (Baym et al. 2021, Morgan 2022, Morris 2020, Prey

8The thorough combination of systemic and editorial factors in platform curation is explored by Tiziano
Bonini and Alessandro Gandini and evidenced by their concept of the “algo-torial” (2019).
This speaks to a deterritorialization of other interests in music-making, such as local musico-cultural concerns.

An important aspect of the affordance of affective arrangements has to do with prospected logics or the production of belief in future developments; that is, predictable patterns, calculable effects, or a sense of stability virtually present, as a function of the arrangement. In digital music promotion and distribution, techno-scientific opportunities combine with blunt claims about effects, for example, as regards audience reach on social media or listener behavior on streaming services. In fact, the datafied abstraction of user profiles, taxonomies of music (by genre, mood, or other types), or markers of user context enables the projection of, for example, musical tastes into playlist curation and ad placement. As Spotify Advertising notes:

> With Spotify Ad Studio [that is, the platform’s advertising portal], you can target listeners based on demographics and based on their interests, the genres they listen to, or as they soundtrack specific moments throughout their day. This creates an effective and efficient experience for both listeners and advertisers. (Majewski 2020; italics added)

On the flipside, abstraction may also create a sense of distance – of generalized disregard for local particularity, or of traits singled out in one context (of music or music culture) and transposed into the management of others (for example, used for playlisting or strategies of music-making). I will return to this aspect of the micropolitics afforded by affective arrangements of (or emanating from) the sphere of digital music distribution, as perceived by Brisbane labels.

To summarize, based on the conceptual triple jump conducted in this and the foregoing sections I suggest considering the emotional, energetic, and capacious shifts, which I refer to as affective dynamics, in the interwoven spheres of local musical engagement and platformed music promotion and distribution as micropolitical, in the sense that they add to power relations inscribed in macropolitical (for example, techno-scientific and commercial) conditions. These dynamics mold the feeling of being engaged, the energy of encounters, or the tone of environments. As such, they impact on the possibilities for action for artists, labels, and other agents in musical life. As we shall see, the experiences of record-label managers and other scene-based entrepreneurs testify to the existence

---

9 This connects with comments above about the ‘tendency, futurity, and potential’ of affective landscapes.

10 I draw on the Deleuzian distinction between common notions (briefly mentioned above) and abstractions (in his account of Spinoza; Deleuze 1988, 44-48) along with the idea of (vicious) abstraction, developed by William James (1909, 1981). As I elaborate elsewhere (Krogh 2023), there is something imaginary about abstraction that may be perceived as not only distancing, but productive (for example, as an impetus for movement, or even hope). However, this is not necessarily the experience of music-makers who encounter the classificatory systems of online music distribution.
of an affective landscape comprised by these affective dynamics. Its contours consist in fluctuating energies – micropolitical thresholds and contestations – resonating with but also transcending other social, technological, or discursive circumstances. We may consider affective scenes as one type of formation in this landscape, one that is experienced as its own sphere, to some extent (that is, territorialized to some degree), while simultaneously it may be subject to external logics, for example, of classification (and, thus, deterritorialized). Such logics may emanate from the sphere of online music distribution. This suggestion guides the following analysis of small-scale, Brisbane-based labels navigating online commitments while remaining invested in local musical life.¹¹

### Socio-algorithmic Musical encounters in Brisbane

Most of the label managers interviewed for this study spoke passionately about local engagements. For example, John Russel (director of 4000 Records)¹² considered these indispensable to the label: ‘[F]or me, it’s the fact that the bands are from Brisbane. Like, my niche is no music genre. If I like it, I’ll work with it. But they gotta be a local band.’ He described his work – releasing records, putting on shows and promotional events – as ‘super passionate,’ in parallel with the artists for whom ‘[t]his is all their kind of passion project.’ Similarly, he stressed the importance of being present (for example, at shows) to build ‘tangible connection[s],’ and he emphasized the feeling of being ‘embraced’ by what he perceived as a ‘really supportive’ music environment – one that fosters engagement.

