

AFTERWORD: RHYTHMIC MULTIPLICITIES – SEEKING ORDER AND EXCITEMENT

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The fertile ideas that abound in Henri Lefebvre's (with contributions also from Catherine Régulier) small volume, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (2004), have proved immensely suggestive across the humanities and social sciences. As the chapters in this edited volume exemplify, these rich concepts are being explored in a growing range of social and historical contexts. Spatial contexts range from the global to the local, and geographical locations include Buenos Aires, France, Mexico City, Venice, Lesbos and London. Rhythmanalysis is deployed to examine a wealth of themes such as data, energy expenditure, taxi-driving, tourism, dance and the aftermath of an earthquake. Moreover, the rhythms conjured up by these chapters are hugely varied, ranging from the enduring to the brief, the staccato and slow, the conventional and the transgressive. In taking inspiration from these diverse accounts, I want to draw out how rhythmanalysis can assist in revealing contrasting social desires for order and its transgression or temporary dissolution. Rhythm, I argue, discloses how manifold temporal conventions are established to produce a social order that secures a necessary predictability on the organisation of the social. And yet if rhythmic order pervaded all areas of the social all of the time, life would be dull and repetitive. Similarly, a lack of rhythmic consistency would be unbearable, making life formless and irregular. I first discuss how arrhythmia devolves to produce an unwanted disorderliness, before exploring how rhythmic standardisation is typically imposed by the powerful to restrict opportunities for living and thinking otherwise. Subsequently, I investigate how alternative rhythmic experience is sought to counter this predictability and then examine how unexpected rhythmic occurrences can also pleasurably disrupt rhythmic confinement. My discussion is informed throughout by the great disruptions engendered by the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic and the shifting social strategies and habits that have responded to spreading virus in 2020 and 2021. For as Dawn Lyon writes in the introduction to this book, the pandemic has foregrounded the importance of rhythm in everyday life.

UNWANTED ARRHYTHMIA

There is no doubt that without any rhythmic order, in the absence of persistent synchronisation and eurhythmia, life would be extremely shapeless and difficult to manage. The predictable sequence of events and the acquisition of shared social habits ensures that undue deliberation is not required any time we undertake an action. To consider each action would be paralyzing and unsettling; it would be difficult to get things done, arrange meetings with others and even sustain a stable identity. Accordingly, humans seek varying degrees of rhythmic conformity and consistency, agreeing upon when practices of eating, sleeping, working and playing should take place, and performing a host of minor, unreflexive habits that organise individual lives. Rhythmic norms belong to broader temporal conventions about ‘when, how often, how long, in what order and at what speed’ (Adam, 1995, p. 66), the implicit and embodied norms that regulate social time and space. These habitual, learned ways of being and knowing give meaning to our lives, structuring routines, facilitating a familiar comfort and helping us to anticipate the immediate future.

This ontological predictability and security is not merely individual but also formed collectively, relying on synchronising practices that enable common practices to be accomplished. Regular paths and points of temporal intersection routinise action in space, with shops, bars, cafes and garages constituting points at which individual paths converge. Aligning bodies with ‘the existing architecture of time and space’ (Labelle, 2008, p. 190), such collective rhythmic choreographies produce what Seamon (1980) calls ‘place ballets’. As such, as Stuart Hall (1996, p. 439) puts it, they belong to those ‘forms of common sense which have taken root in and helped to shape popular life’. Frykman and Löfgren concur, stating that ‘cultural community is often established by people together tackling the world around them with familiar manoeuvres’ (1996, pp. 10–11). Thus, as Salomé Lopes Coelho demonstrates in her chapter for this book, though the highly dynamic Buenos Aires district of Caminito is composed of distinctive and multiple polyrhythms that derive from diverse historical processes and events, a regular if idiosyncratic rhythmic composition nonetheless remains identifiable.

In the past year, the advent of COVID-19 has created a massive disruption to habitual daily and weekly rhythms, in many cases wholly replacing well-worn routines. The establishment of discrete times for work, play and sustenance has been thoroughly undone, with long unstructured periods of time having to be reconfigured into meaningful arrangements. These effects have stimulated the emergence of neologisms and new phrases; the manifestation of the global shift in the rhythmic activity of humans has been termed the *anthropause*, while the sense of one undistinguished day blending into the other has provoked the notion that every day is *blursday*.

