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**A MANIFESTO
FOR A RHYTHM
POLITICS**

EPFL PRESS

**“Rhythm is not a measurement:
it is a vision of the world.”**

Octavio Paz

An exploration of how to navigate the demands of modern life through the lens of rhythm.

We live in a world increasingly saturated – with signs, norms, objects, and demands – and that overstimulation contributes to our daily sense of alienation. In this manifesto, the authors argue that the path to emancipation lies in our capacity to reclaim political agency over our rhythms, both individual and collective.

A Manifesto for a Rhythm Politics explores the fundamentally spatial and territorial dimensions of time, as well as the temporal dynamics of spatial forms, to sketch the contours of a rhythmology. Rather than simply opposing fullness to emptiness, slowness to acceleration, or overwork to boredom, they invite us to reflect on what enables us to breathe and what awakens our desire. By returning to the original meaning of rhythm – a way of flowing – the book offers a dynamic understanding of societies. It allows us to bridge measurement and lived experience, and to recognize the role of spontaneity, randomness, disorganization, and disorder alongside regularity.

On a practical level, rhythm provides tools to address diverse issues such as traffic congestion, personal burnout, and the management of crowds. Ultimately, a politics of rhythm advocates for a choreographic approach to emancipation – one that embraces different ways of living while composing a shared world.

Photography by Christian Lutz

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IDIORHYTHMIA

In recent years, the question of rhythm has become increasingly relevant due to the steadily growing time pressures of daily life. In this book, idiorhythmia—which relates to people’s ability to live at their own rhythm, not just in terms of time, but also in terms of spaces that allow them to feel at ease—is used to identify and explore opportunities for liberation. Idiorhythmia, in other words, is the most intimate expression of our freedom. It is a unique movement that situates us in time and space, with our bodies as a starting point.

Relaxing

Downtime

Burden

Congestion

Lassitude

Eurhythmia

Polyrhythmia

Speed

Patterns

Randomness

Order

Composition

Liberation

Surging



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Introduction

Catching our breath

Need to breathe
To breathe! Oh poem we cannot see!
Pure space exchanged continually
For one's own being. Counterpoise,
In which I come to be, a rhythm.
R. M. Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus*, II

Our daily lives are exhausting, stressful. Society is *relentless*, to use Christophe Mincke and Bertrand Montulet's¹ term.

“When you add kids, homework, and activities, you could say it's really fast paced during the week[.] Not a lot of time.”

A 42-year-old man²

“Today I counted: I spent two hours in my car just dealing with the day-to-day stuff.”

A 40-year-old woman³

“It's not good, but around 9:30 we turn on the TV. We're a mess.”

A 44-year-old man⁴

¹ Christophe Mincke, Bertrand Montulet, *La société sans répit* (Paris: Éditions Descartes et cie, 2019).

² Interview extracts, Guillaume Drevon, *Mobilité quotidienne et stratégies d'adaptation spatio-temporelles des ménages: une approche comparée des espaces transfrontaliers et non frontaliers des métropoles luxembourgeoises et grenobloises*, Thèse de Doctorat (Université de Grenoble Alpes: 2016).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Nowadays, our daily activities segue into one another at break-neck speed, with private and professional worlds merging; we work from home, answer work emails in the evening, take personal calls at the office, and are in constant contact with our partners via text messaging. To understand this phenomenon, we need a concept capable of describing the lives of people, organizations, and territories in their social, spatial, and temporal dimensions. With this manifesto, we speculate that the *concept of rhythm* fulfills this need, as a means of analyzing the changes taking place in the modern world as well as the unprecedented illnesses that plague our societies. After limited success in the history of science and ideas, the concept of rhythm is once again rearing its head.

We, along with Pascal Michon⁵ and Jean-Jacques Wunenberger,⁶ venture that the analysis of rhythms could empower us “to take measure of the fluid, fragmented world—a place of new potencies—we have entered” and “to devise the new forms of individual and collective self-awareness we need.” The poet Octavio Paz underscores the breadth of this challenge: “Rhythm is not a measure: it is a way of seeing the world.”⁷ Philosophers have evoked the difficulty of this: “With rhythm, we’re not dealing with knowledge... [w]e are essentially dealing with our ignorance.”⁸ With a need to better understand this and a handful of insights, we embraced the promise of a heuristic concept and opted to reflect on it in a collective way.

This manifesto is based on a definition of rhythm in the broad sense of *rhythmos*. This definition “includes but is not limited to Plato’s traditional definition of rhythm as an arithmetically ordered succession of strong and weak beats, and all of its cyclical and periodic derivatives.”⁹ It offers a new understanding of the link between

⁵ Pascal Michon, *Rythme, pouvoir, mondialisation*, “Rythmologies” coll. (Paris: Rhuthmos, 2016 [2005]), 492.

⁶ Jean-Jacques Wunenberger, *Les rythmes, lectures et théories* (Paris: LHarmattan, 1992).

⁷ Octavio Paz, “Le rythme” in *L’arc et la lyre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1956).

⁸ Pierre Sauvanet, Jean-Jacques Wunenberger (eds.), *Les rythmes. Lectures et théories* (Paris: LHarmattan, 1996).

⁹ Pascal Michon, “Rythme, rythmanalyse, rythmologie: un essai d’état des lieux,” *Rhuthmos*, January 9, 2013 [online] <http://rhuthmos.eu/spip.php?article644>.

space and time—“the expression of both in one”—and incorporates the concepts of measurement, form, and experience. Defined as a “specific way of flowing” and a form of the present moment, it seems suitable for interpreting and describing an increasingly unstable world. In addition to measuring regularity, this definition can be extended to allow for irregular, spontaneous movements, order and disorder; in other words, life, living, human experience, and the specific way we “inhabit time.”¹⁰ This proposal comes at a time when the question of speed—the acceleration of time and movement—meets that of our relationships with others, living together, and citizenship more broadly.

We were seeking a conceptual term that allowed us to better describe the lives of people, organizations, and territories in their social, spatial, and temporal dimensions. With this manifesto, we speculate that rhythm as a concept meets this need, as a means of analyzing the changes taking place in the modern world, as well as the pathologies that plague today’s societies.

Interpreting and describing rhythms underscores the challenges, issues, and underlying tenets surrounding “rhythm policies.” The latter should be designed to consider, appreciate, and sustain living things—in other words, to forge resilience and potential in the fight against contemporary saturation. Rhythms drive the very existence of both people and societies: our bodily functions, our daily rituals, our aesthetic experience, the fluxes that shape time and space, and the reordering of common structures.

Focusing on the question of rhythms also means revisiting key political issues relative to liberation¹¹ and domination, as well as difference and commonality, which underpin the social sciences and the societal model one expects to see in the midst of major social changes. This book therefore is a manifesto for the study and recognition of the fundamentally polyrhythmic nature of contemporary societies. It provides a framework for thinking about

¹⁰ J. Chesneaux, *Habiter le temps* (Paris: Fayard, 1996).

¹¹ Cornélius Castoriadis, *L’institution imaginaire de la société* (Paris: Seuil, 1975).

rhythm and rhythm policies by exploring essential issues, namely the struggle between the individual and collective, the path from experience to measurement, the fundamentally spatial and territorial nature of time, and the temporal dynamics of spatial forms.

We chose to approach rhythm from different angles (individual, collective, territorial, etc.), as well as to address measurement, form, and experience. Our threefold approach consists of an observation, a challenge, and a vision:

1. The manifesto emerged from the observation of alarming rhythm pathologies and the need for new concepts to describe our changing world, to describe space and time conjointly, and for other avenues and policies to create new means to respond to modern-day saturation.
2. We believe rhythm can help transcend dichotomous approaches, enabling us to move from static situations to dynamic ones, blending space and time, measurement and experience.
3. We will outline a policy of rhythms based on several founding principles to stimulate reflection on new patterns of “idiorhythmic”¹² liberation and means for creating common practices.

“Without rhythms, there is no life,” remarked chronobiologist Bernard Millet.¹³ Faced with acceleration, tension, and saturation, individuals, groups, organizations, and territories need breathing room. Or rather, they need to catch their breath and rediscover their vital rhythms. It is up to the social sciences to support them by providing a renewed approach to the concept.

P.S. Life and unexpected events invited themselves into our project in the form of a virus. The simultaneous lockdown in space and time of several billion people—which each of us experienced

¹² We borrow this term (to which we will refer again later) from Roland Barthes, *Comment vivre ensemble. Cours et séminaires au Collège de France (1976–1977)*, “Traces écrites” coll. (Paris: Seuil/IMEC, 2002).

¹³ Bernard Millet, “L’homme dans la ville en continu,” in Luc Gwiazdzinski (ed.), *La ville 24h/24* (La Tour d’Aigues: Editions de l’Aube, 2003), 87–94.

in our own way—is therefore clearly present in the background of this manifesto, written a mere handful of weeks prior. In order to test our approach against reality, we decided to report on this major upheaval in the form of a postscript that reinterprets rhythms based on the health crisis, and vice versa.

SATURATION

Saturation effects are deeply interpersonal. They result from an overload of signals, demands, needs, and activities. Saturation leads to congestion, suffocation, dizziness, and even exhaustion, and is also a source of stress, ennui, despair, and anger.

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I Rhythm pathologies

Today, the question of rhythm seems to encapsulate a certain social and political urgency. It is central to a complex array of social and psychological disorders that are inextricably linked to the development of capitalist society and the excesses of mass consumption. As German sociologist Hartmut Rosa¹⁴ observed (an idea we too support), the contemporary evolution of capitalism and society have led to a veritable “social acceleration” that generates new forms of alienation linked to time management. The geography of time has contributed greatly to our understanding of the relationship between spaces and daily activity rhythms since the 1970s. Considering space and time simultaneously underscores three types of constraints: the first concerns individual mobility; the second, individuals’ need for physical co-presence; and the third, regulating access to places and times of the city and territory.

When these constraints are considered concomitantly, it is not surprising that individuals’ time and space budgets are often insufficient to carry out their daily activities. This is the spatio-temporal prism of the geography of time, which attests to the finite nature of everyday life. Numerous studies have shown that within this nexus, temporalities are becoming increasingly fragmented and diversified. These observations support Hartmut Rosa’s argument that the acceleration of life rhythms results from the convergence of technological acceleration and the many demands of social acceleration.

While the acceleration of daily rhythms is typically presented as a relatively recent phenomenon, we recall that the working classes of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries faced intense time

¹⁴ Hartmut Rosa, *Accélération. Une critique sociale du temps* (Paris: La Découverte, 2010) and *Alliégation et accélération. Vers une théorie critique de la modernité tardive* (Paris: La Découverte, 2017).

pressures due to extremely long working days and unregulated workweeks. By contrast, at that time, the ruling classes devoted much of their free time to leisure activities and idleness, so as to differentiate themselves from the working classes. Through the struggle for better working conditions waged by the working classes, which led to lighter daily and weekly work schedules and paid vacations thereby alleviating time pressures, in more recent history, a major shift has taken place.

New time pressures and overbooked schedules have become the hallmarks of the ruling classes in the past thirty years thanks to globalization and the cult of performance, which now extend to all social classes. As every social class contends with an ever-growing “to do” list, the dictates of tight schedules, and the acceleration of experiences, people struggle to take ownership of their lives. They feel estranged, not only from objects and their own actions, but also from time and space more fundamentally. These forms of spatio-temporal alienation have led to a whole range of torments, including an uncontrollable sense of urgency, the impression of a lack of time, feelings of suffocation, and the inability to “keep up,” resulting in depressive syndromes and/or weakened self-esteem, all of which can be attributed to rhythm.¹⁵

Drawing on Axel Honneth’s analysis of “social pathologies,”¹⁶ we have chosen the term *capitalist rhythm pathologies* to describe the spatio-temporal causes of this new form of suffering. Honneth uses the term *social pathology*—distinguishing it from *social injustice*—to describe “social relationships or developments that undermine the conditions necessary for self-realization.”¹⁷ These pathologies directly affect our ability to liberate ourselves by experimenting with lifestyles we aspire to individually and collectively—in other words, to lead what philosophers since Aristotle have called a *good life*. In so doing, it is not our intention to defend a prescriptive conception

¹⁵ For more on the relationship between the cult of performance and depression, see Alain Ehrenberg, *La fatigue d'être soi*. Dépression et société (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2008).

¹⁶ Axel Honneth, *La société du mépris* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 179.

of what a *good life* is, but rather to underscore the need to master the temporal and spatial aspects of one's life to live in a humanly and politically meaningful way. Historically speaking, this is what has driven social and spatial movements to defend lifestyles that do not echo prevailing patterns. More than mere personal fulfillment, reclaiming what we like to call *rhythmic power* is a political matter of liberation as well as of creating shared values. We therefore feel it is essential to consider the entire spectrum of pathologies that may affect our *rhythmic* ability to live *well* as individuals and as a society, and more generally to give meaning to our lives.

Rhythm pathologies are thus the somber and troubled background that frame this manifesto. Rhythm is central to our ability to live individually and together with one another; it is at the crossroads of different forms of power and opportunities for liberation and sharing. It must also be linked to the question of neoliberal capitalism since, as Rosa's (and Yves Citton¹⁸ and Pascal Michon's¹⁹) analyses show, the salience of spatio-temporal and rhythm-related issues is closely linked to forms of "fluidification"²⁰ brought about by new patterns of production and consumption. The rhythm question thus becomes the locus for thought on resistance (or at least regulation) in response to effects of modern-day deregulation.

Saturation as an indicator of rhythm pathologies

Going beyond an approach that focuses essentially on individuals' psychology requires broadening the spectrum of *capitalist rhythm pathologies* to include groups, organizations, and territories. The causes of spatio-temporal oppression are diverse and do not exclusively or directly relate to the human body. On the contrary, many

¹⁸ Yves Citton, "Axiomes de survie pour une rythmanalyse politique," *Multitudes*, no. 46 (2011/3), 213–217.

¹⁹ Pascal Michon, *Les rythmes du politique. Démocratie et capitalisme mondialisé* (Paris: Les Prairies ordinaires, 2007).

²⁰ Zygmunt Bauman, *Le présent liquide* (Paris: Seuil, 2017).

rhythm pathologies are experienced at a systemic level and are manifest, for instance, in the forms of congestion (road or digital traffic) and spatial suffocation (overcrowding).

Analytically moving from the intimate and personal to the systemic, we will use the term *saturation* to describe different forms of rhythm pathologies. This term is interesting as it refers to a point at which the potential for change—and liberation more fundamentally—is lost. As we have discussed in previous works,²¹ saturation occurs when the cumulative effect loses its liberating potential and instead becomes a state in which each additional event results in stagnation, thus creating an *overflow*. This overflow can be that of sensations, information, feelings, objects, or even movement. Ultimately, however, it hampers our ability to effect change (i.e., to free ourselves).

The problem of saturation opens up broader reflection on the ambiguous processes that underlie social acceleration, intensified mobility, and communication (rhythm pathologies). From this perspective, we must take a closer look at the many forms of contemporary saturation to understand how we can move from rhythm pathology to rhythm power, whereby individuals and groups reclaim their capacity for fulfillment and sharing.

We will now briefly explore the four types of saturation that underlie rhythm pathologies: functional saturation (*congestion*), spatial saturation (*suffocation*), attentional saturation (*dizziness*), and stimulus saturation (*exhaustion*). Together, these forms of saturation will allow us to explore rhythm pathologies and powers at different scales, from the most personal to urban and territorial governance.

Congestion

The first type of saturation describes situations wherein increased traffic volumes lead to bottlenecks of networks or systems.

²¹ Manola Antonioli, Luc Gwiazdzinski, Vincent Kaufmann, Guillaume Drevon, Luca Pattaroni (eds.), *Saturations. Individus, collectifs, organisations et territoires à l'épreuve* (Grenoble: Éditions Elya, 2020).

Traffic congestion epitomizes this slowdown. This moment is precise, measurable, and widely modeled. The *congestion phenomenon*²² exists in any area affected by traffic volumes, including computer servers (during peak usage periods), tourist sites, and major events. One of the main results is individuals' diminished pleasure. In other words, congestion concerns situations in which the number of people, objects, or storable information exceeds the capacities of a given unit. This type of saturation naturally raises the question of indicators, thresholds, vigilance, and information shared with the public and decision-makers.

As the peak-use concept suggests, this issue is intrinsically tied to rhythm. This is also the case for congestion effects due to the spatio-temporal aligning of mobility with standardized work hours. A similar phenomenon can be observed in the digital realm, with the saturation of servers in the evening, the prime time for watching series and consuming multimedia content.