These sentiments were largely shared by the director of another one-man label, Remy Boccalatte (False Peak Records).¹³ Commenting on his own experience of playing with several bands in the Brisbane area, he noted how social ‘circles […] would sort of meld together and then […] disperse as life moved on for people. […] At most times in all of those bands, there was […] a really strong connection locally.’ This background informs his label’s work, which includes international collaborations, though in these cases, ‘the tendrils are fewer in comparison to working in the local scene.’ What makes up these ‘tendrils’ is the fact that the artists know each other, perform at the same shows, or frequent the same social spaces: ‘that kind of multiple connection pulls it together.’ The challenge of international collaborations – ‘when you can’t […] work on a show together, or […] pick up the records and […] have a listening party at one of the band members’ houses or something like that, which we usually do here in Brisbane’ –

¹¹ I embrace the somewhat diverse or multifarious conception of affect entailed in the theories referenced here as a space for various analytical directions to be followed. In this respect, I lean towards the idea of affect as a “working concept” proposed by Slaby, Mühlfhoff, and Wüschner (2019b).

¹² All statements by Russel are from my in-person interview, 30 June 2022.

¹³ All statements by Boccalatte are from my in-person interview, 30 June 2022.
speaks to the value of physical proximity in the tangible way that Russel also noted.

Throughout the interviews, local engagements were consistently related to ideas about community with, again, the importance of passion evidenced by how artists signed to the various labels were referred to as friends and family. For example, Michelle Padovan (Coolin’ by Sound) spoke about the label’s commitment to a sense of local community as ‘essentially our number one mandate,’ while noting that ‘[w]henever we welcome a new fam… a new artist into our stable, we talk about them being part of our family.’ Another manager, Brodie McAllister (Made Now Music) used the terms ‘peers’ and ‘friends,’ while describing the creation of a community around the label as the very impetus for its creation: ‘it just kind of grew out of that seed of wanting to build a community.’

I take the passionate involvement in a tangible or felt connection to some sort of community surrounding the encountered labels to illustrate the experience, on behalf of label managers, of an affective scene. In fact, the notion of scene was in no way foreign to the interviewees, as illustrated by Russel’s self-identification as ‘someone who genuinely wants to help develop the scene.’ Consistent with Bennett’s reflections, this sense of affective bonds was not restricted to local engagements, as indicated by Boccalatte and others for whom local engagements were combined with national or international orientations. But somewhat in contrast to Bennett’s emphasis on imaginary connections, the tangibility of local activities – which might be interpreted as the sensorially-immersive quality and emotional attunement of encounters – seemed to enforce the feeling of community, of feeling mutually present and passionately engaged; as noted by Russel:

Like, I get the most joy out of, you know, going to a show of one of my bands and then seeing a full room of fans, who – you know – know the lyrics to the songs and stuff like that. […] Yeah, I’ve just got a massive smile on my face the whole time that’s happening.

Whether local, national, or international, we might understand the connections felt in the affective scene as a matter of ‘common notions,’ in the Deleuzian sense, which implies mutual enforcement, a positive sense of being energized or enabled, or of dynamic openness in the encounters that determine the scene (as opposed to subjugation or closure). In the interviews, these implications were most clearly voiced in comparisons between local involvement and dealing with online platforms. Although some managers did engage enthusiastically with the possibilities of, for example, playlist pitching or gaining traction via social-media

---

14 All statements by Padovan are from my in-person interview, 17 August 2022.
15 All statements by McAllister are from my in-person interview, 27 September 2022.
exposure, these were a minority; and even in such cases, there was a sense of disconnection or disempowerment. For example, Aiden Baxter (Colossus Records)\textsuperscript{16} recounted having a video reposted by The Strokes, which gained a surge of followers for the label, but he simultaneously characterized social-media exposure as “hit and miss,” noting that ‘you [just] pray sometimes. I don’t know, it’s hard. It’s hard to say how you crack the algorithm.’ In fact, he regarded digital endeavors as ultimately falling back on local activities:

I think that the most important thing about putting out content, whether it’s music or content to promotes that music, is making sure that you’re active in real life with real people, engaging with them and supporting them, ‘cause then it kind of all comes back to you and then you sort of get that same engagement and support.

