

Rhythmanalysis displays all the characteristics which made Lefebvre one of the most important Marxist thinkers of the twentieth century. In the analysis of rhythms – both biological and social – Lefebvre shows the interrelation of space and time in the understanding of everyday life.

With dazzling skill, Lefebvre moves between discussions of music, the commodity, measurement, the media and the city. In doing so he shows how a non-linear conception of time and history balanced his famous rethinking of the question of space. This volume also includes his earlier essays on *The Rhythmanalytical Project* and *Attempt at the Rhythmanalysis of Mediterranean Towns*.

Henri Lefebvre (1901–91) wrote widely on politics, philosophy and sociology. He is best known for his writings on everyday life, cities and the production of space.

Stuart Elden is Lecturer in political geography at the University of Durham and the author of *Understanding Henri Lefebvre*. **Gerald Moore** is a graduate student at Downing College, Cambridge, working on contemporary French philosophy.

ATHLONE CONTEMPORARY EUROPEAN THINKERS



continuum

LONDON • NEW YORK

www.continuumbooks.com

ISBN 0-8264-7299-0



9 780826 472991 >

LEFEBVRE

Rhythmanalysis

Rhythmanalysis

Space, Time and Everyday Life

HENRI LEFEBVRE

Translated by

STUART ELDEN

and

GERALD MOORE

With an Introduction by

STUART ELDEN



Contents

Continuum

The Tower Building,
11 York Road,
London, SE1 7NX

80 Maiden Lane,
Suite 704
New York, NY 10038

www.continuumbooks.com

English translation © Continuum 2004

Elements of Rhythmanalysis originally published as
Éléments de rythmanalyse by Éditions Syllepse, Paris, 1992

First published by Continuum 2004
Reprinted 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN-10: 0-8264-6993-0 (hardback)

0-8264-7299-0 (paperback)

ISBN-13: 978-0-8264-6993-9 (hardback)

978-0-8264-7299-1 (paperback)

Typeset by Kenneth Burnley, Wirral, Cheshire

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Biddles Ltd., King's Lynn, Norfolk

Acknowledgements	vi
Rhythmanalysis: An Introduction STUART ELDEN	vii
<i>Elements of Rhythmanalysis: An Introduction to the Understanding of Rhythms</i> HENRI LEFEBVRE	1
Introduction to Rhythmanalysis	3
1 The Critique of the Thing	5
2 The Rhythmanalyst: A Previsionary Portrait	19
3 Seen from the Window	27
4 Dressage	38
5 The Media Day	46
6 The Manipulations of Time	51
7 Music and Rhythms	57
8 Conclusions (Résumé)	67
The Rhythmanalytical Project HENRI LEFEBVRE AND CATHERINE RÉGULIER	71
Attempt at the Rhythmanalysis of Mediterranean Cities HENRI LEFEBVRE AND CATHERINE RÉGULIER	85
Notes	101
Index	111

The rhythm analyst could, in the long term, attempt something analogous: works [*oeuvres*] might return to and intervene in the everyday. Without claiming to *change life*, but by fully reinstating the sensible in consciousnesses and in *thought*, he would accomplish a tiny part of the *revolutionary* transformation of this world and this society in decline. Without any declared political position.

Since the so-called *modern* era, the concept of the **work of art** has become obscure without disappearing; on the contrary; it extends and differentiates itself into substitutes: the **product** and the **thing**. The rhythm analyst will bring about many works himself by renewing the very concept of the work.

Desire, of which so much has been said (in psychic terms), is both work and the product of work. Yet it has its rhythm; it **is** a rhythm, whose goal (its end) is either placed outside, or remains internal to, its act (operation). Sensual desire enters into the first case, aesthetic desire into the second. Between need and desire there is a well-known difference, but there is no discontinuity. The intervention of speech and memory does not open up an abyss. Need and desire, sleep and wake, work and repose are rhythms in interaction. This view of temporality defines neither the ones nor the others; it enters into the definitions: into the analysis. We have yet to catch unaware (to grasp) need, desire, reflections and passions in *others*.

Several concepts are established in this ambition. Let us recapitulate: difference and repetition – interaction and composition – cyclical and linear – frequency and measure . . . eurhythmia, arrhythmia, polyrhythmia . . .

3

Seen from the Window

(No! this title belongs to Colette. – I write: ‘Seen from my windows, overlooking a junction in Paris, therefore overlooking the road.’)¹⁷

Noise. Noises. Murmurs. When lives are lived and hence mixed together, they distinguish themselves badly from one another. Noise, chaotic, has no rhythm. However, the attentive ear begins to separate out, to distinguish the sources, to bring them back together by perceiving interactions. If we cease to listen to sounds and noises and instead listen to our bodies (the importance of which cannot be stressed too greatly), we normally grasp (hear, understand) neither the rhythms nor their associations, which nonetheless constitute us. It is only in suffering that a particular rhythm breaks apart, modified by illness. The analysis comes closer to pathology than habitual arrhythmia.