Congestion therefore refers to practical disturbances intrinsic to the organization of daily activities in space and time. Simple to identify but complex in terms of their management, this pathology is largely structural and relatively removed from the physical body, though bodies too suffer from such disorders (poor blood flow leading to brain damage, heart disease, etc.). Interestingly, the clinical description here is functional, mechanical even, unlike other rhythm pathologies which draw on experiences that are catalyzed through the body's *exposure to congestion*. In this mechanical perspective, the rhythm challenge is above all functional and involves easing flows to reduce the saturation threshold. Thus emerges a whole science of so-called "good"²³ rhythms and the spatio-temporal management of activities and flows more

²² "A pathological condition caused by an overaccumulation of blood in the vessels of an organ or tissue. Metaphorically [referring to a city, street or roads]—generalized traffic congestion" <https://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/congestion>.

²³ Here again we wish to emphasize that a "good" cadence is not based on the idea of one that is suitable in absolute terms, but rather that there are cadences that may favor the harmonizing of conflicting elements to produce living conditions that are functionally important to us (e.g., fluid, practical, manageable).

generally. While the issue of liberation is not raised here directly, it is implicit insofar as the key is ensuring that networks function in a way that allows individuals to proceed at their own pace within a matrix of varying speeds and intentions.

Nevertheless, capitalist rhythm pathologies often surpass such physical concerns and instead touch on the emotional and cognitive experiences that shape our ability to liberate ourselves and pursue the lifestyles we value.

Suffocation

Similar to congestion, a second type of saturation brought about by *overcrowding* produces a feeling of suffocation. While congestion evokes a mechanical/functional blockage, *suffocation*²⁴ suggests something more vital. Like congestion, suffocation is the result of an avalanche of practices and objects (versus signs, which are central to dizziness). However, it is distinguishable from congestion insofar as it suggests both spatial saturation *and* a perceived loss of freedom and leeway. This stifling feeling is also a capitalist rhythm pathology to the extent that suffocation results directly from accelerating paces of production and consumption, combined with the heterorhythmia of regulatory systems. The systematic *guaranteeing* of urban qualities that distinguishes spatial production today saturates space with layers of regulations, management procedures, and certifications.²⁵

We therefore *suffocate* not only as a result of overcrowding, but also because we must struggle to make things our own and develop

²⁴ “Action of stifling or muffling a sound; the result of this action. Action of preventing something from existing or developing; the result of this action. / Emotional, intellectual or moral constraint caused by the influence of the living environment. / The more or less complete cessation of certain activities due to outside factors.” <https://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/%C3%A9touffement>.

²⁵ For an analysis of the impact of the mechanisms of guarantee on urban forms and experiences, see Marc Breviglieri’s work on the “guaranteed city”; Marc Breviglieri, “Une brèche critique dans la ville garantie? Espaces intercalaires et architectures d’usage,” in Cogato-Lanza E., Pattaroni L., Piraud M., Tirone B, *De la différence urbaine. Le quartier des Grottes/Genève* (Geneva: Métispresses, 2013), 213–236.

new types of uses and sharing. The challenge here is not so much making a network run but being able to catch one's breath and create leeway. With suffocation, the challenge, rhythmically speaking, is not just that of fluidity but more existentially of appropriation and expansion.

It is therefore worth seeking an antidote to suffocation in rhythm policies aimed at offering latitude with regard to the organization of activities in time and space. This creates room for individual rhythms and processes of appropriation by experience. Rhythm policies literally refer to policies of spacing and reconfiguring limits. Consider, for instance, low-occupancy shelters that allow disadvantaged individuals to find relief and take refuge from immediate harm. Or, in the field of geography, struggles for spatial appropriation to create *sustainable autonomous zones* (in line with the concept of the Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ)), at the nexus between eighteenth century “Pirate Utopias” and the international “cyber-culture” of the twenty-first-century global network, theorized by Hakim Bey.²⁶ Or simple affirmation of the ability to collaboratively experiment. All reflect the choice to reject saturation. In this way, communities in combat—ZADs, squats, yellow vests²⁷ and, more peacefully perhaps, housing and production cooperatives—are rediscovering their (rhythm) autonomy (i.e., their ability to implement their own rules in time and space, as Roland Barthes²⁸ suggested).

Dizziness

In the wake of German philosopher Georges Frank's seminal analyses, Yves Citton condemned the harmful effects of an “attention economy.”²⁹ Indeed, attention grabbing has become

²⁶ Hakim Bey, *TAZ. Zone Autonome Temporaire* (Paris: L'Éclat, 1991 / DATAR, 2003).

²⁷ Bernard Floris, Luc Gwiazdzinski, *Sur la vague jaune. L'utopie d'un rond-point* (Grenoble: Elya, 2019).

²⁸ Roland Barthes, *Comment vivre ensemble. Cours et séminaires au Collège de France (1976–1977)*, “Traces écrites” coll. (Paris: Seuil/IMEC, 2002).

²⁹ Yves Citton, *Pour une écologie de l'attention* (Paris: Seuil, 2014).

a key source of capitalist profit, through Google rankings and other evaluation and accumulation systems (e.g., *likes*). Attention fatigue is also reflected in consumer behaviors, where individuals find themselves assailed by audio, visual, and olfactory stimuli in supermarket aisles and railway stations. The proliferation of attentional stimuli that comes with this new economy leads to new forms of alienation, namely through our inability to choose where to focus our attention, or more simply to concentrate. This dizziness can result in sleep loss (often linked to excessive exposure to screens), feelings of dazedness, and a profound inability to formulate one's own desires, but it also raises the question of manipulation. In the burgeoning models of the *fair city*, the *creative city*, and the *event city*, what is our capacity for resistance, our margin of maneuver, or degree of free will when all our senses are constantly besieged³⁰ in an immersive *total spectacle* that exaggerates reality? The contemporary city (à la Times Square) can have a kitschy, carnival-like, saturated veneer that captivates us: lights, sweets, pop music, thrilling rides, and crowds. Supermarkets today are very similar, with marketing, music, fabricated scents, tasters, and colors that drive purchases. When this kind of attention grabbing is forced through advertising or intensified signals, we experience "heterorhythmia," which prevents us from processing informational cues or, as Nietzsche put it, "ruminating"³¹ at our own pace.

The antidote to this attention-grabbing rhythm pathology can be found in policies designed to reduce stimuli and strengthen our ability to choose where to direct our attention. Perhaps more fundamentally, what we could call the *rhythm dimension* of our attentional fulfillment lies in our ability to ignore and disconnect from stimuli in order to rediscover and reconstruct our inner

³⁰ Luc Gwiazdzinski, *La ville 24h/24* (La Tour d'Aigues: Éditions de L'Aube, 2003).

³¹ "I admit that you need one thing above all in order to practise the requisite art of reading, a thing which today people have been so good at forgetting—and so, it will be some time before my writings are 'readable'—, you almost need to be a cow for this one thing and certainly not a 'modern man': it is rumination." F. Nietzsche, *On the genealogy of morality*, translated from the German by Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 2007 [1887]), 9.

selves. This could take the form of software that provides protection by obliging us to disconnect from the Internet, put notifications on automatic standby, etc. Or, more tactically, learning to manage email, a key component of coaching. Automatic messaging and cultivating personal discipline to check emails once a day are also essential.

With regard to urban planning, cities like Grenoble and Sao Paulo have banned certain types of commercial advertising in public spaces and are considering how to fill this void.

On an individual scale, voluntary efforts to disconnect and seek temperance and frugality,³² especially among those with a sense of environmental awareness, are emerging. Proposals for “frugal cities,”³³ which aim to offer inhabitants greater satisfaction while consuming fewer resources, are cropping up in urban design. Likewise, “frugal urban planning”³⁴ attempts to reconcile expectations with regard to mobility while ensuring energy efficiency, the desire for space and nature with economical use of land, the quest for balanced development with the spontaneous rationale of clustering and polarization, and urban quality of life with reduced urban costs. All of these pave the way for lighter ways of being and lighter carbon footprints.

Exhaustion

The last pathology we will explore is *exhaustion*.³⁵ This is perhaps the most concerning, as it directly affects individuals’ mental and physical wellbeing, notably in the form of burnout (professional exhaustion), a condition that has been clinically recognized.

³² Violeta Ramirez, “Étude qualitative sur les frugaux volontaires, Final report,” ADEME, 2016.

³³ Jean Haëntjens, *La ville frugale* (Limoges: Fyp, 2011).

³⁴ “Manifeste pour une frugalité heureuse dans l’architecture et l’aménagement des territoires urbains et ruraux,” [online] <https://www.frugalite.org/fr/le-manifeste.html>.

³⁵ “The act of emptying by drawing out / The act of emptying something of its contents or substance / The state of that which is exhausted / The fact of being reduced to a complete state of decay,” <https://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/%C3%A9puisement>.

As Erhenberg suggests,³⁶ while history has seen manifold pathologies linked to dominant processes of subjectivation (depression and hysteria, for instance), burnout is unquestionably the syndrome and consequence *par excellence* of fast-paced societies.

Yet, burnout is not yet internationally recognized as an *illness* per se (i.e., by the World Health Organization) but rather is considered a clinically diagnosable state directly linked to time pressures in the professional, familial, and social spheres. Here we find an excellent example of a capitalist pathology whose saturation effects are obvious when one explores the underlying symptoms. Burnout can be characterized as a state of mental, emotional and/or physical fatigue linked to overwork and stress. Stress itself is caused by the inability to achieve certain “unachievable goals.”³⁷ It is this constant strain and sense of being unable to *keep up* as the number of goals and intensification of responsibilities (affective, moral, emotional, and physical) increase that leads to saturation, and gradually to exhaustion. In such situations, individuals feel unable to maintain the pace and intensity necessary to meet their objectives. Exhaustion sets in, followed by burnout, with the body finally shutting down. To treat burnout, doctors generally prescribe rest and, more specifically, *disconnect*. The idea is to reclaim time for oneself through the power of “idiorhythmia” (a term Roland Barthes borrowed from his observation of monastic life in response to his search for “collective solitude,” which reconciles withdrawal and inclusion³⁸), entailing much-needed *self-care* to restore the individual and enabling them to come back to the world. We must also *reconnect* the burnt-out person by providing them focal points that allow them to re-forged the desire to go at their own pace.

³⁶ Alain Ehrenberg, *La Fatigue d'être soi. Dépression et société* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2008).

³⁷ H. J. Freudenberger, G. Richelson, *Burn-out: The high cost of high achievement* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981).

³⁸ Roland Barthes, *Comment vivre ensemble Cours et séminaires au Collège de France (1976–1977)*, “Traces écrites” coll. (Paris: Seuil/IMEC, 2002).

The antidote to the rhythm pathologies leading to burnout must therefore be sought in policies aimed at deceleration and prioritization skills. Burnout prevention policies³⁹ in the workplace should focus on employees setting personal limits, stress reduction, and resource building. At the urban level, *slow city* policies can help pace rhythm in terms of flows and signals.

While slow living policies can also be ambiguous,⁴⁰ their impact on saturation of all types is clear. We can therefore surmise that burnout—both personal and spatial (e.g., when spaces are saturated by development projects⁴¹)—is the convergence of all rhythm pathologies intensified so as to affect an individual's or territory's very essence. Devising rhythm policies that offset social and spatial saturation is therefore vital. However, deceleration alone is not enough: it is also important to identify passions that help individuals return to the world, to adjust their pace in such a way as to forge new forms of cooperation. The art of rhythm policies lies in embracing both momentum and withdrawal, speed and slowness, and finding rhythms that heal and liberate while nurturing the common good.

To fully appreciate the importance of rhythm policies, we must examine their epistemological implications. Thinking in terms of rhythms—in other words, the ability to describe and analyze them—is a major epistemological feat due to the impact of rhythms on people, their living environments, and economic and political models (notably the Western capitalist model, which encourages forms of acceleration both economically and spatially—mobility infrastructures, zoning systems, etc.). The

³⁹ We might refer here to the “no burnout” campaign: <https://www.noburnout.ch>.

⁴⁰ On the ambivalent effects of pedestrianization policies and gentrification in particular, see T. Brenac, H. Reigner, F. Hernandez, “Centres-villes aménagés pour les piétons: développement durable ou marketing urbain et tri social?” *Recherches, transports, sécurité*, no. 29 (2013).

⁴¹ Luca Pattaroni, Guillaume Drevon, Mischa Piraud, “Asphyxies urbaines. Enquête sur les processus contemporains de saturation spatiale,” in M. Antonioli, L. Gwiazdzinski, V. Kaufmann, G. Drevon, L. Pattaroni (eds.). *#SATURATIONS. Individus, collectifs, organisations et territoires à l'épreuve* (Grenoble: Ed Elya, 2020), 74–87.

transition to a post-Fordist system only contributed to this acceleration. The networking of territories, the blurring of boundaries between work and home life, and the spread of the *project*⁴² model and *governance by objectives*⁴³ have further accelerated the dynamics and rhythms of wage employment.

The headlong dive into economic growth and development models is such that, nowadays, it is the rhythm of the market that regulates the rhythm of life, leaving less and less room for politically questioning the meaning and pace of economically and technologically imposed lifestyles.⁴⁴

A major epistemological challenge

Such a general assumption necessitates a lengthy empirical demonstration. However, it highlights the heuristic flexibility and breadth of rhythm while posing a major epistemological challenge for this manifesto. Simply put, from what angle should contemporary research approach rhythm? Historically speaking, the topic of rhythm has been tackled from disparate epistemological standpoints. Consider, for instance, the contrast between the heterodox Marxism of Henry Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis and Simmel's⁴⁵ interactionist analyses of the rhythm of urban life. Indeed, rhythms can as easily be understood in terms of their structural determinants as their cultural variations, their link to individual consumer and mobility practices, their personal experience, or the contextual coordination to which they give rise. This wealth of possibilities undoubtedly is enough to satisfy the conceptual and

⁴² L. Boltanski, E. Chiapello, *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999).

⁴³ L. Thévenot, "Le gouvernement par l'objectif à l'épreuve de la critique: métamorphose des évaluations autorisées," in G. De Larquier, O. Favereau, A. Guirardello (eds.), *Les Conventions dans l'économie en crise* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2011).

⁴⁴ M. Hunyadi, *La tyrannie des modes de vie. Sur le paradoxe moral de notre temps* (Lormont: Éditions Le Bord de l'eau, 2015).

⁴⁵ G. Simmel, *Les grandes villes et la vie de l'esprit. Suivi de "Sociologie des sens"* (Paris: Payot, 2018).

methodological appetites of the great epistemological traditions that haunt the social sciences.

This means we can increase the scope of research to rhythm-related issues, with not one being more heuristic than another. This finding affords rhythm a rare place in the world of concepts. Indeed, its remarkable versatility allows it to move easily between research fields for use in different scientific disciplines and to adapt to various methodological frameworks.

The same versatility that can be an asset in terms of the use and dissemination of a concept can also render it weak. When disconnected from its initial purpose, the concept ceases to be meaningful, and its heuristic virtues are lost. This underscores the importance of defining objectives and analytical scope. Consequently, rather than a field-by-field interpretation of each paradigm's potential impact on rhythm, we might consider instead what it is about rhythm that resists the reductive effects of epistemology. In this way, the risk of a Marxist simplification of rhythms as an alienating form of capitalism is offset by the singularity of individual rhythms, which lays the foundations for resistance. Alternatively, overly narrow analyses of rhythmic indexes are countered by the effects of rhythm patterns resulting from changes in the modes of production. The rhythm question is therefore a combination of both power analyses and individual experience; it is a notion that requires constant exploration of the entire societal spectrum—from structural and political issues to personal questions. It is also a *non-disciplinary* concept that calls for building new bridges in the form of novel and emancipatory biopolitics, between exploitation and biology, individual rationality and emotional impulses, the measurement of time and the spatial grounding of lifestyles, conventional modes of coordination, and the choreography of events and disruptions.

Before looking more closely at the epistemology of rhythm and methods that might render this possible, we would like to revisit various ways in which the social sciences have attempted to grasp the notion.

EURHYTHMIA

Embracing rhythms implies defending the idea that rhythms underpin the ability to build a common world that can accommodate individual and collective differences. It encourages a political approach to eurhythmia and polyrhythmia.