In contrast to Baxter, Russel had simply ‘given up’ on planning social-media strategies, while rejecting the promise of playlist pitching as ‘not worth the time.’ He also considered such strategies to be distant from artists’ concerns: ‘they just want to play and release cool stuff; they don’t want to think about any of that.’ To Padovan, ‘digital disruption’ of the ‘communication channels’ harmed communities: ‘it just doesn’t feel like genuine community support anymore.’ Stephen Green (SGC Media) expressed similar sentiments when questioning streaming’s promotion of ‘lean back listening,’ which may pacify listeners and sever the connection to artists: ‘are the consumers that are listening to those streams connecting with who that artist is?’\textsuperscript{17} This concern was shared by Boccalatte, who considered developing active listening a main priority of the label. Additionally, he expressed ‘a real aversion’ to social media, noting that ‘I don’t want the label to be that, you know; less is more sometimes.’ A sense of disconnection was evident in his perception of streaming metrics, for example, bands posting streaming numbers for promotional purposes: ‘Cool, but do you know any of those people?’ Moreover, he rejected the idea of data-based recommendation as based on any type of mutually meaningful connection: ‘the streaming services now think that they know you. You don’t know them.’ In a similar vein, McAllister decried the opacity of streaming-based logics, stating that releasing music online was essentially ‘screaming into the void.’ This last statement epitomizes the previously-mentioned sense of disconnection and disempowerment – a state where no effort whatsoever will make you heard, without any mutuality in the encounter or, in other words, without any sense of ‘common notions.’ Similarly, although with an added emphasis on incapacitation as a matter of depletion of energy or emotion – recall the Spinozist idea of passions linked to the conception of micropolitics – Russel referred to using streaming metrics as ‘soul sucking.’ Indeed, he considered ignoring such data as much as possible a

\textsuperscript{14}All statements by Baxter are from my in-person interview, 3 August 2022.

\textsuperscript{17}In-person interview, 22 June 2022.
‘protective’ move allowing him to ‘focus on Brisbane, the local scene […] on what we’re doing here.’

The intensity of some label managers’ criticism of digital platforms speaks to the force of affective scenes as a manifestation of local musical engagement and, concurrently, of the digital logics that were seen as undermining this. There is a clear indication of micropolitics playing out in the socio-algorithmic encounters on which managers reported, (dis)incentivizing their doings, while manifesting an adverse or contested affective landscape. Certainly, this adds to the macropolitical, for example, economic and technological conditions of the intersected spheres of local musical life and digital concerns.

The encroaching pertinence of online platforms was felt by both those managers who we might describe as conditionally positive and by those clearly troubled. In the first group, recall Baxter’s mixed views on social-media promotion, or consider the following statement by Iti Memon (Pocketmoth Records):18 ‘I mean, data is important and in particular in the digital economy. At some stage you have to use it. We’re just not using it right now.’ Among the latter group, the need to declare that one has ‘given up’ on social media or playlist pitching illustrates, indirectly, the felt importance though disincentivizing quality of these activities. In a similar vein, the sense of faltering passion or micropolitical resignation appear from this ‘fizzling’ acknowledgement of the importance of playlisting:

It’s huge. It’s huge, absolutely. It is huge and I understand that that’s kind of come around because of the saturation of digital streaming and the multiple streaming platforms that are available now and, you know, whoever is your preferred streaming platform and what not … And playlists and things like that. I don’t know… (Boccalatte)

Acknowledging playlisting while not knowing what to make of it signals, again, a sense of disconnection or distance, a sense that pertained to managers’ perception of classificatory infrastructures and other abstract features of platform distribution as well. For example, genre delimitations were found to be limiting, with respect to featuring bands, as Boccalatte explained:

[I]t always irks me. You know, when I’m trying to upload new tracks or new albums, and I’m just like ‘Uh, they’re not really any of those’ [referring to the requirement of categorizing one’s music as a pre-given genre], so I’m just going to have to choose this and hope for the best, you know. And even if you get two or three choices at choosing your genre, sometimes it just doesn’t capture it…