In order to grasp and analyse rhythms, it is necessary to get outside them, but not completely: be it through illness or a technique. A certain exteriority enables the analytic intellect to function. However, 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. Like in music and the learning of a language (in which one only really understands the meanings and connections when one comes to *produce* them, which is to say, to produce spoken rhythms).

In order to *grasp* this fleeting object, which is not exactly an *object*, it is therefore necessary to situate oneself simultaneously inside and outside. A balcony does the job admirably, in relation

to the street, and it is to this putting into perspective (of the street) that we owe the marvellous invention of balconies, and that of the terrace from which one dominates the road and passers-by. In the absence of which you could content yourself with a window, on the condition that it does not overlook a sombre corner or a gloomy internal courtyard. Or a perennially deserted lawn.

From the window opening onto rue R. facing the famous P. Centre, there is no need to lean much to see into the distance.¹⁸ To the right, the palace-centre P., the Forum, up as far as the (central) Bank of France. To the left up as far as the Archives. Perpendicular to this direction, the *Hôtel de Ville* and, on the other side, the *Arts et Métiers*. The whole of Paris, ancient and modern, traditional and creative, active and lazy.

He who walks down the street, over there, is immersed in the multiplicity of noises, murmurs, rhythms (including those of the body, but does he pay attention, except at the moment of crossing the street, when he has to calculate roughly the number of his steps?). By contrast, from the window, the noises distinguish themselves, the flows separate out, rhythms respond to one another. Towards the right, below, a traffic light. On red, cars at a standstill, the pedestrians cross, feeble murmurings, footsteps, confused voices. One does not chatter while crossing a dangerous junction under the threat of wild cats and elephants ready to charge forward, taxis, buses, lorries, various cars. Hence the relative silence in this crowd. A kind of soft murmuring, sometimes a cry, a call.

Therefore the people produce completely different noises when the cars stop: feet and words. From right to left and back again. And on the pavements along the perpendicular street. At the green light, steps and words stop. A second of silence and then it's the rush, the starting up of tens of cars, the rhythms of the old bangers speeding up as quickly as possible. At some risk: passers-by to the left, buses cutting across, other vehicles. Whereby a slowing down and restart (stage one: starting up – stage two: slowing down for the turn – stage three: brutal restart, foot down, top speed, excluding traffic jams ...). The harmony between what one sees and what one hears (from the window) is remarkable.

Strict concordance. Perhaps because the other side of the road is taken up by the immense shopping centre, nicknamed Beaubourg after the name that immortalised a president. On this side, people walking back and forth, numerous and in silence, tourists and those from the outskirts, a mix of young and old, alone and in couples, but no cars alongside culture. After the red light, all of a sudden it's the bellowing charge of wild cats, big or small, monstrous lorries turning towards Bastille, the majority of small vehicles hurtling towards the *Hôtel de Ville*. The noise grows, grows in intensity and strength, at its peak becomes unbearable, though quite well borne by the stench of fumes. Then stop. Let's do it again, with more pedestrians. Two-minute intervals. Amidst the fury of the cars, the pedestrians cluster together, a clot here, a lump over there; grey dominates, with multicoloured flecks, and these heaps break apart for the race ahead. Sometimes, the old cars stall in the middle of the road and the pedestrians move around them like waves around a rock, though not without condemning the drivers of the badly placed vehicles with withering looks. Hard rhythms: alternations of silence and outburst, time both broken and accentuated, striking he who takes to listening from his window, which astonishes him more than the disparate movements of the crowds.

Disparate crowds, yes, tourists from faraway countries, Finland, Sweden, Portugal, whose cars but with difficulty find places to park, shoppers come from afar, wholesalers, lovers of art or novelties, people from the outskirts who stream in between the so-called peak hours, in such a way that *everybody*, the *world*, is always there around the huge metallic trinkets; boys and girls often go forth hand in hand, as if to support each other in this test of modernity, in the exploration of these meteorites fallen on old Paris, come from a planet several centuries ahead of our own, and on top of that a complete failure on the market! ... Many among these young people walk, walk, without a break, do the tour of the sights, of Beaubourg, of the Forum: one sees them again and again, grouped or solitary; they walk indefatigably, chewing on gum or a sandwich. They only stop to stretch themselves out, no doubt exhausted, on the square itself, in the arcades of the Chiracian Forum, or on the steps of the Fountain of the Innocent,

which now serves only this purpose. The noise that pierces the ear comes not from passers-by, but from the engines pushed to the limit when starting up. No ear, no piece of apparatus could grasp this whole, this flux of metallic and carnal bodies. In order to grasp the rhythms, a bit of time, a sort of meditation on time, the city, people, is required.