Relaxing
Downtime
Burden
Congestion
Lassitude
Eurhythmia
Polyrhythmia
Speed
Patterns
Randomness
Order
Composition
Liberation
Surging





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II Embracing rhythm

Linguistics, poetics, and policies of rhythm

The versatility of the term *rhythm* and the multitude of fields to which it can be applied are undeniable. First and foremost, it refers to the periodic repetition (physical, auditory, or visual) of natural phenomena (e.g., the rhythm of hours, days, seasons, waves, etc.). Rhythm also has a physiological dimension, as it relates to periodic phenomena that characterize vital processes (eating and sleeping, as well as cardiac, respiratory, pulmonary, and cerebral rhythms). In addition to these naturalistic definitions, rhythm can also be an artifact and thus have an aesthetic dimension: for instance, we speak of rhythm in music, in the periodic repetition of metrical stresses in poetry, and the sequence or cadence of events and phases in a novel or play. Rhythm is also a feature in the aesthetic appreciation of painting, sculpture, architecture (the interplay of lines, shapes, colors, and decorative elements in a building) and cinematic images (the rhythm of editing). Lastly, we speak of the rhythm of our everyday experiences (rhythm of life, work, leisure, progress, acceleration, deceleration, change of pace, etc.).

The difficulty lies in identifying the elements that unify the meanings of this term above and beyond its many fields of application. In this classic debate on the specificity of rhythm, we should consider Emile Benveniste's pivotal input in Chapter XXVII of the first volume of *Problèmes de linguistique générale*:⁴⁶

The notion of “rhythm” is one that concerns a large spectrum of human activity. It may even serve to distinctively characterize

⁴⁶ Émile Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, vol. 1, “Tel” coll. (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 327–335.

human behavior, both individual and collective, insofar as we become aware of the temporalities and sequences that regulate them, and also when, beyond the human order, we project rhythm into things and events. This vast unification of man and nature under the consideration of “time,” of similar intervals and recurrences, has been conditioned by the use of the very word, the spread of the term rhythm which, through Latin, comes to us from the Greek in the vocabulary of modern Western thought.⁴⁷

Benveniste’s essay essentially aims to discuss and challenge the etymology of the word *rhythm*, an etymology long considered irrefutable, derived from the Greek verb meaning *to flow*. Hence, the concept of rhythm was based on the observation of natural phenomena, and notably the steady motion of ocean waves. Benveniste traces the word back to pre-Socratic philosophers, and the atomists (Leucippus and Democritus) in particular, for whom *rhythmos* became a technical term in their doctrine. For the atomists, *rhythm* did not refer to the notion of regular measure or cadence, but to *form*, or distinctive form more precisely, the “characteristic arrangement of the parts of a whole.”⁴⁸ Whereas Democritus uses the word to refer to the specific shape of the atom, Herodotus applies it to the shape of the letters of the alphabet. The Greek lyric poets used it to express specific and distinctive forms of human temperament and particular *expressions* of mood or character. However, other Greek terms can be used to express the notion of form, as given, fixed, or actualized. The etymological link between *rhythm* and *flow* is due to the fact that the term often appears relative to a moving, mobile, fluid form with no definite shape—“an improvised, momentary, changeable form.”⁴⁹ The Greeks therefore chose a derivative of the verb *to flow* and used it in the context of a moving vision of a universe made of flows, not fixed forms

⁴⁷ Ibid., 327.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 330.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 333.

and precise measurements. Our modern understanding of *rhythm* appears in Plato, with regard to the intervals, distinctions, and combinations required to learn music or the *form of movement* of the human body in dance. For Plato, the term thus encompassed both today's definition of an ordered, measured sequence of slow and fast movements, order and harmony of movement, and measure akin to the meter in poetry.

Through a study of language that explores its cultural, aesthetic, and political dimensions, Benveniste demonstrates that the concept of "rhythm" is in no way a primary *mimesis*. In other words, it does not result from the observation of a *cadence* present in nature, like that of waves, but rather is the fruit of lengthy philosophical and poetic reflection on both the structure of reality (atomism) and the measurements applied to dance patterns and musical intervals by Plato and, later, Aristotle:

Nothing has been less "natural" than this slow development, through the effort of thinkers, of a notion which seems so necessarily inherent in articulated forms of movement that we find it hard to believe that it was not appreciated from the outset.⁵⁰

Benveniste's essay reveals the complexities of rhythm from the historical depths of Western language and thought. Rhythm has combined human experience and nature in a remarkable synthesis from as far back as pre-Socratic philosophy and atomism, which makes time an aesthetic and cultural substance shaped and organized by both worldly experience and the aesthetic qualities of dance, music, and poetry. It is a profoundly *cultural* construction, but one that like all "culture" is rooted in nature. He also demonstrates that the concepts of measurement, cadence, and regular, measurable (metric) alternation only appear much later, and are but one aspect of a larger construct that conveys the idea of flux, of becoming, of non-measurable events, and even of discontinuity.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 335.

Moreover, what produces *rhythm* in dance, music, and poetry as an aesthetic experience is not a simple succession of predictable patterns, forms, and measures, but the dancer, choreographer, musician, or poet's ability to reveal discontinuity and unexpected elements in known, predictable forms and measures, and constantly invent exceptions to the *rule of art*.

In this first approach to the concept of rhythm, which is based on the study of language, we thus consider a form marked by elasticity, fluidity, and leeway for unforeseen events in its structure, experience, and organization. In other words, a rupture that forges the cultivation of difference and rejects sameness.

Though Benveniste did not pursue these essential findings relative to rhythm, his work inspired Henri Meschonnic's research for the latter's 1982 work, *Critique du rythme*.⁵¹ Based on a detailed analysis of the countless linguistic studies on rhythm, and following in Benveniste's footsteps, Meschonnic insists on the historical—and not merely the *cosmic*—dimension of rhythm. He likewise advocates abandoning any definition that confuses it with scansion, meter, or the exclusive notion of regularity and measure. Moreover, he contrasts metrics that “arrange themselves in time” with rhythm, which both arranges time and organizes it.⁵² The poetics of rhythm, whether applied to painting, film, text, choreography, or music, consists neither in the historical appreciation of a work's compliance with pre-established norms or measures, nor in seeking an emotion that precedes the formal language used and that is extraneous to it. Rather, it involves appreciating the unique way in which a work conveys meaning, namely through the specific arrangement of time, which its own unique rhythm makes possible. In keeping with Benveniste's theory of language and expression, for Meschonnic, rhythm is never a *given*, neither

⁵¹ Henri Meschonnic, *Critique du rythme. Anthropologie historique du langage* (Paris: Verdier/Poche, 2009 [1982]). On this subject, see also Maité Snauwaert's article, “Le rythme critique d'Henri Meschonnic,” *Acta Fabula*, vol. 13, no. 6, “En rythme” (July/August 2012) [online] <http://www.fabula.org/revue/document7129.php>.

⁵² Meschonnic, *Critique du rythme*, 172.

in the inexpressible realm of emotion, nor in the purely technical register of meter or measure. Rather, it is an aesthetic activity pointing to a *poetics of life* and experience, to the rhythms we continually construct throughout our lives and that enable us to *shape* time and attune ourselves to (or tune out) others. In this way, rhythm is a key means of individuation and subjectivization, both for individuals and collectives, thereby highlighting its profoundly political nature.

Benveniste's distinction between rhythm as *skhèma* (a regular succession of strong and weak beats, a measured, predictable succession of figures, forms, verses, etc.) and rhythm as *rhutmos* (a flowing, moving form that does not contradict the former but profoundly affects and constantly varies it) was the starting point for Barthes' reflection on the notion of idiorhythmy in his 1976–1977 lecture at the Collège de France, in which he explored modes of *living together* and made rhythm central to social commons (i.e., forms of coexistence and sharing). The term itself, like its adjective form *idiorhythmic*, comes from the Greek, and is a composite of *idios* (meaning proper) and *rhutmos*. Through the historical study of different religious communities, and notably the monks of Mount Athos, who live in solitude but are dependent on a monastery, Barthes raises the question of the possible existence of an idiorhythmic group wherein each individual's rhythm is allowed to express itself, unhampered by a single *skhèma* dictated by a higher authority. "The monks have private cells, eat their meals at home (with the exception of specific annual celebrations), and are allowed to keep the possessions they had at the time of their vows (...). In these unusual communities, even liturgies are optional, with the exception of the night service."⁵³ The *fantasy* that guides his research, which survives in the fragmented form of lecture notes, is therefore "something like solitude interrupted in a regulated way: the paradox, contradiction, and problem of sharing

⁵³ Roland Barthes, *Comment vivre ensemble. Cours et séminaires au Collège de France (1976–1977)*, "Traces écrites" coll. (Paris: Seuil/IMEC, 2002), 40.

distances—the utopian ideal of a socialism of distances (Nietzsche spoke of a ‘pathos of distances,’⁵⁴ for strong, non-gregarious eras like the Renaissance).” The idea therefore is to create *idiorhythmic agglomerates*, or unique communities, in which individuals can develop their own rhythms while resonating with the rhythms of others. In keeping with Benveniste’s analyses and understanding of *rhythmos* as an *improvised, modifiable form*, Barthes argues that the term *idiorhythm* is a quasi-pleonasm, since *rhythmos* is singular by definition, unlike *schème*, which denotes an imposed, suffered rhythm. Barthes writes that the etymology that links *rhythmos* to the Greek verb *rhein* (thus referring to flow and fluxes) likewise “refers to the subtle forms of ways of life.”⁵⁵ Each person’s rhythm is comprised of “unstable configurations, depressive, and exalted passages.” This includes a form of distinctiveness linked to the body and moods, at the risk of allowing various pathologies (such as those described earlier) to emerge. This distinctiveness cannot withstand relentless cadences in their *schematic* regularity nor the formless irregularity that “cognitive capitalism” imposes as illusory freedom on the “di-vidus,” nor atomized individuals who compose contemporary societies (be they “precarious,” “unsecured,” “uberized,” or “creative,” though the socio-economic conditions of these categories differ).

Barthes stresses the political aspect of resistance to power (spiritual, state, economic, etc.) that is the hallmark of all “idiorhythmia” provided that it is voluntary and not passively suffered. Authority, above all, aspires to impose a rhythm or rhythms (of life, time, thinking, debate, and, today, of consumerism, leisure, and connection), whereas “the demand for idiorhythmia is invariably in opposition to power.”⁵⁶ The desire for idiorhythmia is therefore an essentially political and not merely ethical quest, although it is this second connotation that prevails in Barthes’ analyses—for instance, the protection of *rhythmos* (i.e., the unique, free-flowing,

⁵⁴ Ibid., 27.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 39.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 69.

malleable version of each individual's rhythm). Idiorhythmia is a category that is at odds with power; it is always lagging behind it or running ahead of it, and it is founded on a fundamental disaccord with and deliberate disruption of imposed rhythms.

Roland Barthes invites us to rethink the question of power from a rhythm perspective and to consider how heterorhythmia, which begins close to the body, leads to subtle forms of oppression. For instance, he situates the origins of power in the very way a mother imposes her own rhythm on her child:

From my window, I could see a mother holding her child by the hand and pushing the empty stroller in front of her. She moved unperturbed, at her own pace, the kid was dragged, jerked, forced to run all the time, like an animal or a sadistic victim who's being whipped. She goes at her own pace, oblivious that the kid's pace is different. And yet, she's his mother!⁵⁷

"And yet, she's his mother!" As Barthes suggests, power over others does not necessarily result from ill intent but can nonetheless lead to subtle forms of oppression. It is precisely these subtle but not necessarily less violent forms, far beyond what traditionally is viewed as domination, that underpin the conceptual work of authors like Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, Agamben,⁵⁸ and Rancière.⁵⁹ Despite their sometimes significant distinctions, such concepts as *bio-power*, the *sharing of the sensitive*, and *ritornellos* all aim to forge a dynamic way of thinking about power that can be applied as easily to the body as to the State, and to individuals as to institutions. The argument for rhythm therefore is an argument for reflecting on power in a processual, interpersonal way. We could then free ourselves from the descriptive and analytical tensions that objectify the interplay between actors and institutional mechanisms and lead to simplistic models of domination.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 40.

⁵⁸ G. Agamben, "Formes de vie," in *Moyens sans fin* (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 2007).

⁵⁹ J. Rancière, *Aux bords du politique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998).

On the contrary, the rhythm pathologies of capitalism presented in this book are an invitation to decolonize our minds and invent new descriptive and analytical tools to make movement and spatio-temporal influences the crux of political processes.

The delicate interplay of space and time

Part of our reflection involves discussing how time and space combine⁶⁰ and are linked, as well as thinking in terms of space-time. The first to consider time in conjunction with space in a more balanced, deliberate way were the Swedish geographers of the Lund School. Starting in the 1960s, these pioneers of Time Geography made everyday life a question of social policy through an approach that closely linked time and space. One of its pioneers, T. Hägerstrand, focused on *space-time budgets*, recording people's movements over a given period. While this approach helped him understand how people use time, it did not shed light on how space and time were perceived or experienced. Time Geography, which explores the spatio-temporal location of activities from a *behaviorist* perspective, upholds a primary approach to space, time, and human action, a pattern of space-time mathematics. Time geography is criticized for being a space-time container that is merely filled with individual movements and the notion of a universal space, even though geographers know that space is neither homogeneous nor isotropic. A shift to a pragmatics of space-time is necessary for creating a "theory of habitation."⁶¹ Some have tried to unify or link space and time around concepts such as "chronogeography," "spatio-temporal representations," and "chronotopia." The "low dissemination"⁶² of the term within the French

⁶⁰ N. Thrift, J. May, 2001, *Timespace: Geographies of Temporality (Critical Geographies)* (Routledge, 2001).

⁶¹ M. Stock, "Théorie de l'habiter. Questionnements," in T. Paquot, *Habiter le propre de l'humain* (Paris: La Découverte, 2007), 103–125.

⁶² A. Volvey, *Echelles et temporalités* (Neully: Atlande, 2005).

scientific community and competing terms (e.g., “chronogeography,”⁶³ “geography of space-time,”⁶⁴ and “geography of time”) for Giddens⁶⁵—in yet another discipline—illustrates the difficulty the approach has faced in emerging.

In the 1990s, researchers in France and Italy⁶⁶ continued their work, notably focusing on spatio-temporal representations and mapping.⁶⁷ But, following “*a period when chronogeography was fashionable in the wake of T. Hägerstrand’s pioneering work on space-time budgets and D. Parkes and N. Thrift’s syntheses on the time of places, Francophone thought in this area slowed down.*”⁶⁸

The quest to link space and time notably has taken the form of a chronotopic approach, where *chronotopia* is defined as “a descriptive model of a possible link between inhabited space and time,”⁶⁹ and a *chronotope* as “the convergence of spatial and temporal dimensions.”⁷⁰ This concept, which is still being explored, particularly in the field of architecture,⁷¹ allows us to identify chronotopic patterns, spatio-temporal configurations, and combinations, but focuses more on structural analysis than processes and dynamics. It also does not take into account the sensitive dimension. The *chronotope* concept considers the space-time link but focuses more on the analysis of structure than on process and dynamics.

⁶³ A. Bailly, *Les concepts de la géographie humaine* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2005).

⁶⁴ G. Di Méo, “Géographies tranquilles du quotidien. Une analyse de la contribution des sciences sociales et de la géographie à l’étude des pratiques spatiales,” *Cahiers de géographie du Québec*, vol. 43, no. 118 (1999): 75–93.

⁶⁵ A. Giddens, *La constitution de la société* (Paris: PUF, 1987).

⁶⁶ S. Bonfiglioli, *L’Architettura del tempo* (Milan: Liguori Editore, 1990).

⁶⁷ C. Cauvin, L. Gwiazdzinski, “Représenter l’espace, représenter le temps,” in J.-Y. Boulouin, Dommergues, F. Godard, *La nouvelle aire du temps* (La Tour d’Aigues: Editions de l’Aube/DATAR 2002), 63–91.

⁶⁸ A. Bailly, *Les concepts de la géographie humaine* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2005).

⁶⁹ Bonfiglioli, *L’Architettura del tempo*.

⁷⁰ Luc Gwiazdzinski, “Temps et territoires: les pistes de l’hyperchronie,” *Territoires 2040: revue d’études et de prospective* (Paris: Documentation française, 2012), pp. 75–97.

⁷¹ A. Guez, C. Lagesse, M. Meziani, “Des chronotopes et des chronotypes. Exploration des temporalités de l’espace public parisien,” *Revue Internationale de Géomatique*, no. 28 (2018/2): 191–201.

