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Afterword

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Afterword

Dawn Lyon

Abstract

The Afterword offers a reflection on the power of rhythm as both an object and tool of analysis for making sense of the experience and patterning of everyday life and the social and cultural processes that give it shape and texture, 'flow and form' at different scales. Informed by sociological research on work, time and everyday life and the 'rhythmanalysis' of Henri Lefebvre and Catherine Régulier, it discusses the significance of the body and the senses for grasping rhythm, working with sound and image to research rhythm, and coordination and disruption in work and everyday life.

This special section on rhythm brings together a wonderful set of texts and materials that capture, evoke and analyse rhythm. If there was any doubt, the collection shows the power of rhythm and what the editors have termed 'rhythmic aesthetic formations' for making sense of the experience and patterning of everyday life and the social and cultural processes that give it shape and texture, 'flow and form' (Benveniste, 1966). Rhythm complicates epochal claims about speed and acceleration—or indeed slowness—and it draws attention to the lived experience of time and space and how they unfold in the everyday. The multimodal contributions take the reader/viewer underwater with mollusc gleaners in Senegal and on the water with the inhabitants of a now-submerged village in Sudan. We follow different exploratory and experimental directions, guided by rhythm as both an object and tool of analysis (Elden, 2004), to grasp the intertwined and interrupted experience of work and cinema viewing in Delhi and the visceral disruption to everyday life brought about by a sudden death and the collective grief of a community in Namibia. And we appreciate how rhythm operates at and across different scales through the life story of a land broker in a south Indian coastal city, which is both a slowly unfolding biography and an account of rapid urbanisation.

I came to read, listen to and view the materials that compose this collection with a background in sociology of work, time and everyday life, an interest in visual and sensory modes of research, and with the 'rhythmanalysis' of Henri Lefebvre and Catherine Régulier in mind, itself inspired by urban studies, literature, philosophy and more (Lefebvre, 2004). So mine was a multi/interdisciplinary reading from the outset. The fits well with recent interest in the 'return' of rhythm (Henriques et al, 2014) which has moved around different disciplines from literature (Barletta, 2020) to biology (Williams et al, 2021). I was fortunate to participate in the conference panel on rhythm, sight, sound and work in times of uncertainty (in collaboration with Jack Warner) from which the idea for this collection emerged at the RAI Film Festival in 2021. Based on Jack's doctoral research, we discussed the different registers of rhythm experienced by bicycle couriers in relation to the operation of the apps through which orders are communicated. From moments of harmonious synchronicity

(*eurhythmia* in Lefebvre's terms) to fragmentation (*arrhythmia* following Lefebvre), the couriers deploy their senses to manage the volume, scheduling and intensity of their work. If Lefebvre has had something of an 'afterlife' (Elden, 2006) in geography, urban studies and sociology since the posthumous publication of *Éléments de rythmanalyse: introduction à la connaissance des rythmes* (in 1992), and especially its translation into in English as *Rhythmanalysis* in 2004, the contributions at the conference and to this special section draw on a wider range of resources, notably Deleuze, Ingold and Bücher. Together with a focus on aesthetics, this makes for a rich conceptual as well as empirical and aesthetic collection.

The significance of the body and the senses for grasping rhythm

Across the contributions, we read, hear and see the body as a site and source of rhythm. Rhythmanalysis uses the body and the senses as an instrument of research and thinks with the body 'not in the abstract, but in lived temporality' (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 21). Indeed, 'to grasp a rhythm, it is necessary to have been ***grasped*** by it; one must let oneself go, give oneself over, abandon oneself to its duration' (ibid., p. 27, emphasis in original). Lefebvre's notion of 'dressage' draws attention to the process of 'entrainment' that is involved in getting into rhythm. The mollusc gleaners in Sandro Simon's film quite literally learn to 'bend' their bodies to reach into the murky waters, to the point where they do not have to think about how to act as 'dressage fills the place of the unforeseen' (ibid., p. 39-40).