Accordingly, arrhythmia has often prevailed, especially before people have become accustomed to the new routines they have to undertake, an unsettling situation that is exacerbated by continuously shifting restrictions about permitted activities and access to particular places. For many, life has become primarily home-based. With the suspension of school attendance, families have been compelled to adapt to children being at home all day, with parental responsibilities extending to accommodate home schooling to reproduce the systematic timetabling of schools. Rhythmic patterns that formerly interspersed family togetherness and apartness have been replaced by an enforced intimacy. Unused to such continuous co-presence, relationships with partners, children and other home-sharers have been strained, with some of the consequences including domestic discord, violence and break-ups.

For many, this has been compounded by completely overturned work schedules. Key health workers have been exhausted by treating those infected with the virus, their bodies and emotional capacities strained to breaking point. Also, far more prominent has been the tireless work of a host of essential workers whose rhythms have certainly not ceased or slowed down: shopworkers, postal workers, lorry drivers, teachers and many more. While many workers unable to operate from home retain a semblance of their habitual work schedules, others have adapted their working timetables and practices within the domestic sphere. For some, meetings have increasingly taken place via videotelephony, establishing virtual co-presence and different rhythms of participation, intensities of attention and duration. Many have found such meetings stressful, others less so.

Many people have attempted to ameliorate a sense of confinement by undertaking brief excursions outdoors. Yet, when they do venture beyond the home, they may have to engage in unfamiliar forms of waiting, for instance, in queuing outside shops, and when admitted, may rush around the interior, rapidly filling baskets to minimise time spent in the company of potentially infectious others. At the same time, many retail activities have been replaced by the rhythms of delivery services to the home. The rhythms of performing such mundane tasks are supplemented by altered street choreographies in which linear walking is disrupted by wide swerves to avoid contact with others. These altered place ballets also reconfigure other daily mobile rhythms, for example, where daily habits of travelling on public transport – catching up on texts, daydreaming, scrolling through mobile phones or chatting with friends – have been suspended with the sudden loss of those regular periods of the day that are spent between home and work, often while mobile.

Though most people have conformed as best they can to these new rhythmic structures as well as the arrhythmia produced by continuous change and illness, their extended duration has generated widespread unease and stasis. Yet those who protest about the infringements perpetrated upon their rights and who flout government advice and the norms

followed by the majority have become the focus of anger. However, as several chapters in this book demonstrate, though the pandemic has generated a specific form of global arrhythmia, the advent of other instances of arrhythmia may devolve across time and space according to multiple circumstances, often unexpectedly.

Arrhythmia may arrive at the level of the body, as Amy Sackville identifies in describing the monthly arrival of menstrual cramps, a condition that she has had to adapt to, but one that nonetheless produces further arrhythmic effects of insomnia and misery. Sackville's experience can be further exemplified by her discussion of the listlessness that characterises those tourists who have run out of things to do after staying too long in a destination or whose explorations are curtailed by the weather. Tourism is a useful sphere in which to identify how the body can intervene to disrupt eurhythmic experience. Travel to long haul destinations typically produces the discombobulated sensations of jet lag as the usual rhythms of sleep and eating are disrupted and we feel 'out of synch'. Even the more modest travel provided by coach tours, seemingly eurhythmic, comfortable mobile environments from which passing scenes are apprehended, may cause travelling bodies to become uncomfortable, feel hungry, restless or sick, adding to arrhythmic potentialities (Edensor & Holloway, 2008). Unfamiliar food leads to arrhythmic digestion, excessive drinking or drug-taking generate an aftermath of disorientation and too long spent on the beach may result in disruptive effects of sun stroke. Tourists typically seek to alleviate these arrhythmic effects through medicine and careful food consumption to achieve a semblance of somatic rhythmic order once more (Falconer, 2013).