Temporal and chronotopic entry points naturally highlight rhythms in terms of “the recurrence of a fact or phenomenon at regular intervals in time”⁷² as regards the functioning of cities and regions, service provision, and practices. While they reveal chronotopic patterns, spatio-temporal configurations and arrangements also reflect experience, emotion, and “habitation” in Eric Dardel’s sense, but do not incorporate them. We were more interested in a term that would allow us to embrace the complex nature of living things and the lives of people, organizations, and territories.

In its broadest sense—going beyond the definition of “an arithmetically ordered succession of strong and weak beats and all of its cyclical and periodic derivatives”⁷³—the concept of *rhythm* is a good model for reading, writing, and inhabiting worlds in motion. It goes beyond a strictly temporal and metrical *metronomic* approach to a term that was “created to indissolubly unite time and space—in other words life,”⁷⁴ with an approach based solely on speed or acceleration. Rhythm transcends the limited, arrhythmic conception of a *form of movement* handed down from Plato. Rather, it should be defined as “a specific way of flowing,”⁷⁵ a *mode of accomplishment*, or *specific configurations of the moving*.

Rhythmic space-time: a new way of thinking territory

In modern philosophy, the aesthetic and political dimensions of rhythm in the creation of territories (the spatial and spatializing dimension of rhythm) notably were studied by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari through their concept of “ritornello.”⁷⁶ In the

⁷² Larousse online French dictionary, “rythme” (2025) [online] <https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/rythme/70326>.

⁷³ Pascal Michon, “Rythme, rythmanalyse, rythmologie: un essai d’état des lieux,” *Rhuthmos*, January 9, 2013 [online] <http://rhuthmos.eu/spip.php?article644>.

⁷⁴ J. L. Bureau, “Géo-rythme: la transmutation des lieux,” in J. J. Wunenberger, *Les rythmes, lectures et théories* (Paris: l’Harmattan, 1992), 125.

⁷⁵ E. Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974).

⁷⁶ See Manola Antonoioli, “La Ritournelle,” *Dossier Deleuze et la musique*, *Inculte* no. 14 (November 2007): 30–56.

musical cosmogony they outlined in “plateau” 11 of *Mille plateaux*,⁷⁷ *Milieux* and *Rythmes* are born of chaos, while the unity of Nature’s heterogeneous milieu is achieved through rhythm.

In *Le geste et la parole*, Leroi-Gourhan stresses the rhythmic dimension of man’s “domestication” of time and space.⁷⁸ The need for inclusion in both space and time is common to all living things. Among animals, it is reflected in the perception of the security afforded by inclusion in collective (the herd) space and rhythm, but also through shared living space in a permanent or temporary refuge. The perception of a safety zone—an enclosed refuge or socializing rhythms—highlights certain similarities between animals and humans. While built shelter is common to both, the use of tools and language is not. Human socialization requires the gradual creation of regular rhythms, patterns, and intervals that replace the chaotic rhythms of the natural world and humanize space by removing it from external chaos. In this way, rhythm enables us to live together by shaping a shared time and space while allowing for differences and the expression of idiorhythmia and heterotopia.

Rhythm thus offers us a new way of thinking about territory and its link to emancipation. Barthes likewise closely ties the question of rhythm to that of territory by associating it with both autonomy and oppression. He does not use the concept of ritornello but instead focuses on the idea of rules, and on how rhythm stabilizes forms, particularly those likely to impact others. For Barthes, rules are what drive “time, desires, space, objects.” As such, any system of rules can be regarded as “a territory—either temporal (timing) or gestural (behaviors).” From this standpoint, autonomy (i.e., the ability to establish one’s own rules) involves a body in movement, its environment, and its life rhythm in time and space. Autonomy therefore raises the question of idiorhythmia as the ability to go at

⁷⁷ Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, “1837—De la ritournelle,” *Mille plateaux. Capitalisme et schizophrénie*, 2 (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2013).

⁷⁸ André Leroi-Gourhan, *Le geste et la parole*, vol 2 (Paris: Albin Michel, 1964). See, in particular, II, *La mémoire et les rythmes*, Chapter XIII “Les symboles de la société.”

one's own pace and, as such, create one's own territory and time. As suggested earlier, this is where the political dimension of rhythm and its role in the process of creating a common world—which is a matter of both subjectivization and oppression—comes into play.

Ritornellos, refrains, and the invention of new rhythms

The rhythmic status of the ritornello is complex and ambiguous. In music, ritornellos introduce animal and cosmic themes that often somehow elude subjectivization and signification. Their capacity to standardize and create repetition also enables them to immobilize and neatly divide individual and collective time. Guattari addresses this dimension which, while not prominently featured in *Mille Plateaux*, is present in *l'Inconscient machinique*. Here, Guattari asserts that humans do not experience time as an external entity: like space, time is organized by social norms and rituals, and is “battered” by concrete “semiotic patterns, collective or individual, territorialized or deterritorialized, mechanical or stratified.”⁷⁹ Every individual, group, and nation thus boasts a host of ritualistic ritornellos. The crafts guilds of ancient Greece, for instance, used a melodic device called *nome* to assert their social identities and territorial affiliations. Ancient societies did not separate song, dance, language, and ritual from the production of goods and were wary of overly rigid divisions of labor and social roles. Community life was based on a variety of configurations that associated ritual and production, sexuality, playfulness, politics, and so forth. In capitalist societies, which are founded on disjunctive thinking, the object of distrust constantly shifts; it is not necessarily purity or division that sparks suspicion but rather heterogeneity, mixing, and the undefined. Thus, writing acquired primordial importance that coupled with more widespread processes of simplification and rationalization.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 109.

As such, writing, speaking, singing, music, and dance became distinct forms of expression, with each entrusted to a “specialist” (the writer, the dancer, the musician, the sportsman, etc.). This separation of modes of expression notably resulted in the gradual decline of calligraphic refinement and physical posture. Musically, this is reflected in the progressive disappearance of complex rhythms and resulted in the simplification of the basic rhythms of individual and collective temporality. This is one possible dimension of ritornellos: everyone succumbs to the same life rhythms and accelerated cadences, driven at all cost by ideals of production and productivity. Thus, ritornellos no longer serve as expressive signs of recognition. Instead, they are specialized and distinguishable based on elementary traits corresponding to each trade, professional, scientific, artistic, or political caste. Similarly, music ultimately lost its regional color, with Western music prevailing as a universal model. As the territorialized arrangements of castes, guilds, territories, and extended families were replaced by the deterritorialized flows of advanced capitalism, people clung to residual objects and vainly attempted to reterritorialize (myths of blood, soil, roots, national identity, etc.). Subjectivization processes, whereby individuals are forced to renounce the territorialized elements of tribe, ethnicity, and province, hence shifted their focus to the individual. In modern societies, social time is now structured by the media through catchphrases, rhythms, and codes that have gradually dominated and shaped a “zeitgeist” that allows us to feel “like everyone else” and accept the world “as is.”

Guattari’s *ecosophical* project, which attempts to unite social, mental, and environmental ecology, in no way advocates a return to the archaic territories or foundations that Western technological development has definitively obliterated, but rather a move towards the building of new *existential territories*. Guattari likewise recognizes the absurdity of the idea of going back in time to reconstruct former ways of life. In the wake of the digital and genetic revolutions, globalization, and the ever-increasing speed of transportation and telecommunications, reshaping social and

individual practices must be undertaken *in the contemporary context*. Recognizing this context, however, means not losing sight of the fact that the delocalization and de-territorialization of capitalist power has strengthened its grip on the planet's social, economic, and cultural life. It has also allowed it to *infiltrate* our subconscious perception and biological clocks. As such, domination and commodification have attained the *infra-personal* level.

For Guattari, the temporal patterns *capitalist ritornellos* impose on the elusive dimension of our relationship with time is three-fold. The first results in the construction of hyper-territorialized individuality and power manipulation involving the control of bodily rhythms and subtle movements. The second concerns the development of new technologies designed to *chronographically enslave* human functions (increasingly rigorous time management for increased profitability, planning, and organization of social time, with spatial planning and temporal planning inextricably linked). The third opens the door to transformations that can de-territorialize traditional rhythms (biological and archaic), thus escaping the power of capitalist ritornellos and creating new individual and collective temporalities.

Meanwhile, Gilles Deleuze set out guidelines for considering the standardization and uniformization of contemporary space, time, and modes of identity. At the end of *L'Image-mouvement*,⁸⁰ he speaks of "clichés" as an impoverished, residual form of collective life that create an illusion of shared meaning and that in reality are meaningless. In a world where the unitary principle no longer exists, where dislocation and dischronicity permeate the many cracks and fissures in the illusion of the unity of time and space, clichés uphold a fragmented reality (today, we might say they create "social bonds"). Clichés are sound or visual slogans, stories (on the TV or radio), news items, ditties, and floating images and sounds that filter into our inner world, culminating in

⁸⁰ Gilles Deleuze, "La crise de l'image-action," in *Cinéma 1. L'Image-mouvement* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1983), 266–290.

a mode of functioning through psychological clichés, which itself ultimately becomes just another cliché: “physical, visual, audio, and psychological clichés feed off one another,”⁸¹ with inner and outside worlds becoming equally devoid of meaning.

With the loss of the tremendous cosmic, life-giving, creative power of ritornellos (which have been replaced by meaningless repetitiveness) we now face a grave risk: that of clichés or *capitalist ritornellos* infiltrating the inner sanctum of our minds in the form of advertising and/or political slogans, brand names, fake news, and the omnipresent pop tunes that saturate our public spaces. These ritornellos do not open to the outside world or lead to new encounters, but instead impoverish our ability to exist, think, see, and listen.

Modern marketing is well aware of the power these ritornellos have over individuals, who have been reduced to passive consumers. The uniformity of collective rhythms, both in the workplace and in our leisure time, persists despite the illusion of individual choice, the abolition of time, and the freedom afforded by new technologies. This is superposed by the unbridled sprawl of the commercial sphere, where our subconscious—a coveted commodity—is but a sponge for absorbing and consuming cultural merchandise, ads, information, products, vacations, ideas, leisure, etc.

Building on Deleuze’s musings on “the society of control,”⁸² philosopher Bernard Stiegler has described and denounced the market’s grip on individual temporality⁸³ for some twenty years. He argues that, in this age of “cultural or cognitive capitalism,” it is now a question of controlling the technologies of *aisthesis* to better control “*the periods of consciousness and unconsciousness of the*

⁸¹ Ibid., 281.

⁸² Gilles Deleuze, “Postscriptum sur les sociétés de contrôle,” in *Pourparlers* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1990), 240–247.

⁸³ From Stiegler’s abundant output, we are notably referring to series of works on “symbolic mystery,” which to date includes two volumes (*De la misère symbolique 1. L’époque hyperindustrielle* (Paris: Galilée, 2004) and *De la misère symbolique 2. La catastrophe du sensible* (Paris: Galilée, 2005) and to the book *Mécréance et discrédit 1. La décadence des démocraties industrielles* (Paris: Galilée, 2005).

bodies and souls that inhabit them, by *modulating* these periods of consciousness and life by *controlling flows*.”⁸⁴ Marketing has thus created the concept of *lifetime value*, which measures our individual lifetime as an economically calculable, de-isolated, de-individualized value.

Ritornellos continue to play an essential role in this all-out war on the senses: droves of ears all listen to the same music (so-called “hits,” which are little more than commercialized catchphrases produced and reproduced on a vast scale), and multitudes of eyes all watch the same films and TV programs. It is this de-individualization and prefabrication of *leisure* time that has given rise to the pervasive sense of dis-ease that characterizes *hyper-industrial society*. These observations, now somewhat outdated, could be countered by arguing that the Internet gives us *carte blanche* to choose what we watch and listen to, thus circumventing the *synchronization* and *standardization* of traditional media. Yet, we know that the unlimited *freedom* that we have been promised is largely illusory, even if solo viewing of Hollywood productions at any hour of the day or night has replaced the evening news we once watched together as a family.

In *Le geste et la parole*, however, Leroi-Gourhan foresaw the evolution of technological and machine-driven societies towards “super-humanized time and space.”⁸⁵ In 1964, he wrote that the urban environment had progressively achieved near-total humanization of the space-time framework, initially through the regularizing of transportation services and later through the *cadencing of time* based on the rhythm of radio and television broadcasts. The ultimate tendency of these artificial constructs of time and space was to synchronize human functioning. In this way, social and societal order would come to resemble that of certain species in the animal world, in which individuals are mere units. “It is not unreasonable to think that individual freedom is only a stage, and

⁸⁴ Stiegler, *De la misère symbolique 1. L'époque hyperindustrielle*, 20 (in italics in the text).

⁸⁵ See André Leroi-Gourhan, *Le geste et la parole*, vol. 2, *La mémoire et les rythmes* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1964), 185–187.

that the harnessing of time and space entails the perfect subjugation of all the parts of the supra-individual organism.”⁸⁶

Guattari’s analysis of ritornellos and rhythms is political in that it sheds light on a notion of freedom that can no longer be simplified to the purely subjective, individuated, accountable (and thus *guilty*) problem of subjectivity:

The political issue underlying these questions seems to be the following: is it conceivable that a highly differentiated structure of behavior and the *socius* is not necessarily correlative to individuals’ subjugation to oppressive hierarchies and the systematic erosion of their spaces of freedom?⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Félix Guattari, *L’Inconscient machinique. Essais de schizo-analyse* (Paris: Éditions Recherches, 1979), 131.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 131.

POLYRHYTHMIA

Rhythm invites us to consider time and space jointly; in other words, how they unfold in a constant interplay fraught with tension, across the whole spectrum of life, both human and non-human. Rhythm reveals forms of coexistence; it is both pace and order, acceleration and deceleration, randomness and patterns.

Relaxing
Downtime
Burden
Congestion
Lassitude
Eurhythmia
Polyrhythmia
Speed
Patterns
Randomness
Order
Composition
Liberation
Surging





Relaxing
Downtime
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Liberation
Surging

AQUARIUM BAR-CAFÉ

Formules
Petit Déjeuner

Tartines / Croissant
jus de fruits
Café 5-

NOUVEAU
Cuisine ouverte le soir
du mardi au samedi

CAFÉ

Rue des
Pêcheries

AQUARIUM
pour café
BIÈRES
Pilsener
Sacro's
Superbock / Non
Heineken
Corona
Desperados
Guinness
Leffe (Blond/Brune)
Coca-Cola

artpg
Londr

LORRAINE

021





Relaxing
Downtime
Burden
Congestion
Lassitude
Eurhythmia
Polyrhythmia
Speed
Patterns
Randomness
Order
Composition
Liberation
Surging





Relaxing
Downtime
Burden
Congestion
Lassitude
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Polyrhythmia
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Patterns
Randomness
Order
Composition
Liberation
Surging





III Exploring forms of rhythm

In the humanities and social sciences, dichotomous positions are used to frame thinking about rhythms and the relationship between time and space, and between human societies and territories more broadly. In order to understand and accurately describe contemporary societies through the lens of rhythm, we must transcend dichotomies that tend to oversimplify phenomena by rendering them two dimensional and thus prevent us from exploiting the heuristic virtues of rhythm. The approaches used in the humanities and social sciences are based on forging dichotomies which are often implicit and taking an oppositional stance. Numerous examples can be cited: hyper-connected vs. disconnected; speed vs. slowness, city vs. country, voluntary vs. suffered, lively vs. non-chalant, work vs. leisure, and excitement vs. boredom.

Transcending dichotomies

Dichotomies can sometimes solidify in the form of concepts. Human density and spatial segregation are good examples of this. The first is measured by the number of residents per area unit. As we also know, social integration is no longer a function of proximity to the home, or even the neighborhood. Daily activities such as shopping, work, studying, etc. can take place across much larger areas. So, what does population density mean in terms of place of residence? Fifty years ago, social integration in cities was based on proximity to home, which naturally made sense. But today, human density indicators falsely represent the presence of populations in territories—more specifically, they indicate where people sleep at night. However, this does not inform us as to where

they spend their days. Human density indexes based on the number of inhabitants and jobs per area unit were developed to remedy this but only partially address the problem, as work-related trips account for less than 30% of trips made by any given population on any given weekday (Monday to Friday).

Spatial segregation—a key concept in geography and urban sociology that aims to measure concentrations of populations with similar characteristics in a given geographical area—is even more instructive. Segregation indexes are also based on residence and therefore pose exactly the same problems as those of population density. In the case of spatial segregation, the question goes even further, as segregation indexes are designed to identify social inequalities. One can easily imagine a city that is highly segregated in terms of housing, but whose inhabitants are highly mobile in their daily lives within their metropolitan area. This includes disadvantaged groups, who therefore mix with other population categories. Is such a city less mixed than one with a lower segregation index, but whose populations live separately, at different scales, and use different modes of transportation?