For the anthropologist who is not already steeped in the *cyclical* rhythms of grief, for instance, tuning into rhythm requires 'the cultivation of a peculiar style of attentiveness' (McCormack, 2013, p. 42). In Yannick van den Berg's account of mourning and accompanying sound clips which register the visceral pain of loss following the death of a woman in childbirth in Namibia, he comes to sense the collective rhythm of the moment through his own bodily presence. Rhythm has an affective resonance as he is moved in the situation; or, following Yi Chen, it is 'a *meta-sense* which synthesises bodily and extra-bodily impressions' (2017, p. 2).

Working with sound and image to research rhythm

Rhythm is both extensive and elusive. We know and feel it through the body and recognise how it shapes the everyday. If, as Lefebvre writes, some rhythms 'operate on the surface', others, however, appear 'through indirect effects' (1991, p. 205). There is a sense of to-and-fro in doing rhythmanalysis—as with ethnography more generally—of being immersed, on the one hand, and trying to take a more distant tack, on the other (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 17), both with the body and the camera. The short film by Sandro Simon about mollusc gleaners in the Sine-Saloum Delta in Senegal captures this relation beautifully. In the early shots from a more-then-human perspective, the sound of the water and the delicate movement of the worker's fingers searching the seabed convey the sense of this watery and back-breaking work but it's almost too much to take in. It's only towards the end that the camera surfaces and the scene comes into view. Now we grasp the rhythm of the work.

Interestingly, Lefebvre was not in favour of using the camera to capture rhythm (although it's hard to imagine that he wouldn't appreciate the contributions here), preferring 'the discriminatory capacity of the auditory' (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 69) or 'the attentive ear' which can distinguish sounds and movement and perceive interactions (2004, p. 27). In the first of van den Berg's recordings, there are layers of sound—singing and wailing alongside the voice of the priest which the ear can disentangle to appreciate the 'interference' of the linear and cyclical rhythms that constitute the moment.

Collage is also an effective device to explore and convey the polyrhythmic complexity of work, everyday life or urban space. In Ian M. Cook's audio-visual essay, a collage of images takes the viewer's gaze up and across the intense urbanisation of the city of Mangaluru, in coastal south India, as the soundscape sets the mood. And Rosemary Grennan's mesmerising multiscreen work sets intertwined scenes alongside one another, playfully distorting and connecting them to create a powerful and rhythmic aesthetic.

Coordination and disruption in work and everyday life

Working with rhythm attunes us to forms of collective coordination and disruption. In Ian M. Cook's collage, the camera in one image repeatedly moves up the façades of the buildings that arise literally from the work of Mr Pai, the film's protagonist and the self-declared longest serving land broker in the area. He brings people together, mediating caste and gender, and matching spaces to buyers—a form of synchronisation through which he orchestrates the rhythmic patterns of the city. Yet, in the very city whose everyday urban aesthetics he has fashioned through social relations as much as material construction, he is 'falling out of step', cut out of a deal he set up. Nevertheless, he sticks to his daily routine and commitment to be seen in the same place at the same time and sustains his public display of success.

If the swift construction of Mangaluru also involves losses and destruction, the collection includes a film and text about the apparent eradication of place. When a village is submerged by a planned flood following the damming of the River Nile in Northern Sudan—a plan that was not shared with local inhabitants—there is a powerful juxtaposition of images between the village on dry land and the view of the reservoir where it was previously situated. Disruption is never a singular moment but a process (see Lefaki, 2022), and Valerie Hänsch shows how memory informs the 'formation of new infrastructural connections'—boats and oars, for instance—and new practices of wayfinding as 'troubled senses' adjust to the changed environment. People become attuned to the water and learn to anticipate its fluctuations, and use their knowledge of the land to navigate the lake.

For Lefebvre, discontinuities which break up the banality of the everyday are full of possibility and the potential for social transformation. The opening shots of Rosemary Grennan's film set in Delhi about cinematic-time make this argument feel compelling as cinema-goers collectively protest a refusal to grant them access. Whilst cinema and work appear to interrupt one another, this combination is an intertwined rhythm which enhances both the experience of work and watching as well as the film, which is otherwise 'too slow' and predictable despite the pleasures of the familiar narrative. Instead, viewers mobilise rhythm to make their own rhythmic aesthetic formations.

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