Other, less lively, slower rhythms superimpose themselves on this inexorable rhythm, which hardly dies down at night: children leaving for school, some very noisy, even piercing screams of morning recognition. Then towards half past nine it's the arrival of the shoppers, followed shortly by the tourists, in accordance, with exceptions (storms or advertising promotions), with a timetable that is almost always the same; the flows and conglomerations succeed one another: they get fatter or thinner but always agglomerate at the corners in order subsequently to clear a path, tangle and disentangle themselves amongst the cars.

These last rhythms (schoolchildren, shoppers, tourists) would be more **cyclical**, of large and simple intervals, at the heart of livelier, **alternating** rhythms, at brief intervals, cars, regulars, employees, bistro clients. The interaction of diverse, repetitive and different rhythms animates, as one says, the street and the neighbourhood. The linear, which is to say, in short, succession, consists of journeys to and fro: it combines with the cyclical, the movements of long intervals. The cyclical is social organisation manifesting itself. The linear is the daily grind, the routine, therefore the perpetual, made up of chance and encounters.

The night does not interrupt the diurnal rhythms but modifies them, and above all slows them down. However, even at three or four o'clock in the morning, there are always a few cars at the red light. Sometimes one of them, whose driver is coming back from a late night, goes straight through it. Other times, there is no-one at the lights, with their alternating flashes (red, amber, green), and the signal continues to function in the void, a despairing social mechanism marching inexorably through the desert, before the façades that dramatically proclaim their vocation as ruins.

Should a window suddenly light up, or on the contrary go dark, the solitary dreamer might ask himself – in vain – if it concerns a scene of illness or of love, if it is the movement [*geste*] of a child

who gets up too early or of an insomniac. Never does a head, a face appear in the dozens and dozens of windows. Except if there is something going on in the street, an explosion, a fire engine that hurtles without stopping towards a call for help. In short, arrhythmia reigns, except for rare moments and circumstances.

From my window overlooking courtyards and gardens, the view and the supply of space are very different. Overlooking the gardens, the differences between habitual (daily, therefore linked to night and day) rhythms blur; they seem to disappear into a sculptural immobility. Except, of course, the sun and the shadows, the well lit and the gloomy corners, quite cursory contrasts. But look at those trees, those lawns and those groves. To your eyes they situate themselves in a permanence, in a spatial simultaneity, in a coexistence. But look harder and longer. This simultaneity, up to a certain point, is only apparent: a surface, a spectacle. Go deeper, dig beneath the surface, listen attentively instead of simply looking, of reflecting the effects of a mirror. You thus perceive that each plant, each tree, has its rhythm, made up of several: the trees, the flowers, the seeds and fruits, each have their time. The plum tree? The flowers were born in the spring, before the leaves, the tree was white before turning green. But on this cherry tree, on the other hand, there are flowers that opened before the leaves, which will survive the fruits and fall late in the autumn and not all at once. Continue and you will see this garden and the *objects* (which are in no way things) **polyrhythmically**, or if you prefer *symphonically*. In place of a collection of fixed things, you will follow each *being*, each *body*, as having its own time above the whole. Each one therefore having its place, its rhythm, with its recent past, a foreseeable and a distant future.

Are the simultaneous and the immobile deceptive? Are the synchronous, the background and the spectacle abusive? No and yes. No: they constitute, they are, the **present**. Modernity curiously enlarged, deepened and at the same time dilapidated the present. The quasi-suppression of distances and waiting periods (by the media) amplifies the present, but these media give only reflections and shadows. You attend the incessant fêtes or massacres, you see the dead bodies, you contemplate the explosions; missiles are fired before your eyes. You are there! . . . but no, you are not

there; your present is composed of simulacra; the image before you simulates the real, drives it out, is not there, and the simulation of the drama, the moment, has nothing dramatic about it, except in the verbal.