As these examples demonstrate, dichotomous thinking applied to the humanities and social sciences discourages dynamic research concepts, such as the pragmatic turn and the mobility turn.

From this perspective, the concept of rhythm we are building here should serve as a forum for blending epistemologies and analytical scales. This manifesto advocates radically interdisciplinary approaches, both epistemologically and methodologically, as well as a view of the analytical corpus and traditional ways of thinking in the social sciences.

Over and above this theoretical aim, it is essential to move beyond dichotomies that merely serve to fuel the development of pared-down critical forms. Hence, the adverse effects of capitalist acceleration are being met by calls for deceleration. As we have already suggested, however, neither speed nor slowness in themselves are or have ever been a guarantee of a better life or world. In addition to the modern tradition of disjunctive thinking, we

must forge *conjunctive* thinking and concepts. Rhythm is useful in that it brings opposites together (as in a ritornello), uniting different expressions of originality and creating forms of commonality without obscuring the tensions necessary for political work and the invention of new possible outcomes.

Broadening the epistemologies of space and time

Transcending dichotomies requires thinking about time and space not only as distinct territories characterized by an inside and an outside. As Bertrand Montulet⁸⁸ observes, it also pertains to different forms of fluidity leading to new ways of thinking about politics, i.e., ways of being in common:

- Space is expressed as a discrete dimension, either as delimitation—what geographers call territories—or as open, indefinite spaces or expanses.⁸⁹ When applied to social space, we can perceive that a *class* or *social contract* perspective shapes territories within a circumscribed social aggregate, for instance, whereas *liberal* social fluidity, *Smithian market*, or even *network* perspectives envisage a social area with no internal or external delimitation.
- Time is construed as a continuous dimension that moves either towards permanency (generally expressed as a duration, which allows us to *grasp* the movement of time) or towards ephemerality (expressed in the change inherent in the movement of time).

In other words, following Montulet's reasoning,⁹⁰ space and time do not necessarily unite delimitation and permanence. They may well consist of attachment to delimited spaces with no permanent conception of time. For instance, this can be the case for individuals who maintain strong attachments to delimited spaces despite

⁸⁸ B. Montulet, *Les enjeux spatio-temporels du social—mobilités* (Paris, L'Harmattan, 1998).

⁸⁹ R. Leduc, "L'espace et la dialectique de l'action," *Espaces et Sociétés*, no. 48–49 (1986): pp. 131–149.

⁹⁰ Montulet, *Les enjeux spatio-temporels du social*.

having experienced forms of uprooting in their lives (immigrants are exemplary in this sense). Finally, space and time can be kinetic. In other words, they can combine expansiveness and ephemerality. Poised to jump at any new opportunity that presents itself in time, the kinetic moves from one point to another through space without any boundaries or delimitations to give its action meaning. In this respect, it is time understood as change that prevails over static space.

The four spatio-temporal combinations derived from Bertrand Montulet's work⁹¹ illustrate the value of opening up the concepts of time and space. This approach does not merely envisage an inside and an outside. Rather, it allows for multiple combinations, as demonstrated by uprooting and repetition. Hybridizations⁹² therefore are often present in space and time. It is then not a question of comparing hyper-connectedness and disconnectedness, speed and slowness, the city and the country, the chosen and the imposed, the vivacious and the casual, work and leisure, or excitement and boredom, but of considering their combinatorics and combinations, and, in so doing, identifying specific rhythms.

Revisiting spatio-temporal combinations

The need to contemplate these combinations is all the greater given the impact of increasing differentials in speed and time, which have reapportioned the relative importance of different spatial forms: the halo, the network, and smooth rhizome space. This shift concerns both urban and non-urban areas, as well as social and professional integration. Exploring the combinations and combinatorics of time and space to outline a framework for a rhythmic analysis of contemporary societies requires revisiting these three spatio-temporal forms:

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² See Luc Gwiazdzinski (ed.), *L'hybridation des mondes* (Grenoble: Elya, 2016).

The halo. In this first approach, space and time, which are static, are represented as enclosed territories with an inside, an outside, and identifiable boundaries. Everyone has a place in this space. Mobility consists in moving from one space to another. Hence, movement is purposeful; it has an origin and a destination. The conceptual and methodological framework of the social sciences largely is based on this model, as is the mapping of zones, social classes, and national public policy as an object of political science. Most statistical sources implicitly are based on halo spaces, with their criteria of social (socio-professional categories, household composition) and spatial (countries, administrative regions) differentiation relative to spaces identified *a priori* as relevant, homogeneous, and delimited by borders. The main critique of the halo conception of space is its reliance on pre-established, closed categories. Its critics point to the diminishing capacity of differentiation of many of the analytical categories founded on this concept as proof of its conceptual obsolescence.⁹³ Rhythm here is closely associated with bodies in motion and the flow of time.

The network. In this conception, space and time are understood as a discontinuous, open, functional arrangement of lines and points. While its limits are identifiable, they are topological. Here, everyone has access to the network that is space. Access is a key issue, and physical transmission plays a key role in the analysis. While the halo conception considers transportation and means of communication as neutral mediums of mobility between origin and destination points, it also acknowledges that they tend to foster or hinder mobility in a network approach by virtue of their accessibility. The network concept has been extensively used to analyze social relationships (social networks and social capital), technical and territorial networks (agglomerations and automobile dependence), and their effects (fragmentation). Literature on Global Cities draws extensively on the network concept

⁹³ Z. Bauman, *Liquid modernity* (London: Polity, 2000).

to highlight links of dependency between cities based on airline routes and telecommunications traffic, for example.⁹⁴ Beyond the notion of territories being overdetermined by networks (versus by individuals' rhythms), for the social sciences, the risk of the network conception is a binary analysis based on denial of access. The network conception encourages a functional understanding of rhythm based on access. It also suggests the complex interplay of rhythms based on the differing speeds of each network (the acceleration of digital flows, the constraints of physical mobility, timetable schedules, etc.).

Smooth rhizome space. The third conception of space and time is a world in which distance no longer matters. Here, the occupation of time supplants the occupation of space, which is smooth, indefinite, and open, in a perpetual reorganization of potential opportunities. Society is like an "organless body,"⁹⁵ and the world is but a vast interface in which "the instantaneity of ubiquity results in the atopy of a single interface."⁹⁶ The complete compression of space has a radical impact on society, and the concept of mobility no longer has meaning since there are no borders (as space is a rhizome). Individuals are forced to live in a largely immaterial world and must carry their territories with and within them. The smooth rhizome space concept, in which time is *instantaneous* and territory is dematerialized, was inspired by the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Within this horizon, rhythm disappears, or rather, recovers its full institutional authority. Indeed, just as the body traces the temporal and spatial lines of its idiorhythmia, it partially dismantles the rhizome in an attempt to "dock"⁹⁷—to use Bruno Latour's sublime image—in other words, to fasten itself to the ground and dilate time.

⁹⁴ Taylor, *World City Network: A global urban analysis* (London: Routledge, 2004).

⁹⁵ Which brings us back to the notion of Anti-Oedipus.

⁹⁶ Virilio, *L'espace critique* (Paris: Christian Bourgeois, 1984).

⁹⁷ B. Latour, *Où atterrir?* (Paris: La découverte, 2017).

Rethinking the interweaving of relationships

The differentiation of spatio-temporal forms, which is shaped by the historical development of techniques for arranging time and space, call for us to think in terms of interweaving versus separating. From this standpoint, rhythms are born precisely at the juncture between restrictive systems that gradually narrow our possibilities, and processes of liberation and reassemblage. Hence, we must strive to develop analytical approaches to rhythm characterized by its ability to both propagate and accommodate multiple conflicting processes, and thereby create entangled, ambivalent spatio-temporal forms. In this way, rhythm is not merely a way of resisting acceleration in an increasingly fast-paced world (i.e., through deceleration), but rather a choreographic force. Therefore:

- **Rhythms are plural:** slowness and speed combine and reflect different categories (spatial distance, communication, social relations, artifacts, etc.).
- **Rhythms are overlapping:** the categories that rhythms refer to are often conflicting and jumbled (e.g., poorly connected long-distance car commuters, people who live hyper-locally and have dense activity schedules, etc.).
- **Rhythms are ambivalent:** fast and slow rhythms can be experienced positively or negatively. While most people aspire to a slower pace,⁹⁸ some feel restless, or even oppressed, when their daily rhythm slows (fewer activities, less movement). More fundamentally, acceleration and deceleration are integral in terms of our experience of pleasure in life and are contextual.

It is in this complex tangle of plurality, overlapping, and ambivalence that we must further Roland Barthes' dream—not that of a small, idiorhythmic community, but of an idiorhythmic society, a place of empowerment, differentiation, and sharing. It is a

⁹⁸ For more on this topic, see the results of the Mobile Lives Forum's international survey (2015) "Modes de vie et mobilité: quelles aspirations pour le futur?" [online] <https://fr.forumviesmobiles.org/meeting/2016/06/21/modes-vie-et-mobilite-queelles-aspirations-pour-futur-3282>

political project which, as we shall see, should cultivate new types of knowledge, thus enabling us to describe, represent, and measure the diversity and dynamics of rhythms.

New tools for analyzing rhythms

The analytical techniques of the social sciences greatly depend on the empirical materials available and survey methods used. These determine the scope of possibilities and frame research goals. Surveys generally are used to document a situation at a given moment in time to objectify a phenomenon and pinpoint the underlying causes. Other types of surveys carried out at regular intervals offer a retrospective approach by measuring variations in observations, thus highlighting changes in the phenomenon in question. Although these surveys lay the empirical basis for analysis in the social sciences, they have three important limitations when it comes to analyzing rhythms, which we will discuss shortly.

Describing a phenomenon at a given moment precludes observing eventual changes due to environmental variations. For instance, certain standardized survey protocols encourage interviewers to collect data on *normal* days. Normality here refers to typical days that reflect so-called routine or regular practices. Consequently, these standardized protocols tend to exclude Wednesdays (which are devoted to childcare), Fridays and Mondays (due to three-day weekends), and Saturdays and Sundays, which typically are days of rest. School vacations and bad weather are also to be avoided. If we consider all of these recommendations, only 72 days in a 365-day year can be considered *appropriate* for conducting surveys on mobility or activities. The quest for a *typical* day therefore inherently limits variations and excludes behaviors deemed *marginal*. The choice of survey periods may seem anecdotal, but it is a striking example of the power of norms in our understanding of collective temporalities, and a far cry from the idiorhythmia we hope to foster and nurture.

Regarding behavioral analysis, so-called traditional surveys have been supplanted by machine learning and the promises of Big Data, which claim to offer both a holistic and individual reading of human behavior *at the click of a button*. One important advantage of these approaches is the regularity with which material is collected (on a daily basis, as a function of mobile devices notably). In this sense, Big Data provides a high degree of regularity as well as temporal breadth, and at a massive scale. As Dominique Boullier points out, such devices allow us to take the pulse of a society⁹⁹ and potentially develop a new empirical way of practicing the social sciences. As such, they seem well suited for measuring individual and collective rhythms. Big Data, however, can be deceptive, as the information gathered from mobile devices and web queries ultimately provides little information about an individual's characteristics, intentions, feelings, and emotions (in other words, the experiential and hermeneutic material of rhythm). Despite some progress in analyzing comments through extraction,¹⁰⁰ Big Data is still relatively ill-adapted when it comes to describing rhythmic forms, in the most formal and reductive sense of the term. While the relative scarcity of such data should be stressed (due to the need to protect individuals' privacy), it could prove useful for analyzing spatio-temporal behaviors that combine spatial dispersion, complexity, and activity *time budgets*. While numerous data sources would help us develop a powerful corpus for analyzing rhythms, these approaches are still marginal.

Prioritizing a dynamic approach and rhythmic breadth

Interpreting, perceiving, and measuring rhythms seems like a straightforward matter given the battery of technological tools available for observing the rhythms of lives and cities. However,

⁹⁹ D. Boullier, *Sociologie du numérique* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2016), 352.

¹⁰⁰ Wenbo Hu et al., "Les nuits de Shanghai. Première approche spatio-temporelle à partir des réseaux numériques sociaux," *NETCOM: Networks and Communications Studies*, no. 30 (2016): 181–206.

as we stated above as regards the limitations of Big Data, these tools would require considerable work to be able to conceptualize the goals and boundaries of measuring rhythm. In attempting to delimit the scope of rhythm analysis and conceptualize its targets, an underlying tension between metrics-based approaches to rhythmology and experiential approaches is emerging. This tension could yield an important field of conceptualization insofar as thinking about rhythms can form a basis for reconciling two, often conflicting approaches.¹⁰¹

Analyzing rhythms thus allows us to rethink how social phenomena are analyzed and considered in the social sciences. Objectivized data generally espouses a view of social phenomena as immutable and devoid of movement or transformative capacity. Even in fields where movement is intrinsic, a change of state—spatial or social—paradoxically rarely features in analytical frameworks. Mobility behaviors and their whys and hows are a striking example of this tendency. In traditional mobility analyses, the individual is irrelevant, and their practices are buried in a mass of statistical indicators. This approach, which tends to underpin public transportation policies, systematically omits potentially useful information for decision-makers, not the least of which includes individual aspirations and intentions. This vision is best understood through a subtle organization of activities and experience, which is critical on several levels. For one, it shows how people move through the space and time of everyday life, thus echoing the concept of the *rhythmos*. It also reveals how individuals *inhabit* cities based on the purposes and motives of their activities. Moreover, it highlights complex sequences of activities and the time constraints that individuals face, thus underscoring key social and spatial factors. This organization highlights social synchronies, the time-spaces in which societies are shaped through the intensity of interactions and practices. It also suggests the desynchronization

¹⁰¹ Guillaume Drevon, *Proposition pour une rythmologie de la mobilité et des sociétés contemporaines*, “Espaces, mobilités et sociétés” coll. (Neuchâtel: Alphil—Presses universitaires suisses, 2019).

of certain populations that experience situations of temporal marginalization, pointing to the vulnerability associated with solitude and misalignment with rhythmic norms. Mobility analysis tends to focus on rush hours (i.e., times and places daily saturation). While fighting rush-hour congestion is an honorable priority for mobility planning, limiting analyses as such masks other temporalities that could be key for orienting social policy.

For instance, the nighttime, which is often fraught with conflicting uses and misuses, is scarcely considered in political agendas. Yet, scores of individuals with insecure jobs (e.g., cleaning personnel who precede or follow the white-collar workers) travel to work early and late at night. The inability to fully appreciate the rhythmic breadth of social phenomena touches many other fields as well, from civic mobilization to workplace commitments and attachment processes. For instance, the notion of habitation is often limited to how we frequent places. Yet, if we consider habitation as a form of commitment that involves the long, physical process of familiarization,¹⁰² then a superficially rhythmic interpretation is no longer sufficient. We must therefore turn to ethnographic tools (and observation in particular) to describe and analyze the implementation of life rhythms and the personal environment thus created. One could imagine that in-depth knowledge of rhythm might help us avoid rhythmic pathologies such as exhaustion. Many militant movements have also recently rediscovered the political power of attachment and habitation.¹⁰³ Understanding rhythm is therefore more than a purely epistemological question; it is a political necessity, although the path to idiorhythmic liberation remains long and uncertain, both individually and collectively.

¹⁰² M. Breviglieri, "Penser l'habiter, estimer l'habitabilité." *Tracés—Bulletin technique de la Suisse romande* (2006), 9–14.

¹⁰³ For more on this topic, see the "habiter" section of *Constellations*, a manifesto that looks at struggles and resistance of the early twenty-first century: Collectif Mauvaise troupe, *Constellations: Trajectoires révolutionnaires du jeune 21^e siècle* (Paris: L'Éclat, 2014), 399–478.

Conceptualizing rhythm in the social sciences

Beyond critiques of the analyses of socio-spatial phenomena, whose heuristic force would undoubtedly be greater were it based on dynamic or, even better, rhythmic approaches, we will highlight the concept of rhythm in the social sciences. These disciplines often consider rhythm as a sum of the activities performed in a given unit of time (hour, day, etc.). However, as philosophy and musicology suggest, rhythm does not necessarily mean regular, repetitive movement. Rather, it is both multilayered and overlapping, and is marked by differences of pace, peaks of intensity, and slumps. Thus, events contributing to rhythmic complexification, including the emergence of arrhythmic forms, can be essential in forging a true social science of rhythms. Off-beatness, heterorhythmia, and divergence reveal phenomena that are unobservable through static approaches. Beyond the presumed qualities of the rhythm concept and its added value for analysis, our proposed conceptualization of rhythm in the social sciences includes two structural dimensions and several types of rhythmic variations that contradict the phenomenon's alleged regularity. Each of these variations is valuable for analyzing social phenomena and their unfolding in space and time.