18 All statements by Memon are from my in-person interview, 4 August 2022.
For this and other reasons, Bandcamp was the preferred platform: Specifically, it offers an option for self-labelling or picking your own classificatory tag, ‘which is really helpful’ (Memon). Moreover, on-site band and label presentations may be variously customized — ‘you really can personalize your thing that you’re putting out’ (McAllister) — and users can directly purchase records, cassette tapes, or merchandise, for example. For some, these features afforded a more direct, and thus, passionate sense of engagement: ‘I hand print all the packages, you know, and so there’s a real care that’s connected when anybody makes a purchase. Like, it’s huge excitement’ (Boccalatte). We might say that Bandcamp preserves some qualities of the socio-musical engagement that are familiar to those accustomed to local affective scenes, but which are otherwise lost (or reversed) in the landscape of online services. For example, the mandatory classification of platform submissions not only contrasts with the plurality of genres that a particular band or music release may be assigned: ‘it can be hard when they ask what genre is the whole album’ (Memon). It also diverges from, in effect fixating or stifling, the fluidity of local scenes or the dynamism of musical life, including label work. In this regard, recall Boccalatte’s statement about melding and dispersing social circles, which he linked to the plurality of genres in the Brisbane scene(s). Somewhat relatedly, Aiden characterized the profile of Colossus Records as based not so much on genre as on a more overarching, open, or flexible sense of ‘DIY and independent — and passion, I guess.’

The issue of classification speaks to how the intensive quality of affective scenes may be subject to extensive delimitations in the encounter with streaming-based affective arrangements. Quite literally, the sense of openness, which I remarked on in connection with scene theory, is submitted to genre boundaries and, more fundamentally, the experiential intensity, which I noted as an affective implication of micropolitics, is curbed by set classificatory schemes.

The issue of classification aligns with others in a common illustration of how streaming-based arrangements may striate or de- and re-territorialize scene-based experiences. Examples include local labels’ (in)capacity (or reluctance) to develop social-media strategies, accommodate data-based business logics, or profit from playlist pitching. Affective arrangements issuing from the context of streaming services are affective, not only in the sense that they may push music-makers in the direction of producing ‘chill-pop-sad-vibe playlist fodder’ meant for ‘lean-back’ listening, which most interviewees disliked, but also because of the systematic affordance of certain motivations, energies, or atmospheres (for example, of promise and efficiency) as evident in the (dis)inclination of label managers, their (dis)acknowledgement of social-media strategies, and so on. In light of this, managers’ investment or passionate engagement in local activities may be considered a micropolitical intervention in the face of what are otherwise perceived as overarching and necessary commercial and techno-scientific developments, but that in themselves — for this impression — thrive on micropowers (for example, the felt presence and persistence of strategic concerns).
Still, despite this somewhat bleak picture, hope also emerged from the interviews – from in-between the spheres of labels’ local musical engagements and digital efforts. As indicated, some managers combined investment in the local scene with national or international engagements, recognizing digital facilities as a prerequisite for the latter. For example, Boccalatte qualified his description of the challenges of international, and, thus, online, collaboration by noting, ‘I don’t think it’s any less strong.’ Similarly, Padovan connected the idea of a local community to online activities, specifically bands’ mutual exposure through promotion and playlisting:

[O]n the promotional side, you’ll find a lot of bands supporting each other, sharing each other’s releases, adding each other’s releases to their own playlists. And yeah, taking that physical community onto using those online platforms to express their love for one another. And I always find that the label is like the conduit that’s sort of tying all those artists together.

In this way, we might think about hopes issuing from the alignment of scene-based concerns with platform arrangements; that is, from the production of ‘common notions’ or mutually enforcing affects. However, even beyond this option, hopes were also pinned to indications or feelings that platform domination might wane. For example, McAllister pondered the possibility of a (re)turn to greater local investment:

I think overall things are moving back towards local, you know. […] there’s definitely a feeling out, where everyone is going: ‘Yeah, streaming is bad for the artists. We should stop doing that.’ You know, there’s a lot of people, myself inclusive, that just got rid of streaming and only use Bandcamp or download from Bandcamp and put it on the phone. There’s a kind of feeling that […] they, you know, want to be investing in their local community.