At a more significant scale, massive arrhythmia devolves after sudden, unexpected disasters such as tsunamis, wildfires and as evidenced in Eirini Glynou-Lefaki's chapter, the calamitous earthquake that hit the venerable Italian city of L'Aquila. As she reveals, the disaster was not only a time shattering event in itself but generated further arrhythmic consequences for mental and physical health, educational progress and substance abuse that disrupted efforts to regain a semblance of urban order. She explains that L'Aquila remains in a kind of rhythmic suspension, a spell during which slow and noisy reconstruction dominates the sensory rhythms of the city pending its restoration and the slide back into the everyday rhythms that reigned before the catastrophe. And as Guido Borelli shows, such disruptions may be more gradual but equally devastating. The tidal rhythms that are slowly swamping Venice will reclaim this iconic city for the sea, ultimately extinguishing the rhythms established by residents and tourists alike.

LAYING DOWN DOMINANT RHYTHMS: THE BEATS OF THE POWERFUL

We fear the chaos of widespread arrhythmia that war, disaster or social and economic crisis might herald. Yet though desires for the reproduction and restoration of eurhythmia are usually sought following such disruptions, there is always a danger that such longings will be capitalised upon, for as Lefebvre emphasises, power ‘knows how to utilise and manipulate time, dates, time-tables’ (2004, p. 68). An array of temporal and rhythmic strictures is already imposed by local and national governments that lay down when particular activities may be enacted, including the hours during which children must attend school, regulations about the sale of alcohol, speed limits on roads and the time when ‘noise’ is deemed to become ‘antisocial’. Other regulations govern the ‘openings and closing of shops, the flows of postal deliveries, bank deposits and coffee breaks’ (Labelle, 2008, p. 192), and these are supplemented by more specific, local arrangements about times of work – the custom of clocking on and off still pertains – rubbish collection and library opening hours. Other powerful agencies also act to impose rhythmic order on space as Mattias Kärholm (2009) demonstrates in his discussion of how retailers in Malmo, Sweden, synchronise commercial rhythms with the everyday urban rhythms and mobilities of that city. Racial, gendered and generational forms of power also lay down dominant rhythms. For instance, Louise Nash shows how working in the City of London financial sector is dominated by masculine rhythms, characterised by over-effusive outbursts, clubbable sociability and an intense pace of work. By contrast, women working here express how they feel ill attuned and experience a social and spatial arrhythmia.

Certain mega-events require assiduous planning in order to ensure that they proceed smoothly (Edensor & Larsen, 2018). More rigorous rhythmic management pertains in the institutional settings of prisons and armed forces. Under certain conditions and at certain historical junctures, such temporal control might be more widely extended through the installation of curfews, intensive surveillance and coercive participation in state ceremonies and rituals, threatening to establish an Orwellian subjugation.

In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, regular rhythms have been utterly transformed by the terrible impact of the virus but also because of the strategies that authorities have deployed to manage the crisis. Local and central governments have decreed that rigorous schedules, timetables and routines must be followed to limit the spread of the virus, although these orders are apt to change from week to week. In the United Kingdom, for long spells we have been instructed to remain at home, only going outside for brief periods of exercise, shopping and essential tasks. Those workers who can work from home are advised to do so. Pubs, restaurants, cinemas and gyms have been forbidden to open for months. Only takeaways have been permitted to serve food and drink, and most non-essential items have been

acquired only through home delivery services. Only vulnerable children and those of key workers have been permitted to attend school. Yet though unaccustomed to such strict measures, they have been adhered to by most people; generally speaking, these expressions of state power have not been deemed to be unnecessarily oppressive but are understood to have been installed to protect the vulnerable against infection and ensure that essential medical care is not overloaded.

THE QUEST FOR ALTERNATIVE RHYTHMS

The arrhythmic events, sudden changes and harsh state policies discussed above may shatter long-established, formerly stable routines. However, because the continuous reiteration of unchanging rhythmic regularities can be excessively mundane, desires to transcend and transgress such regularities are spawned, even if these merely eventuate in temporary breaks from predictable eurhythmia. As Dawn Lyon writes in the introduction to this book, rhythm cannot be merely grasped as inexorably shaped by power for it also offers scope for appropriation, subversion and the adoption of competing, alternative rhythms that generate possibilities for creativity and innovation.