To this end, this manifesto hypothesizes that analyzing the two structuring dimensions of rhythms and their various inflections (Figure 12) together can shed new light on social and spatial phenomena already observed and transcend their dichotomization.

The first structuring dimension of rhythm concerns the different forms of intensity that shape the regular rhythmic framework (1). Rhythmic peaks are moments where a phenomenon reaches its peak intensity, while rhythmic slumps are situations where said phenomenon is unobservable. Peaks include rush hours, extreme pollution, urban events, periods of workplace stress, moments of collective effervescence, and the resulting effects of emotional saturation. Slumps are periods of rest (e.g., vacations

and weekends). Nights can also be considered slumps when relative to the daytime. The second dimension of rhythm is cadence (2), which encompasses the pace, speed, and complexity of rhythmic frameworks. Cadence can be regular or irregular; it expresses the rhythm at which a phenomenon unfolds from beginning to end; it is the breath of social and biological phenomena and can be distinguished in a variety of natural processes. For instance, leaf fall in autumn takes place over several weeks, whereas the intensity of this process varies based on temperature and precipitation. People similarly carry out their activities at different paces depending on the temporal context. Workdays and non-workdays, for example, have associated cadences that differ in pace and intensity. Periodicity (1) affects rhythm at two levels. Firstly, it governs the more or less regular intervals at which a rhythmic form develops. It also determines the time frame within which rhythmic forms unfold. This interval can be short or long, as illustrated by climatic periodicity, for instance. In this way, a rhythmic form can occur on a daily, monthly, or yearly basis, or take place at irregular intervals. For example, daily schedules span the 24 hours of the day at different spatial scales; seasons are defined by thresholds linked to temperature and precipitation; events can take place over time periods ranging from a few minutes to several days or more.

Periodic patterns thus help us to better grasp the fabric of social life, thereby attesting to the pace of societies and laying the bases for our calendars. More regular periods, for example, correspond to commuting from home to work and routine activities in general, which are emblematic examples of rhythmic repetition.

The second rhythmic pattern relates to unplanned events that disrupt regular rhythmic patterns or that, more specifically, are considered disruptive. Randomness is therefore the second form of rhythmic variation (2). As it occurs unexpectedly, randomness refers to the occurrence of an unforeseen phenomenon. For example, an accident or bad weather can impact regular rhythms more or less durably. Beyond randomness, this rhythmic variation

is also reflected in emotional shifts (e.g., collective emotions like jubilation or panic) that disrupt rhythms by intensifying or interrupting patterns.¹⁰⁴

The third type of rhythmic pattern concerns the ordering of episodes (2), which reveals connections between different types of activities. Home-work, spring-summer-fall-winter, birth-death, day-night, and work-rest cycles are examples of immutable patterns. However, these sequences can be rearranged to produce new ones, particularly with respect to everyday life, where activities must be reordered to face excessive time pressures, for example.

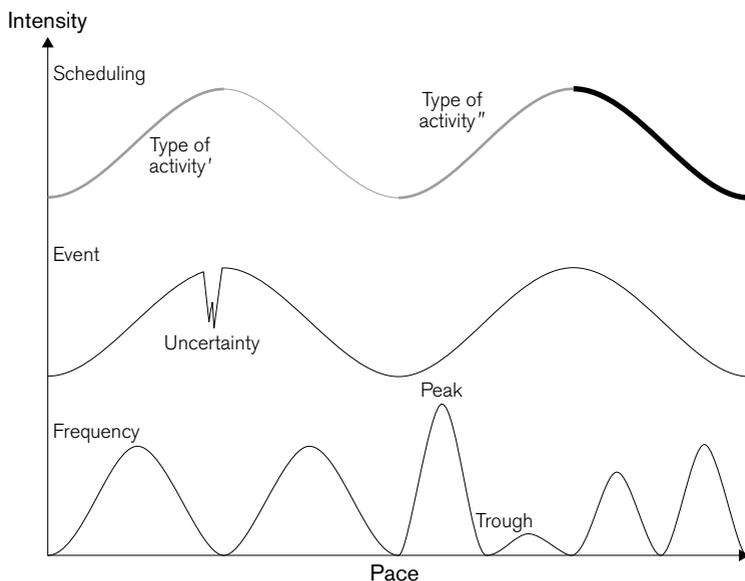


Figure 12 Structuring dimensions of rhythms and key patterns

¹⁰⁴ Luca Pattaroni, Pascal Viot, Lucien Delley, "Liesse, émeute et panique : enquête sur l'effervescence et la crisallisation des états publics de la foule," *Émulations* (2020).

Combining an analysis of practices and experiences of rhythm

Rhythm, as presented in this manifesto, therefore embraces the idea of combining epistemologies and transcending dichotomies. The concept of rhythm can satisfy a variety of epistemological appetites and provide a new interpretation of social and spatial phenomena by linking approaches that are often perceived as conflicting or irreconcilable. While a wealth of practices can be analyzed on the basis of spatio-temporal behavior, it is experience that attests to the sensations and emotional states conditioned by different rhythmic situations. *Rhythmic* situations result from the states of intensity and cadences associated with these variations (ordering, periodicity, events). The conjunction of these elements gives rise to situations wherein practices, activities, and experience of the present intermingle. Patterns that fluctuate based on cadence, intensity, and rhythmic *inflections* are marked alternately by periods of intense activity and less structured ones. Measuring alternations between peaks and slumps is relatively easy with mobility surveys, road traffic data, digital exchange rates, and telephone geolocation data. However, the fluctuating intensity of emotional states is more subtle. An *objectivist* approach might measure individuals' heart rates and perspiration levels to better appreciate this data. In this way, analyses could be used to link the intensity of practices with how the body functions. What such approaches lack—and what contemporary technologies could help improve—is individuals' capacity to reflect on their own aspirations relative to their personal cadence. Aspiration speaks to individuals' plans and reservations, particularly as regards the personal priorities that guide one's life. These behavioral patterns are increasingly reified through life rhythms which, by their intensity and pace, overshadow the specific times and spaces of different areas of commitment. What is at stake is the very possibility of living a full, meaningful life. In this respect, idiorhythmics is not merely a particularity, but rather a necessary form of life that nourishes the

aspirations and attachments that make life pleasurable. Extending this notion to territories and urban areas in particular is essential. Intensity and cadence of activities effectively help reveal the essential role territories play in creating environments and offering (or failing to offer) footholds for liberation and common rhythms. This approach echoes Henri Lefebvre's¹⁰⁵ approach to the production of space by linking the process of creating form with ideological and experiential perspectives.¹⁰⁶ It revitalizes the concept of *rhythmanalysis* (developed by Dos Santos in the 1930s before being taken up by Gaston Bachelard,¹⁰⁷ who gave it a psychoanalytical dimension and proposed a detailed exploration of life rhythms) and is at the crossroads of poetry, philosophy, and spatial planning. Lefebvre added a sociological dimension to *rhythmanalysis* that aims to minimize distinction between the scientific and the poetic, making its appropriation and transmission challenging.

By analogy with individual and collective aspirations, the analysis of rhythms and their differences also reflects the political leanings and preferred development models of political decision-makers. Globally speaking, the dominant development model was and remains the acceleration of trade and productivity growth. At the regional level, this model is manifest in the creation and implementation of major transportation infrastructure, logistics platforms, and remote communications networks. The diversity and density of the retail offer in urban areas have increased significantly due to support of development policies increasingly geared to the capitalist development model that has come to shape our fast-paced lifestyles. Today, individuals must face intensifying demands for mobility, activity, and productivity in a larger context of interpersonal competition. This results in a strong correlation between environmental systems and personal aspirations that largely shapes contemporary life rhythms.

¹⁰⁵ H. Lefebvre, *Éléments de rythmanalyse* (Paris: Éditions Syllepse, 1992).

¹⁰⁶ L. Pattaroni, "La trame sociologique de l'espace," *SociologieS* (2016) [online] <https://journals.openedition.org/sociologies/5435>.

¹⁰⁷ G. Bachelard, *La dialectique de la durée* (Paris: PUF, 1950).

Principles of rhythm analysis

As mentioned previously, the concept of rhythm has a strong cross-disciplinary dimension and potentially can be used in a variety of research fields. This flexibility is advantageous for forging dialogue between the many areas of the human sciences. However, the concept is all the more meaningful when applied to a specific problem. In our view, proposing a general rhythmology theory that excludes spatial, temporal, and thematic limits outright would be illusory. We feel that rhythmology is most effective when it follows three main principles:

- The first relates to overcoming the static nature of observations in the social sciences by countering dichotomous, static thinking with dynamic approaches.
- The second principle concerns the investigation and analysis of rhythmic forms, i.e., well-known patterns that are now the boon of the computational sciences. Underlying this now automated quest for patterns, we find Benveniste's fundamental observation that the very notion of rhythm was born of an attempt to "unify man and nature with respect to 'time,' intervals, and equal recurrences," thus enabling us to "distinctively characterize human behavior, both individual and collective."¹⁰⁸ Rhythm patterns enable us to rediscover dynamic forms that were rendered invisible by the traditional analysis of stocks and flows.
- The third principle concerns the structure of epistemologies, and the regularity/experience duo more specifically. This involves combining the measurement of rhythmic forms and the experiences (emotions, attachments, etc.) that drive them and give them political significance in a single concept.

¹⁰⁸ Émile Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, vol. 1, "Tel" coll. (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 327.

Based on these principles, we will broadly outline the potential areas to revisit using rhythm analysis in order to build rhythm policies.

- Historically speaking, mobility is the ideal tool for developing a rhythm approach based on the structuring dimensions of rhythm and for identifying differentiated patterns. Individuals' mobility varies greatly in terms of *intensity* (peak versus off-peak), *cadence* (pace and speed of movement), *periodicity* (daily commuting versus leisure travel), and *activity schedules*. Mobility can also be affected by unforeseen events that interrupt a journey's course. While the study of travel behaviors is well suited to a metrics-based analysis of rhythms, research often limits itself to individuals' reasons for choosing one means of transportation over another (what engineers call modal choice). The relationship with time and its historical evolution in different mobility contexts, together with contemporary rhythm pressures, should be explored in order to analyze how transportation time is used.
- In a similar vein, energy consumption lends itself quite well to rhythm analysis. Electricity consumption, for instance, is marked by peaks in domestic consumption, which often occur in the early evening between 6:30 and 8:00 p.m. when people return home, cook a meal, turn up the heat (in winter), charge devices, and sometimes run dishwashers. These peaks can also be read as rhythms in that they reflect the pulse of lifestyles at an urban or regional scale. This dynamic reading of energy consumption shows how the question of life rhythms is manifest in technical systems: do not coal powered stations and other hydroelectric dams start up at peak times to meet these social rhythms?
- In a different vein, **the critical analysis of relationships of domination** through time and heterorhythmia are also relevant themes for a rhythm perspective. Such approaches could help in revealing the range of demands relative to the workplace, mass consumerism, and social activities. Rhythmology can also shed light on the hidden ranks of casual workers who work odd hours, gender inequalities in everyday life, and income inequalities when it comes to support services for managing rhythm pressures.

- The study of contemporary subjectivation processes can also benefit from a rhythm-based approach. As Pascal Michon suggests in his groundbreaking book on *politics of rhythm*,¹⁰⁹ individuation processes are closely linked to the convergence of corporal, discursive, and social rhythms. It seems the question of rhythm is essential for considering self-preservation and empowerment in a context of *fluid* capitalism, whose noxious effects impact older forms of individuation.

For spatial and territorial analysis, a rhythm approach offers interesting perspectives in several ways. To begin, it looks at how people move within territories to better understand how they interact in public spaces. These rhythmic encounter clusters¹¹⁰ can be used to extend the interactionist approach of urban ecology or that of Goffman,¹¹¹ which focuses not only on individuals' space and gestures, but also on the collective patterns that emerge through these encounters and their rhythms. Next, we must work to understand the rhythms dictated by the contemporary production of space. If a tyranny of lifestyles indeed exists,¹¹² then it involves, among other things, the imposing of rhythms linked to spatial distribution. Rhythmically speaking, networked and interconnected territories are highly complex and tend to aggregate, not alleviate, the rhythmic pressures of physical mobility and virtual communications. In fact, places are becoming increasingly *augmented*, or "hyper-topes"¹¹³—in other words hyper-places where physical and virtual space, intense co-presence, interactions, and communications come together. More than ever, it is essential for territories to be capable of managing these new *hyper-rhythmicities*.

¹⁰⁹ Pascal Michon, *Les rythmes du politique. Démocratie et capitalisme mondialisé* (Paris: Les Prairies ordinaires, 2007).

¹¹⁰ Wenbo Hu et al., "Les nuits de Shanghai. Première approche spatio-temporelle à partir des réseaux numériques sociaux," *NETCOM: Networks and Communications Studies*, no. 30 (2016): 181–206.

¹¹¹ Erving Goffman, *Les rites d'interaction* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2003).

¹¹² M. Hunyadi, *La tyrannie des modes de vie. Sur le paradoxe moral de notre temps* (Lormont: Éditions Le Bord de l'eau, 2015).

¹¹³ Luc Gwiazdzinski, "Nuit debout," *Imaginations: Journal of Cross-Cultural Image Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2017): 38–57.

CHOREOPOLICIES

A rhythm policy should be like a choreography, not one that negates differences and disputes, but rather a composition in a state of tension and attuned to idiosyncrasies and inconsistencies. It should welcome the emergence of different lifestyles and shape new ways of thinking about hospitality.

Relaxing
Downtime
Burden
Congestion
Lassitude
Eurhythmia
Polyrhythmia
Speed
Patterns
Randomness
Order
Composition
Liberation
Surging





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RÉSERVÉ
DIRECTION

IV A plea for choreopolicies

Given the limitations of the approaches and tools used to interpret and analyze in our fast-changing world, rhythm approaches are a necessity. They leave room for aspirations born of experimentation with individual and collective lifestyles and are able to withstand the toxic effects of contemporary rhythmic pressures.

Beyond observation and analysis, fundamentally speaking, rhythm is a political issue and part and parcel of the sustainable development debate. It is a question of *rhythmopolicies* in that it involves the governing of rhythms, which transcends mere *chronopolicies* or time management, to encompass space and time simultaneously. It also addresses contemporary questions regarding liberation, cohabitation, and the dangers of dominant systems based on neoliberal economic models and the market economy. A rhythm approach forces us to question the intimate, dialectical relationship between deceleration and acceleration, scheduling and improvising, order and disorder, freedom and control, and individuals and communities.

Using rhythm as our starting point, one can imagine acts of individual and collective resistance to rhythm pathologies and the toxic impact of a frenetic pace of life, but also to forms of deceleration that marginalize and impoverish certain populations. This manifesto is a call to shatter the mold of neoliberal economics (including submission to increasingly accelerated time demands and forced immobility).

Rhythmic power and choreopolicies

This manifesto highlights the tremendous potential of rhythm-based policies. Rhythm effectively underpins our individual and collective

life force, as well as providing perspective on modern forms of power and domination, which are obstacles to liberation and sharing.

Goal-oriented rhythm management policy (e.g., aimed at decelerating and reducing intensities) could also potentially limit paths towards liberation for certain individuals and groups. We must be wary of the potentially deleterious effects of radical deceleration policies forcibly implemented, which could lead to new forms of oppression and domination due to disregard for essential idiorhythmia. On the contrary, we believe it is important to think in terms of policies that can accommodate the ebbs and flows of both acceleration and deceleration, i.e., the ups and downs that determine the rhythms of our relationships with others and with the world functionally, existentially, and socially.

With this in mind, our approach enhances the basic idea of combating rhythmic pathologies by proposing what we call choreopolicies. By this we mean policies that focus on the arranging of rhythmic cadences and intensities, so as to enable the expression and reconciling of differences, as well as the relationship between liberation and commonality. This endeavor invites us to draw on the art of choreography, as ancient Greek philosophers did, for developing guidelines for dynamic thinking about commons. In this perspective, the aim and necessity of choreopolicies is to reduce pathological forms of time pressure, saturation, and urgency by forging acceptance and balancing cadences, intensities, and paces. The challenge is offering a framework for different rhythms and living environments, playing on the potential for acceptance and coexistence of different speeds, with tolerance for outbursts and withdrawal, and times and spaces for attachment and detachment. This involves both creating coherency and welcoming differences, however disturbing and agonistic.