Would it be the *feeling* of the spectacle that appears *spectacular*, that the open window overlooking one of the liveliest streets in Paris shows? To attribute this slightly pejorative character to this *vision* (as the dominant trait) would be unjust and would bypass the *real*, that is to say, its meaning. The characteristic traits are truly temporal and rhythmic, not visual. To release and listen to rhythms demands attention and a certain time. In other words, it serves only as a *glimpse* for entering into the *murmur*, noises, cries.¹⁹ The classic term in philosophy, 'the object', is not appropriate to rhythm. 'Objective'? Yes, but exceeding the narrow framework of objectivity, by bringing to it a multiplicity of (sensorial and significant) *meanings*.²⁰

The succession of alternations, of differential repetitions, suggests that there is somewhere in this present an order, which comes from elsewhere. Which reveals itself. Where? In the monuments, the palaces, from the *Archives* to the Bank of France, meteorites fallen from another planet into the popular centre, for so long abandoned, the *Cour des Miracles*, a place of rogues. Therefore, beside the present, a sort of presence-absence, badly localised and strong: the State, which is not seen from the window, but which looms over this present, the omnipresent State.

Just as beyond the horizon, other horizons loom without being present, so beyond the sensible and visible order, which reveals political power, other orders suggest themselves: a logic, a division of labour, *leisure activities* are also **produced** (and productive), although they are proclaimed *free* and even 'free time'. Isn't this freedom also a *product*?

Secret objects also speak, in their own way, sending out a message. The Palace screams, yells, louder than the cars. It screams, 'Down with the past! Long live the modern! Down with history, I've swallowed it, digested it and brought it back up [*restituée*] . . .'. It has as perpetual witness and proof the cop at the junction, Law and Order, and if someone goes too far, he knows he will be arrested, whistled at, trapped, in such a way that the

solitary cop induces the discourse of Order, more and better than the façades of the Square and the junction. Unless he also induces an anarchistic discourse, for he is always there, and of little use; the fear of an accident maintains the order of the junctions more efficiently than the police. Whose presence arouses no protestation anyway, everyone knowing its uselessness in advance.

Could it be that the lessons of the street are exhausted, outdated, and likewise the teachings of the window? Certainly not. They perpetuate themselves by renewing themselves. The window overlooking the street is not a mental place, where the inner gaze follows abstract perspectives: a practical space, private and concrete, the window offers views that are more than spectacles; mentally prolonged spaces. In such a way that the implication in the spectacle entails the explication of this spectacle. Familiarity preserves it; it disappears and is reborn, with the everydayness of both the inside and the outside world. Opacity and horizons, obstacles and perspectives implicate one another because they complicate one another, imbricate one another to the point of allowing the Unknown, the giant city, to be glimpsed or guessed at. With its diverse spaces affected by diverse times: rhythms.

Once the interactions are determined, the analysis continues. Is there a hierarchy in this tangled mess, this scaffolding? A determining rhythm? A primordial and coordinating aspect?

The window suggests several hypotheses, which wandering and the street will confirm or invalidate. Wouldn't the bodies (human, living, plus those of a few dogs) that move about down there, in the car-wrecked swarming whole, impose a law? Which one? An order of grandeur. The windows, doors, streets and façades are measured in proportion to human size. The hands that move about, the limbs, do not amount to signs, even though they throw out multiple messages. But is there a relation between these physical flows of movements and gestures and the culture that shows itself (and yells) in the enormous murmur of the junction? The little bistros on the *rue R.*, the boutiques, are on a human scale, like the passers-by. Opposite, the constructions wanted to *transcend* this scale, to leave known dimensions and also all models past and possible behind; leading to the exhibition of

metal and frozen guts, in the form of solidified piping, and the harshest reflections. And it's a meteorite fallen from another planet, where technocracy reigns untrammelled.

Absurd? Or super-rational? What do these strange contrasts say? What does the proximity between a certain archaism attached to history and the exhibited supra-modernity whisper? Has it a secret – or secrets? Does the State-political order write across this scene, with the signature of the author? Without doubt, but the time and the age that inscribe themselves in the performance of this spectacle, that give it meaning, should not be forgotten. And why the *rue de la Truanderie* and the *passage des Ménétriers*,²¹ preserved throughout the upheavals?

The essential? The determining factor? Money. But money no longer renders itself sensible as such, even on the façade of the bank. This centre of Paris bears the imprint of what it hides, but it hides it. Money passes through circulation. Not long ago, this *capital* centre retained something of the provincial, of the mediaeval: historic and crumbling. So many discussions and projects for these predestined or abandoned places! One such amiable and charming project – very 18th century – authored by Ricardo Bofill – was set aside after its adoption.²² Another such project, which made the centre of Paris the administrative centre (for the ministries) of the country, seduced, it would appear, the Chief; his disappearance entailed that of the project. And a compromise between the powers – the State, money, culture – was attempted. Windows for all products, including intellectual ones, correcting the drabness with images most *belle époque*.