Tourism is an exemplary case of a socially institutionalised form of transitory relief from the recurrent rhythms that might render life unexciting. On holiday in an unfamiliar place, we may lapse into a temporary rhythm of relaxation, sleeping longer, lazing by the pool, eating unusual foods, drinking heavily and altogether moving at a slower rhythm. Of course, much tourism is itself managed according to rigorous schedules organised to reduce the potential for arrhythmic experience. Timetabled activities instantiate a daily routine of relaxation, consumption, guided tours and entertainment that breaks with home-based routines but is equally predictable. However, certain tourist adventures more dramatically break with expected routines. Amy Sackville's visit to Saint-Paul-de-Vence in southern France involves immersion in an alternative rhythmic realm, as she wanders, eats at any time she desires and experiences the sonic alterity of the café in which she lingers. Such urges to leave behind the speeded-up rhythms of the working week reach its zenith in the Slow Travel movement, wherein tourists reside in rural retreats and old towns, submerging themselves in local culture and avoiding renowned attractions in favour of walking, cycling and canal cruising in slowed down mobile rhythms (Edensor, 2012).

Backpackers travelling for a longer duration may become more thoroughly immersed with the divergent rhythms of elsewhere. As a young backpacker, my first trip to India required me to stay in a small Gujarati village for a few weeks. Social mores, sensations and the primarily agricultural routine of the day were wholly unfamiliar. At 4.30 in the morning, I would be woken by the sound of passing buffaloes being taken to the fields,

while at twilight, huge numbers of large fruit bats would lazily flap over the village. In the middle of the afternoon, a period of siesta would see the elderly woman from next door enter my house and promptly fall asleep on the bed. Furthermore, times of eating, sleeping and relaxing entirely departed from my usual schedules. I was plunged into a world where unfamiliar rhythms supplemented a somewhat unnerving but nonetheless thrilling strangeness.

There are many other ways in which people more regularly seek to retreat from an everyday rhythmic order. At weekends, people may consume alcohol and drugs to escape the constraints of the working week. Similarly, loiterers and strikers violate rhythmic conventions. Equally mundanely, Justin Spinney (2010) and Richard Hornsey (2010) explore how cyclists and pedestrians both violate the dominant rhythmic norms imposed by vehicular traffic by adopting improvisatory practices on the road. Moreover, the night has long provided an occasion for dominant, more regulatory diurnal rhythms to be contravened by bohemians, musicians and practitioners of the occult (Edensor & Dunn, 2020). As Jani Tartia discusses, slowing down commences with the advent of twilight, with a corresponding speeding up of rhythms induced by the emerging dawn. In cities, she discloses how slower, more diverse rhythmic practices occupy spaces that are dominated by vehicular rhythms during the day, with sonic, mobile and social nocturnal rhythms deviating more profoundly from these busier diurnal rhythms.

As James Macpherson importantly notes, festivals also mark a time during which the usual rhythms and routines are transcended. As he exemplifies, there is a tension between the orderly rhythmic production and consumption of spectacle and more sensuous, ludic carnivalesque practices. He demonstrates that festivals vary according to the degree to which they manage schedules or alternatively, surrender control, allowing events to be co-produced by participants. More radical retreats from normative rhythms involve the wholesale repudiation of conventional urban existence to an off-grid life. Phillip Vannini and Jonathan Taggart (2015) explore how to live sustainably and efficiently, and off-gridders in northern Canada primarily deploy solar power and must, therefore, move with the rhythms of the light and dark, the seasons and weather.

THE UNEXPECTED EMERGENCE OF OTHER RHYTHMS

Though there are numerous ways in which people practice pleasurable pursuits that depart from rhythmic norms, the unanticipated breaking of rhythmic order may generate delightful ruptures while also revealing rhythms that are usually overlooked.

It is snowing heavily as I write this, and scores of people have forsaken lockdown and headed for Hampstead Heath, London. The atmosphere has transformed from one of muted sound and sedate shuffling to a scene that is

animated with shouts of glee, frenzied snowball fights and sledges hurtling down slopes. Snow used to be a regular seasonal occurrence but is now far rarer. When it settles on the land, people head out of their houses in droves to experience the transformation of their everyday spaces. The snowfall is an enchanting disruption to winter predictability at any time, but this year it serves as an especially welcome excuse to break a sequestered indoor existence.