Towards choreopolicies

The rhythm pathologies that underpin the choreopolicies proposed here can open to reflection on how contemporary societies

function. Choreopolicies, which strive for respect and integration of individual rhythms in view of developing new forms of commonality, can be grounded in principles that address multiple modern-day issues. Each principle is rooted in a rhythmic power. When combined, these powers should give rise to new ways of dealing with the effects of congestion, suffocation, dizziness, and exhaustion that undermine our ability to live well and to live together.

The idiorhythmia principle, or the rhythmic power of liberation

The first challenge concerns the potential for liberation—in other words, for becoming an actor in a world of time pressures due, as we saw in the first chapter, to the intensifying of capitalist forms and the imperatives of social and economic acceleration. Becoming actors of our lifestyles, individually and collectively, requires political awareness of the experiential and territorial implications of idiorhythmia. It is therefore a call for policy initiatives aimed at reclaiming time and space for the pursuit of non-productive and non-economic activities to forge the bonds and aspirations that give life meaning.¹¹⁴

The idiorhythmic principles of choreopolicies thus militate for the liberation of individuals and communities that wish to regain control of their time and life rhythms. Liberation essentially involves a sense of spatial control over our living environments and a capacity for social and political self-determination over activities and experiences. It is therefore instrumental in curbing the alienation associated with time saturation and scheduling imperatives. Idiorhythmia acts as a bulwark against both the tyranny of lifestyles dictated by capitalist and technological acceleration (see Chapter One), and the tyranny of potential alternatives forged on

¹¹⁴ On the concept of singular attachments, in which the relationships that give life their meaning play out, see, for example, Bernard Williams, *La fortune morale* (Paris, PUF, 1994).

homogenized, decelerated, local lifestyles. The goal is to unleash the rhythmic power of liberation, which requires free times and spaces for public debate and deliberation, *potential* times and spaces that allow for critical, creative appropriation and emancipatory mechanisms (e.g., yellow vest encampments on roundabouts).

The eurhythmia principle (the rhythmic power of compromise)

The second principle of choreopolicies calls for the development of rhythms that promote the commonality so central to human encounters in a context of individualized lifestyles. This may involve the development of shared synchronies and downtimes to forge cohesion and bonding, or acceleration to promote functional fluidity as well as collective ferment. This principle aims to restore the time and space needed for the collective building processes that are essential to associative life, festive activities, and forms of resistance.

In this case, choreopolicies must harness the ability to embrace and come to terms with differences in terms of rhythmic forms, just as jazz melodies welcome solos while providing a common musical theme. In this sense, we insist that eurhythmia is not simply a state of rhythmic harmony. Rather, the danger is that choreopolicies will become merely an idealistic form designed to eliminate tension in the name of harmony and peaceful fusion. In fact, considering eurhythmia in this way is highly counterproductive. On the contrary, it is important to find creative forms that preserve the essence of our myriad differences. As Chantal Mouffe argues, political debate is essential to the life of democracies.¹¹⁵ More fundamentally, the turmoil¹¹⁶ we experience in our daily lives is vital to our engagement and critical thinking. In this respect, we need to draw inspiration from choreographic and musical forms that

¹¹⁵ C. Mouffe, *On the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

¹¹⁶ On the democratic implications of disorder, see, for example, M. Breviglieri, D. Trom, *Troubles et tensions en milieu urbain. Les épreuves citadines et habitantes de la ville. Les sens du public. Publics politiques, publics médiatiques* (Paris: PUF, 2003).

celebrate tension, disruption, disjunction, and controlled dissonance (think of the choreographic work of Pina Bausch or the free jazz of John Coltrane).

The transition principle (the rhythmic power of care)

The third principle concerns the need to rethink the relationship between the rhythms of human activity and those of the universe. Modernity has lulled humanity into believing that technological progress will free us from natural rhythms (seasons, natural disasters, etc.). Climate change puts this illusion into perspective by reminding us how tied to these rhythms and disruptions we are in the Anthropocene era. The third principle offers an approach that reconciles the rhythms of nature, and in particular the renewal of resources with those of consumption and production. It thus echoes current debates about what we now call *the transition* by measuring humanity's impact on the planet in order to forge new rhythmic arrangements that help us to transcend the rigmarole that surrounds these issues, as well as the rhythmic pathologies of extractive capitalism. This transition principle seeks to rhythmically rekindle the art of embracing otherness and being attentive to what we affect through our actions: in other words, the rhythmic power of caring. More fundamentally, it is a principle of vigilance against the negative effects of heterorhythmia and a way of reintroducing an element of passivity into rhythm, as something that creates space and room.

The future challenges of choreopolicies

The feasibility of choreopolicies still seems fragile, especially given political actors' seeming inability to grasp the full scope of time issues in relation to space and lifestyles in general. In addition to the principles outlined above, choreopolicies should address the practical issues outlined in this final chapter.

The idiorhythmic approach

The first approach—idiorhythmia—would encourage the expression of unique rhythms that shape the diversity of individual and collective lifestyles. From a practical standpoint, the goal is to understand the characteristics and means of implementing rhythmic singularity. This implies refreshing social science research tools and the development of radical interdisciplinary approaches. Based on this new knowledge of individual and collective rhythms, idiorhythmia would then be used to highlight the rhythm pathologies that manifest themselves in the time pressures individuals face and that our environments must metabolize. In turn, we can devise methods and means¹¹⁷ to free ourselves from these shackles.

This may involve rethinking personal aspirations relative to circumscribed rhythmic imperatives. The aim is not to discourage those who want a fast-paced life, but to make (policy) arrangements with those who want to live at a slower pace and have greater control over their time. Such arrangements require new social conventions, as well as both institutional and material support systems to accommodate both extremes of these rhythmic shifts (between withdrawal and sudden bursts of energy). This starts with rethinking our time standards, which valorize acceleration and overbooked agendas, and stigmatize idleness. Secondly, implementing idiorhythmia involves creating greater leeway in our schedules and physical spaces. This could take the form of spaces in our schedules that offer a new range of choices for managing our time.

Specifically, an idiorhythmic approach could be implemented through public policies that support and encourage individual downtime. Some examples include reducing and sharing working hours, increasing maternity and paternity leave, supporting child-care management, minimizing the need for mobility, encouraging

¹¹⁷ As defined by Michel Foucault (1975), i.e., “a heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, etc.,” in Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977 [1975]), but in the opposite sense of prison confinement.

associative and militant activities, and, more generally, shifting from productive to more meaningful activities, thereby creating a satisfying, worthwhile sense of life.

More generally, these policies would ideally be based on rethinking ways of creating more space, rather than encouraging even greater saturation by devising new targets and target indicators. The possibility of managing one's time and space is strongly linked to access to resources (monetary or otherwise) and activity spaces. In this respect, the introduction of a fixed universal income would be a powerful means of regaining control over lifestyles and rhythms. Similarly, initiatives for sustainable autonomous zones or, in a more formal framework, non-commercial spaces and cooperatives, could contribute greatly to increasing the space for personal and collective rhythms.

The eurhythmia approach

The second challenge of choreopolicies is overturning current political traditions. As the *Accelerationist Manifesto* suggests,¹¹⁸ existing institutional tools seem ill-suited to the scale of change required to combat contemporary rhythmic pathologies. These tools need to be radically rethought as regards their original intent, which essentially is based on a neoliberal model of development. Over the last fifty years, Western state institutions have promoted the development of physical and legal infrastructures to accelerate the rhythms of production and life, largely contributing to the development of various forms of saturation.

Alongside this dominant productivist approach are processes for *securing*¹¹⁹ quality of life and forms of collective organization (certification, hosts of indicators, reporting, etc.), that have helped

¹¹⁸ A. Williams, N. Srnicek, Y. Citton, "Manifeste accélérationniste," *Multitudes*, no. 2 (2014): 23–35.

¹¹⁹ M. Breviglieri, "Une brèche critique dans la ville garantie ? Espaces intercalaires et architectures d'usage," in E. Cogato-Lanza, L. Pattaroni, M. Piraud, B. Tirone, *De la différence urbaine. Le quartier des Grottes/Genève* (Geneva: Métispresses, 2013), 213–236.

depoliticize the question of commons. In this *post-democratic*¹²⁰ perspective, eurhythmia as a relationship between rhythms and differences, is often reduced to conflict avoidance. However, as we argue above, the kinds of choreographies that interest us are those that, on the contrary, embrace essential differences and tendencies.

Choreopolicies therefore require a radical paradigm shift in terms of public policy. It is not only a question of downscaling, but also of rethinking forms of government. Starting from eurhythmia, it is a matter of encouraging people to work on the creation of rhythms in forms of coordination that offer ample leeway and are based on tolerance of differences. Such forms have yet to be invented but should be based on restoring trust in the inventions and everyday uses of individuals and groups (versus constant surveillance or preventive suppression of any form of appropriation), or on valuing complex situations and the tensions they generate.

In other words, it means advocating the proliferation of rhythms rather than dictating what *good* rhythms are, based only on collective performance, economic efficiency, and aimless productivity. Thus, while differences in speed can lead to the separation of spaces (for instance, the construction of *bicycle highways* in northern Europe to facilitate fast, fluid traffic), we must also create mixed spaces where pedestrians, cyclists, and scooter users mix, and encounters and tensions occur. Similarly, in addition to structured times and spaces, we need to also envisage unstructured ones that are not commoditized and exploited for possible futures.

With this in mind, eurhythmia requires choreopolicies that allow for disruption and for temporal and spatial differences.

The challenge of transition

Reconciling the rhythms of activity in the Western/Westernized world with those of the universe, which have long been out of sync, is one of the great challenges of choreopolicies today. The pace of mass

¹²⁰ C. Crouch, *Post-democracy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004).

production, largely dependent on non-renewable energies and rare minerals, disregards the rhythms of renewal resource process. This is all the more true for renewable resources, which are depleted earlier and earlier each year (as Earth Overshoot Day¹²¹ often indicates). The rhythm of human activity is therefore a major challenge for choreopolicies in the Anthropocene era. In practical terms, we need to rethink the rhythms of production and consumption, and work to make them more compatible with the rhythms of the universe and nature. Politically speaking, this means abandoning the presumed linear nature of growth and aligning production and consumption systems with our natural resources. Choreopolicies aim to adapt the pace of human activity to the availability of resources, keeping consumption and production rates within the limits of nature's capacities to renew itself. For instance, this reconfiguration involves mitigating many of the man-made devices that underlie disjunctive rhythmic processes (i.e., policies that reduce night-time lighting, thereby reintroducing the notion of night-time rhythms into our everyday experience). By re-experiencing night (i.e., darkness), we can protect the rhythms of human and animal life by reducing light pollution.

Perhaps, and most importantly, choreopolicies involve a greater awareness of seasonal effects and short cycles in agricultural production and consumer practices. These principles are at the heart of permaculture, which advocates a vision of agricultural production as a process of attention and accompaniment that respects the rhythms of renewal of our ecosystems.

The choice of rhythmic liberation

In today's fluid forms of capitalism, no aspect of our existence (including—and especially—culture, teaching, research, education, and leisure) can escape the frantic rhythms of the infernal production-consumption-growth triad. As a result, it is becoming

¹²¹ "Earth Overshoot Day" is the date each year at which humanity is deemed to have consumed all of the resources the planet is capable of regenerating in one year [online] https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jour_du_dépassement.

increasingly difficult to invent lifestyles that are aesthetically and politically responsive to the rhythms that shape our lives, our temporalities, and the spaces we inhabit.¹²² In “Bâtir la civilisation du temps libéré”¹²³ (“Build a civilization from freed time”), André Gorz explores this question through the (very concrete) utopian lens of reduced working hours as a fundamental way of de-saturating our lives by alleviating the rhythmic oppression of production. For him, if a society can produce more—and better—with less labor, then a person’s income should no longer depend on the amount of work they do. A policy of wealth redistribution should enable everyone to work less. This is a long-term political vision (as opposed to the *short-term* perspective of current policies) that involves dual revenues: a labor income that decreases with the duration of work, and a social income whose value increases as the first decreases.

This *revolution of chosen rhythms* could be facilitated by the introduction of a guaranteed universal income, which would not be limited to a unique, top-down model for all workers (25-hour week, 30-hour week, etc.). Rather, it should allow a choice between a range of models and systems that have already been tested in different countries: reduced daily/weekly/monthly/yearly working hours, the right to a sabbatical year every five years, the right to more (and more flexible) leave for parents, for individual training, health-related reasons (caring for a sick parent, child, etc.).

The goal should be *achieving rhythmic autonomy* that allows us to tailor our free time and self-determined spaces to individual needs or personal situations. This is the only way to ensure that our free time does not become an idle, empty time that is usurped and exploited by the entertainment and leisure industries. In keeping with the idea of rhythm, this reappropriation of time is inevitably a question of space, in that it is not a matter of having free time

¹²² On this topic, we are referring to Manola Antonoli’s article “Le stade esthétique de la production/consommation et la révolution du temps choisi,” *Multitudes*, no. 69 (2017), whose conclusion is partially reiterated here.

¹²³ Article recently republished in the publication, *Bâtir la civilisation du temps libéré* (Paris: Le Monde diplomatique / Les liens qui libèrent, 2013).

only to consign it to limited spaces in a vain attempt at distraction, but rather of having alternative places to live and experiment.

The aim of time liberation is not to create new jobs and services, but to relativize the economy's role in the organization of individual and collective time and to establish a fresh balance between paid work and unpaid, productive activities (economic solidarity networks, cooperative structures, cultural circles, etc.). The aim is to forge a new relationship between *having* and *being*, where our schedules are neither *too full* (for workers who must meet the demands of productivity) nor *too empty* (for the unemployed). The increased autonomy and existential security of this new time paradigm could free individuals from excessive consumption and work in the service of growth. Instead, they could invest their time in co-creating a shared, pluralistic, sustainable world and inventing new individual and collective rhythms.

From a rhythmic perspective, the question of fewer working hours could be broadened by considering models of living environments that could emerge from and facilitate this process of liberation. More than forty years ago, in his famous “pragmatopia” *Bolo bolo*,¹²⁴ Swiss activist PM described the close relationship between the liberation of time and territory. This notably concerns the concept of hospitality. In this political-ecological essay, each autonomous spatial unit, or “bolo bolo,” must produce more than it can consume, not only to encourage exchange, but also to welcome travelers (who travel slowly and lightly, enjoying the months of freedom from work). In turn, the surroundings territories, which have been liberated thanks to light workloads, are linked to other areas by slower rhythms of mobility. This allows for exchanges to take place over long periods of time and for the development of idiorhythmia that is free and partially liberated from the constraints of production. In a sense, it is about making space for new spatio-temporal rhythms of creativity—that free process beyond the realm of work that was at the heart of Lefebvre's thinking on the

¹²⁴ PM, *Bolo Bolo* (Paris, Éditions de l'Éclat, 1998 [1983]).

right to the city, where a new division is forged between production and reproduction, invention and care. Such time—freed from the shackles of work—would allow us to identify the rhythms of life that are necessary to meet the imperious demands of caring for the world and for each other.

Conclusion

The possibility of a life

In a society that is increasingly dominated by the omnipresence of technology, the ritornellos of the cultural industry (in the form of slogans and jingles), the seemingly unregulated but tightly controlled behaviors of business and consumerism, the accelerated rhythms of life and work, the ambiguous imperatives of mass entertainment, countable and depoliticized objectives, and the tyranny of benchmarking, can we still imagine spaces for creativity and invention, for the deterritorialization of dominant ritornellos? How can we inhabit the spaces and times of modern society?

Choosing multiplicity

Taking up the challenge of rhythm means answering this question affirmatively and advocating new ways of organizing personal and social time (and, by extension, territories and environments) through the proliferation of individual and collective rhythms:

- **Slower rhythms of production and consumption**, for population control and a more frugal society, both critical in the face of the ecological emergency;
- **different rhythms of mobility** that do not systematically favor the speed of cars and planes;
- **autonomous territorial rhythms** protected from *metropolization* and *planning*;
- **flexible learning rhythms** based not on competition, acceleration, and constant evaluation but on cooperation and sharing; and

- **more relaxed rhythms of work**, which are neither the *empty*, unrhythmed time of unemployment nor the frenetic, saturated pace of full-time work.