He linked the desire for greater local investment to the rise of distracted or background listening, as enforced by streaming: ‘it’s all attached to the attention deficit economy.’ However, in light of affect theory, we might consider such perspectives as issuing from interferences in the intersection of affective scenes and streaming-based affective arrangements prompting openings or ‘lines of flight’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 510), as opposed to the resentment otherwise expressed towards digital logics. Specifically, McAllister seemed to chart a virtual line of development that operates in contrast to the logics projected by platform marketing, but which unfolds in-between the care for local artists, active musical engagement, and (inadvertent) platform affordances. This accords with the understanding of micropolitics as always imbued with a potential for alternative lines of action (recall Massumi). There is ‘a feeling out’, a sense in the attitude
towards online services, which McAllister referenced, that might accrue into setting a new (micro)political direction or prompting alternative affective dynamics to manifest in the socio-algorithmic musical encounter.

**Conclusion**

It has been the aim of this article to discuss how the intertwinement of local musical engagements and digital promotional and distributional concerns may be conceived as a matter of affective dynamics. The foregoing analysis exemplify and – to some extent – substantiates the relevance of the concepts of affective landscapes, scenes, and arrangements in that regard. The experiential focus on users’ interaction with media environments as a locus of micropolitical struggle, which is entailed in the concept of affective landscapes, allows for contemplating scene participants’ attempts at making sense of digital platforms. This supplements Bennett’s emphasis on affect as an important dimension of scene formation, while situating affective scenes in the broader scope of energetic or intensive constellations; a wider emotional geography, so to speak. The experiences of the label managers interviewed for this study illustrate the importance of affect, including the multiplicity of dynamic relations through which it manifests: the felt connection to some sort of community, a sense of this community being alive (that is, fluid and dynamic), and the passionate investment in reinforcing this feeling of aliveness, in contrast to other, and notably digital, engagements, which are experienced as disconnecting and disempowering. The picture presented by the group of small-scale Brisbane-based labels is not unequivocal. Certainly, some label managers saw opportunities to either reach audiences or sustain collaborations on a national or international scale. Still, widespread resentment of social-media promotion, online distribution and – more generally – the opacity of datafied and algorithmic procedures speaks to the force of affective arrangements emanating from the realm of online platforms and impacting on local musical life. The affordances and projected logics implied by such arrangements go some way towards explaining this impact, which may be thought of as a matter of territorialization or a striating of the intensive space of the affective scene. However, as I have also argued, this does not preclude openings, the potential for contestation or, again, a sense of hope.

As initially noted, the designation of spheres in musical life should be considered a heuristic maneuver, as these are indeed interwoven. Still, the emotional orientations, energetic differences, and – on the whole – colliding affective dynamics that are elaborated above speak to the contours of music-cultural investment, and, thus, to a sense of emotional geography or dynamic formations of musical life in a way that supplements conditions of hard infrastructure (to use Stahl’s term). This accords with Bennett’s original idea of the affective scene, although I hope to have added both nuances and theoretical perspectives. Moreover, it does to some extent substantiate the sense that spheres – however fluctuant – are present and play an affective-political role in organizing musical life.
Acknowledgements
This article is based upon a stay as visiting researcher at Griffith University, funded by Aarhus University Research Foundation (AUFF-E-2020-6-16). I would like to express my gratitude to Andy Bennett for hosting this visit and for fruitful discussions. Also, I wish to thank Ben Green and other colleagues, along with the label managers, who generously offered insights into Brisbane’s musical life.

Author Bio
Mads Krogh is Associate Professor of Popular Music Culture at the School of Communication and Culture, Aarhus University, Denmark. His research deals with issues of genre, mediation, and practice with a particular focus on digital contexts and drawing perspectives from cultural sociology, assemblage theory, affect theory, and actor-network theory. Recent and upcoming books include Music Radio (co-edited, Bloomsbury 2019), Methodologies of Affective Experimentation (co-edited, Palgrave 2022) and Musical Genre: Assemblage and abstraction (contracted, Bloomsbury).

References


Bennett, Andy, and Ian Rogers. 2014. ‘In search of ‘independent’ Brisbane: Music, memory, and cultural heritage.’ In Sounds and the City: Popular Music,
Mads Krogh – Affective Landscapes, Scenes, and Arrangements


Hughes, Diane, Mark Evans, Guy Morrow, and Sarah Keith. 2016. The New Music Industries: Disruption and Discovery, Palgrave pivot. Cham: Springer International Publishing AG.


Mads Krogh – Affective Landscapes, Scenes, and Arrangements