While I have discussed the arrhythmic effects of the COVID-19 lockdowns and the unwanted adoption of new rhythms, the pandemic has also caused a slowing down, transformed mobile rhythms and established new daily rhythms that have solicited unforeseen pleasures. The absence of routine and the need for daily exercise has stimulated many to walk around their neighbourhoods. As a consequence, they have become newly aware of, or reacquainted with, aspects of their local environments they had previously overlooked: green spaces, architectural styles, historical details and a host of minor features and idiosyncrasies. As mythogeographer Phil Smith (2020) observes, such opportunities for exploring local space can encourage us to shift our perspective and notice how

...every street you walk down is a treasure of geology and materials, each window is a museum of symbols, every tree is a drama of buds, enkissings, wounds and blossoming.

This heightened awareness has been accompanied by the defamiliarisation of habitually sensed places that have suddenly been rendered uncharacteristically quiet and unpopulated. As I walked through central London one summer afternoon in 2020, Oxford Street, usually teeming and crowded with shoppers, was made uncanny by their complete absence. Similarly, the abrupt scarcity of the regular rhythmic sounds of aeroplanes overhead has bestowed a strange silence on the city. And this suspension of mobile and sonic rhythms has fostered an awareness of the non-human rhythms that course through the city. The rhythms of birdsong are no longer smothered by the ambient din of traffic while the slowing down of human activity has inspired the creatures who cohabit the world to move beyond their usual tracks. They are no longer out of sight or earshot. Wild goats, usually confined to a nearby coastal headland, have wandered freely around the North Wales resort of Llandudno, now much quieter in absence of the usual tourist and work rhythms of the town. Similarly, since lockdown, the Thai town of Lopburi has been overrun with monkeys that, usually resident at the aptly named Monkey Temple and fed by numerous tourists, seek food further afield in their absence. Such rhythmic intrusions reveal Lefebvre's insistence that though we may not notice, '(There is) nothing inert in the *world*', for it is suffused with the polyrhythms of 'trees, flowers, birds and insects' (2004, p. 17).

Besides these sensory rhythmic transformations, many have adopted new routines and habits. In addition to the surge in walking, in the United Kingdom there has been a considerable rise in bicycle sales. And while some have experienced boredom and restlessness, for others the greater allotment of free time has afforded the performance of leisure practices previously abandoned or never undertaken. New rhythms of leisure have emerged, encouraging absorption in knitting and dressmaking, painting, gardening and DIY (do it yourself). Many have adopted new self-motivated exercise regimes through which physical fitness is gained by developing a eurhythmically efficient, trained body (Edensor, Kärrholm, & Wirdelöv, 2018).

David Nye (2010) writes about how the arrival of a blackout in New York prompted people to change their long-established habits to converse with neighbours, stage parties and go walking outside in the familiar city suddenly rendered strange by an enveloping darkness. Guido Borelli similarly shows how for Venice's inhabitants, the disruption to everyday rhythms created by swarms of tourists has been dramatically suspended, enabling a less stressful, more leisurely reoccupation of their streets and canals.

This also reveals how despite the propensity of bureaucrats, politicians and employees to abruptly change rhythms to which people have become habituated, these can be adapted, bypassed or improvised to produce more independently organised, comfortable routines. Donald Anderson investigates how taxi drivers are subject to technocratic means of control via information gathering and continuous remote monitoring, threatening their own more sensuous, geographically aware and improvisational modes of negotiating urban roads. Yet he also shows how drivers sidestep and subvert this rhythmic management, by also drawing on emerging technological means.

Finally, also drawing on quantitative technological data, Harry Pitts, Eleanor Jean and Yas Clarke examine how while such information is typically interpreted dispassionately and abstractly, it can alternatively be analysed to solicit heightened awareness of more intimate bodily rhythms. Here, abstract quantitative data become something intimate, embodied, for there are more progressive potentialities that inhere in rhythm-recording technologies. By way of demonstration, the data that recorded the heart rate, movement, sleep and food intake of the authors were deployed to compose a musical score, sonic information that was affectively and sensorially apprehended. In contradistinction to a dry, quantitative assessment, these everyday bodily regularities were revealed as the sensuous rhythms they are.