How is it that **people** (as one says, since certain phrases like 'the people' and 'workers' have lost some of their prestige) accept this display? That they come in crowds, in perpetual flows? In such a way that the rhythms of their passing weaken or are reinforced, but link up with and follow on from one another, and never disappear (even at night!).

What is it that attracts them to this extent? Do they come simply *to see*? But what? The big building that was conceived not in order to be seen, but in order *to give sight*? Yet, we come to see it, and we cast a distracted eye over that which it *exposes*. We go around this void [*ce vide*], which fills itself up with things and

people in order to empty itself [*se vider*], and so on. Wouldn't these people come above all to see and meet one another? Would this crowd unconsciously give itself the consciousness of a crowd?

The window replies. First, the spectacle of the junction and the perpendicular streets which, not long ago, formed a neighbourhood of the city, peopled by a sort of native, with many artisans and small shopkeepers. In short, people of the neighbourhood. Those who remain live under the roofs, in the attics, with Chinese or Arabic neighbours. Production has left these places, even those businesses that require storage depots, warehouses, stocks and vast offices. Nothing to say about these most well-known facts other than their consequences. For example: the crowds, the masses on the square at Beaubourg, around mediaeval Saint-Merri, or on the *Place des Innocents*, of which it would be too easy to say that it has lost all its innocence. The squares have re-found their ancient function, for a long time imperilled, of gathering, of setting the scene and staging spontaneous popular theatre.

Here on the square, between Saint-Merri and Modernism erupts a mediaeval-looking festival: fire-eaters, jugglers, snake charmers, but also preachers and sit-in discussions. Openness and adventure next to dogmatic armour-plating. All possible games, material and spiritual. Impossible to classify, to count. Without doubt many deviant wanderers that seek, knowing not what for – themselves! But many who seek only to forget, neither town nor country, but their own corners. And for hours and hours they walk, find themselves back at the junctions, circle the places that are closed and enclosed. They almost never stop, eating some hot-dog or other as they walk (rapid Americanisation). On the square, they occasionally stop walking, staring straight ahead of them; they no longer know what to do. Watching, half-listening to those pitching their wares, then taking up again their unrelenting march.

There on the square, there is something maritime about the rhythms. Currents traverse the masses. Streams break off, which bring or take away new participants. Some of them go towards the jaws of the monster, which gobbles them down in order quite quickly to throw them back up. The tide invades the immense square, then withdraws: flux and reflux. The agitation and the

noise are so great that the residents have complained. The fateful hour: ten o'clock in the evening, noises forbidden: so the crowd becomes silent, calm but more melancholy; oh fatal ten o'clock at night! The spectacle and murmur disappeared, sadness remains.

With these places are we in the everyday or the extra-everyday? Well, the one doesn't prevent the other and the pseudo-fête emerges only apparently from the everyday. The former prolongs the latter by other means, with a perfected organisation that reunites *everything* – advertising, culture, arts, games, propaganda, rules of work, urban life . . . And the police keep vigil, watch over.

Rhythms. Rhythms. They reveal and they hide. Much more diverse than in music, or the so-called civil code of successions, relatively simple texts in relation to the City. Rhythms: the music of the City, a scene that listens to itself, an image in the present of a discontinuous sum. Rhythms perceived from the invisible window, pierced into the wall of the façade . . . But next to the other windows, it is also within a rhythm that escapes it . . .

No camera, no image or series of images can show these rhythms. It requires equally attentive eyes and ears, a head and a memory and a heart. A memory? Yes, in order to grasp this present otherwise than in an instantaneous moment, to restore it in its moments, in the movement of diverse rhythms. The recollection of other moments and of all hours is indispensable, not as a simple point of reference, but in order not to isolate this present and in order to *live* it in all its diversity, made up of *subjects* and *objects*, subjective states and objective figures. Here the old philosophical question (of subject, object and their relations) is found posed in non-speculative terms, close to practice. The observer in the window knows that he takes **his time** as first reference, but that the first impression displaces itself and includes the most diverse rhythms, on the condition that they remain *to scale*. The passage from *subject* to *object* requires neither a leap over an abyss, nor the crossing of a desert. Rhythms always need a reference; the initial moment persists through other perceived givens. The philosophical tradition has raised half-real, half-fictitious, problems that are badly resolved by remaining within speculative ambiguity. Observation [*le regard*] and meditation follow the lines

of force that come from the past, from the present and from the possible, and which rejoin one another in the observer, simultaneously centre and periphery.

Here as elsewhere, opposites re-find each other, recognise one other, in a reality that is at the same time more *real* and more ideal, more complicated than its elements that are already accounted for. This clarifies and actualises the concept of *dialectical thought* that does not cease to fill these pages with so many questions and but a few answers!