CONCLUSION: TOLERANT CO-EXISTENCE

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced people to adopt very different daily and weekly work, leisure and domestic rhythms to which they were formerly

habituated. Besides the positive effects engendered through the development of alternative rhythms – the acquisition of new pursuits and skills, the slowing down of frantic rhythms and opportunities to strengthen relationships with people, places and non-humans – this has provided an occasion on which to accommodate and attune to the rhythms of others. In these times, the confrontation with those whose rhythms are slower or faster than our own, are divergently scheduled, perhaps seeming impractical or chaotic, has the potential to cultivate a greater tolerance towards these very different temporal frameworks. We have learned to adjust to the slower mobile rhythms of fellow travellers on public transport or older shoppers at the supermarket till, to accept that the temporal vacuum of the domestic day will be filled differently according to individual proclivities and to tolerate the various rhythmic habits of others.

Several chapters in this book highlight how in certain contexts, greater rhythmic diversity and tolerance can reign. Katherine Stansfield investigates how the highly diverse rhythms enacted in a super diverse area of London are generated by many actors. Collectively, these diverse rhythms contribute to the production of potent street atmospheres, soliciting a sensory and affective awareness about how we might tolerantly live with difference. Equally compelling is Marina Karides portrayal of the complex and loosely observed polyrhythms of the Greek island of Lesbos. Combining cosmic rhythms with annual tourist rhythms (including the distinctive rhythms of lesbian tourism), as well as family, agricultural, seasonal non-human rhythms and recent migratory arrivals of asylum seekers and refugees, the island allows a wealth of polyrhythms to persist. This is facilitated by an absence of the constraints imposed on the rhythmic practices of others, exemplifying the virtues of looser, more tolerant perspectives towards rhythmic diversity. In this regard, the contrast between the more regulated and less regulated festivals discussed by James Macpherson is manifest in the divergent scope for participatory improvisation and negotiation of space at the two events. One kind of highly managed festival focuses on the production of static audiences held in thrall to spectacular, timetabled shows while more loosely arranged events encourage a moving around between different attractions, and a tendency towards carnivalesque, ludic practices.

Finally, challenges to strict rhythmic conventions, as Jessie Stein evocatively details, can be organised by staging multicultural music and dance events. At Munich's *Plug in Beats*, participants are invited to select dance tracks that align with their own cultural preferences. Following each other in succession, these musical forms and the dances performed in response to them generate a respectful appreciation of rhythmic diversity that engenders an embodied solidarity between participants. Bodies align and realign with different beats in this inclusive setting, as dancers *feel* each other's rhythms by engaging with each other's musical tastes, even if they find dancing to the rhythms of the other difficult.

Adaptation to COVID-19 rhythms can instigate a reflexive sense that our ordinary routines are themselves peculiar, not some kind of ‘normal’ to which we must return. Unreflexively performed routinised practice allows business to proceed as usual without being interrogated. However, seemingly common sensical rhythms, once subject to consideration, may suddenly appear to be unbalanced, oppressive and confining, and the normative compulsions to work and spend and possess things may be revealed as unthinking habits. Critically, it is the collective performance of such unreflexive practices that has culminated in ecological devastation, extensive social and economic inequalities, and reductive forms of mediated information, conditions that remain unamenable to critique precisely because of their habitual performance. In this sense, the COVID-19 pandemic, despite its devastating consequences, might have opened an opportunity for more reflexive thinking about the malign effects that can be produced by the shared re-enactment of habits.

Unreflexively immersed in our social worlds, we are often oblivious to the cosmic, tidal, weather-related, tectonic and other non-human rhythms that are always present in addition to the embodied, social and economic rhythms of humans. Contemporary human activity all too often proceeds without acknowledging that it is essential to align human rhythms with these earthly, non-human pulses, though certain non-Western forms of knowledge and practice are far more closely connected to them. As Gordon Walker emphasises in his chapter, only by reattuning our rhythms to accord more closely with non-human rhythms can we humans address emergent, potentially devastating environmental change and avoid the arrhythmic effects that result from their misalignment.

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