The path to dynamic balance

Rhythm is a key issue for both society and sustainable development. It raises the problem of play, room for maneuver, and the balance between order and disorder, restriction and innovation, norms and freedom. It is also necessary for considering the implications of the temporal and spatial changes in a society where lifestyles are increasingly distinctive and diverse. Rhythm is an inherently political issue when understood as the governance of rhythms, and it raises fundamental questions about living together, boundaries to respect, dominant systems to manage, and the search for a balance between deceleration and acceleration, planning and improvisation,¹²⁵ and innovation and routine, which “create a kind of unstable balance among these rhythms by defining them in relation to each other.”¹²⁶

It is a matter of choice. When we decided to revisit this concept, we chose adventure and sharing—for a visible manifesto. And you, dear reader? Faced with often contradictory demands placed on our lifestyles, our cities, and our societies, with increasing tensions and saturation, and with an emerging need for order, let us eagerly and joyfully reread Siegfried Kracauer, who declared: “You can recognize a city by the space it leaves for improvisation.”¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Olivier Soubeyran, *Pensée aménagiste et improvisation* (Paris: Éditions des archives contemporaines, 2015).

¹²⁶ Pierre Ricœur, *Philosophie de la volonté, Tome I. Le volontaire et l'involontaire* (Paris: Aubier, 1988).

¹²⁷ S. Kracauer, *Rues de Berlin et d'ailleurs* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2013).

Postscript

A rhythmic approach to a crisis Luc Gwiazdzinski

While we were putting the finishing touches to this book, a pandemic broke out, followed by a lockdown. Here, we were faced with a question of rhythm: how to reconcile our conclusion—even temporary—with something akin to a cataclysm, or the satisfaction of achievement with the stupefaction we experienced due to this unforeseen event? Not to mention state(s) of mind, confusion, upheaval, and instability. There were also the issues of reactivity and choice. So, the question was, do we bring it up or not? It was quite difficult to ignore. Having a discussion about a virus in the middle of a book is a tricky business. So, for the sake of simplicity (and modesty), we chose to discuss it in the form of a postscript, i.e., an afterthought scrawled at the end of a letter following the signature. With the obvious lack of hindsight and in the midst of the turmoil that prevailed, this allowed us to address the issue, to continue our reflection, and even to sketch out a first (rhythmic) approach to the pandemic based on a veritable change of rhythm. The COVID crisis was a way for us to test our ideas against reality, against “the unexpected”¹²⁸. In this sense, the pandemic was also a tragic but stimulating testing ground for some of the principles in the manifesto. In the Europe of mid-May 2020, we were willing to bet that rhythm could be used both to measure the phenomenon and to describe the lived experience. This postscript was improvised and virtually unencumbered by the constraints of the

¹²⁸ Henri Maldiney, *L'art, l'éclair de l'être* (Paris : Éditions du Cerf, 2012), 24.

exercise, as part of an adventure (in Jankelevitch's¹²⁹ sense) of what we experienced and hoped for: the emergence of the future. It was based on two hypotheses: the first, that we can understand a crisis with a rhythmic approach; the second, that a rhythmic "deconfinement" was not only possible but preferable.

Interpreting the pandemic through rhythm

Doctors, journalists, and politicians used the word "crisis" (which the Cambridge dictionary defines as "a time of great disagreement, confusion, or suffering; an extremely difficult or dangerous point in a situation"¹³⁰) to describe a time when more than three billion people on the planet learned to inhabit the world differently, to isolate themselves, and to synchronize at a distance. Whether we call it a break, downtime, or an interlude, everyone seems to agree that was an *historic*, unforeseen event that will be remembered, and also that there was a *before* and an *after*. The pandemic was a milestone in the calendar of our lives. The very paradox of the situation engendered a particular rhythm of thought, a balancing act steeped in ambiguity. Lockdown brought *discontinuity* that not only contrasted with the rhythms of the past but also created monotony in the form of endless days of isolation. Emptiness and silence underscored both the importance of social interaction and what we previously called *saturation*, but also created new, more extreme forms (e.g., overcrowded hospitals, but also in the daily lives of those in lockdown). In Chinese, the word *crisis* is composed of two characters. The first means *danger*; the second suggests *opportunity*. For us, this was an opportunity to take our first rhythmic approach to the pandemic as a form, but also as an experience.

¹²⁹ Vladimir Jankelevitch, *L'aventure, l'ennui, le sérieux* (Paris: Flammarion, 2017).

¹³⁰ Cambridge online English dictionary, "crisis" [online] <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/crisis>.

Measurement and form. The first insight is that rhythm is everywhere: in the observation of a phenomenon, in the monitoring of the crisis, in the analysis of the dysfunctions, and in the strategies employed. Experts prescribed a specific vocabulary and *visuality*, or viewpoint, to describe what was happening, which in turn imparted a specific rhythm. Statistics—from daily death tolls to 24-hour news channels anxiously monitoring the *speed* of the pandemic's spread internationally, regionally, and locally, and the number of people infected and hospitalized each day, week, and month—expressed a kind of rhythm of data being synthesized and analyzed. The progression of the virus was represented by graphs, curves, and histograms, with all eyes on the peak and then the endless *plateau* before the decline. Epidemics typically follow a bell curve, a rhythmic shape prescribed by epidemiologists and for which we imagine a dizzying landscape of steep climbs and falls. Accompanied by war-like rhetoric from the presidency designed to mobilize the emotions of a nation, rhythm was ubiquitous in the lexicon of the medical community, who also employed nautical metaphors, such as *wave*, *flux*, *reflux* (risk of a) *second/third wave*, *tsunamis*, and reanimation units that were suddenly *submerged*. By comparing national curves, we were able to rank nations according to their ability to react to the crisis and according to rhythms, i.e., according to their performance. For us and for the general public, the pandemic was both the patchwork image of a map of France and that of a rhythm, a kind of nebulous shape. As the lockdown lifted, the question of the possible *periodicity* of the pandemic was raised by the medical authorities, with the hypothesis of seasonality and the possible return of the phenomenon at regular intervals. Rhythm, again, as a possible measure.

Reactions, connections and mobilization. Rhythm was also present in the strategies used to try and *slow down* the pandemic, and in the difficulty of reconciling the urgency of a health crisis with the slower timeframe of political decision-making. Faced with shortages of masks, respirators, and tests, we criticized local authorities for their inability to respond quickly. And so, a

medieval strategy—lockdown—was implemented to *cushion the peak* and allow hospitals to absorb the shock. It also addressed the discrepancy between the increased demand for and inadequate supply of equipment, as well as the speed of use and provision. Some tried to escape the lockdown using a *forward-looking* approach (i.e., the lifting of the lockdown), which was also question of pace and rhythm. In our societies we have become accustomed to planning activities with a beginning and an end. As such, the uncertain, elusive reality of the end of lockdown left us feeling insecure to say the least.

In France, perhaps for the first time, the highest government authorities admitted that they were navigating blindly, adjusting their positions and strategies as information and knowledge became available. These authorities were forced to govern—or rather to improvise—in a context of uncertainty. The urgency and scale of this momentous, global event imposed a different framework, different rules, different rhythms, different systems, and different values.

Faced with the scale of the pandemic, the saturation of equipment, the state of supplies, the slow pace of provision, and the suffering, all sorts of initiatives of self-organization and mobilization emerged: masks made by seamstresses or fablabs, farm deliveries, group food shopping, collective patient/staff lock-ins in retirement homes, food distribution, and a thousand other acts of DIY, resourcefulness, and solidarity with the elderly, the homeless, migrants, and many others. Long-distance parties and online cocktails were held to fight the loneliness and slow passage of time. It seems we needed a major shock—a pandemic—and the restrictions it imposed to find solutions in this new reality. This exceptional time was also a kind of rhythm experienced by each individual. In this sense, rhythm became a kind of pruning shear, creating a social distance between those who kept to their old rhythm (with the risks that entailed) and those who took to teleworking from the “safety” of their homes.

Experience and new rhythms. The pandemic disrupted the times and spaces of everyday life. The lockdown imposed a rhythm that each one of us felt in the depths of our being. Suddenly we found ourselves trapped, caged, under house arrest—often in cramped quarters—with drastic restrictions on our movements. A kind of forced leave of absence. The pandemic also introduced new rhythms and *rituals*, such as the medical authorities' grim nightly death toll on the news, and the more invigorating 8 p.m. tribute to caregivers from urban balconies. Not to mention all the long-distance discussions, concerts, games, drinks, and meals with family, friends, and strangers on social networks. This retreat into our domestic spaces made our mealtimes and one-hour daily outings indispensable. To break up the *monotony*, *routine*, and *boredom*, *experts* advised us to create schedules for ourselves, thus forcing us to forge new rhythms. Some found time to be slow, while others enjoyed this less frenetic imposed rhythm—a kind of *deceleration*. Many of the stimuli that used to connect us with the great social rhythms and urban bustle (noise peaks, congestion, etc.) had disappeared. Some missed the sounds of the streets, while others were already dreading their return. Other, almost forgotten rhythms, such as those of nature (birdsong, the scent of flowers) regained importance.

Desaturation of spaces, saturation of facilities. Looking at the aerial photographs of our city streets deprived of their inhabitants, we perceived emptiness, silence, and calm, in contrast to the hustle and bustle: cities at a standstill, pausing as if to catch their breath. Like empty shells free of cars and people, cities were *breathing*, uncluttered. Outside, in the deserted streets where most of the shops were closed, rare passers-by crossed paths at a safe distance. House arrest combined with the departure of around 17% of Parisians to the more pleasant confines of the countryside (tourists and visitors being *non grata*) left the streets empty. Gone were the morning and evening rush hours and traffic jams! Gone were the noise and pollution (at least some of it)! And as nature abhors a vacuum, lockdown allowed wild animals to explore new terrain.

The media proclaimed that Nature had reclaimed its rights. And so, we reveled in the televised images of ducks, foxes, and alligators exploring big city streets, pretending to believe in the healing promise of this *time out*.

This desaturation led to forms of oversaturation that were either experienced personally or perceived from a distance. It began behind our screens, but also in certain facilities (for instance, the hospitals in Wuhan, China: a saturation to which the authorities responded by building new facilities in record time). There were the morgues in Bergamo, Italy, which were so saturated that they could not even accommodate the victims of the pandemic. Then the virus crossed the border and *invaded* France, leading to further saturation. This time, it was the French army's field hospital that *decongested* the hospitals of Mulhouse. More spectacularly, helicopters and special trains were used to transport patients to other facilities in France and beyond. There were also shocking images, like the warehouses of the Rungis market on the outskirts of Paris being used as morgues, or a military ship in New York being used as a hospital.

Our living spaces were also saturated. Who can reasonably live with several people in a few square meters 24 hours a day? How to put up with other people's noise all of the time? How can we live and synchronize with others and still allow each person to live at their own pace? For those relegated to the confines of their homes, teleworking also brought with it a plethora of demands in terms of work intensity and concentration that often left us feeling drained, saturated, and exhausted. It is challenging to suddenly play teacher to one's own children while preparing a meal. Despite promises and tricks borrowed from a well-known Swedish furniture manufacturer, it was difficult to accommodate so many activities and rhythms in the one space. Modularity, hybridization, and alternation do have their limits after all. Saturation and overflow ensue when these limits are exceeded.

Saturation and exhaustion. Paradoxically, during the pandemic, we spent a lot of time in front of our screens, watching

24-hour news channels, interacting on social networks with loved ones far away, and videoconferencing for work, school, online classes, etc. All this in a continuous flow that often left us feeling exhausted in the evening. For many of us, fear and worry for our loved ones and ourselves took up what little space was still left in our brains. For weeks on end, we got up and went to bed with the image of a virus in our minds, facilitated by a stream of mono-oriented media. Our attention saturated, there was little room for anything else in a glaring present that clouded all perspective. For each of us, it was a period with moments of collapse, exaltation, withdrawal, and projection; in other words, a rhythm unto itself. Constant concern for loved ones and a flood of information from the Internet added to this saturation and, for many, led to disgust at the rising death toll and the pseudo-experts who ultimately confused our orientation and understanding. There was also anger, not to mention escapism through reading, sharing, and dreaming.

Exiting the health crisis through rhythm policies

The second, more action-oriented hypothesis we considered at the time of writing was how to exit the health crisis using a rhythmic approach. This is what those who saw COVID and lockdown as a potential fork in the road envisioned—a change of pace from the world of yesterday to the world of tomorrow. This is precisely what we have proposed in this manifesto: rhythm policies that can adapt to moments of pause and silence, to peaks and valleys, to emptiness and abundance, to saturation and desaturation, to deceleration and acceleration. A policy of life, of breath and breathing, of order and disorder. An approach that leaves room for all possibilities.

Kairos and shifting rhythms. One of our first observations was that of a perceived distance from *before*. The events of yesterday, of last year—of December, January, and February—suddenly seemed distant, insignificant, and out of proportion with

regard to the shock of the crisis. Beyond our daily lives, limited in space and time, there were also rhythms of the future to (re)discover, or not. For many of us, the pandemic was an opportunity for an existential reappraisal, a time to question past mistakes and to think about the future, particularly with regard to our relationship with the environment and the Anthropocene era. Myriad hypotheses emerged on how we should (re)inhabit the world, for instance, by making production more local, de-globalizing, reducing mobility, and improving digitization. Putting aside the casualties and the severity of the pandemic, appeals for a *world of tomorrow* often blossomed into performative, life-seeking, transformative approaches. It was an opportune moment—*kairos*—to project ourselves and build a new world, to overcome our shock, to transition, to innovate, and to synchronize the economy and our lives with the rhythms of nature.

These projections often speak of a change of pace, a kind of deceleration. Many of those who dreamed of a post-pandemic *tomorrow* ultimately were dreaming of a less saturated world with different, slower rhythms, of harnessing urban development, time, our cities, and our lives. Many French urbanites imagined a future far from the big city. Others revisited the idea of the city in the countryside, and vice versa, with the advent of urban agriculture. Others professed to want to do less. Whatever the case, it speaks to rhythm. Still others were already looking ahead to the next crisis, this time economic, that has befallen us since the time of writing. On our screens, statistics hovered over the sick and the dead, portending market trends and impending recession, future bankruptcies, and unemployment. As we watched lines of cars form at fast-food drive-thrus and supermarket click-and-collects points, the more cynical declared that we had learned nothing.

Spacing, distancing, and spatial rhythms. Our gradual release from lockdown was also a kind of rhythm imposed to combat saturation (by creating distance and time intervals between people in co-presence). And so, new spatial rhythms emerged: living together, but at a distance. Physical—not social—distance

inevitably led to a reduction in the saturation of public facilities and spaces. The idea was to allow spaces to breathe, to find the *right* rhythms and *decongest* by establishing distances between people and respecting the occupancy capacity of spaces. As part of this strategy, bars, restaurants, nightclubs—even schools—had no choice but to spill over into the public space. Parks and alternative spaces opened their gates and doors in an effort to relieve congestion. In Bergamo, Italy, the city council quickly authorized the extension of restaurant terraces. Sidewalks were widened to comply with distancing and desaturation measures, and suddenly encroached onto roads. And so, spatial distance combined with temporal distance, and occupancy restrictions led to new rhythms for premises and transportation with extended opening hours. Staggered working hours in businesses helped to relieve rush hour congestion on public transportation and urban ring roads. The proxemics and rhythms of cities and urban life undoubtedly were disrupted, but this was the price to be paid for preserving them as places of maximized interactions. So together, yes, but in lesser numbers. Rhythms are the key.

Rhythm policies, or the politics of rhythm(s). After lockdown, we had an opportunity to build a less saturated, post-society based on shared rhythms, with downtimes, voids, fallow spaces, silence, vacancy, boredom, mystery, and opacity. Rhythm—that reality in which time and space merge—is an excellent way of approaching urban resilience and more sustainable development. It means being able to experiment by developing experiential approaches and temporary measures to test user-friendly solutions. Beyond crises, which by virtue of their very nature are temporary, we hope that such solutions can lay the foundations for cities where appropriation and autonomy can transcend private property (and its inequalities) and capitalist saturation (and the oppression it generates). This could take the form of a malleable, adaptable, reversible city that is strong in the face of capitalism, resilient to the pressures of rhythm, and able to connect spaces and times with the dream that infuses our existence and our cities with life.

Saturation, speed, desynchronization, lag times, peaks, curves, events... Approaching crises based on rhythm, and vice versa, is useful for observing and analyzing situations and for building a common future based on rhythmology and rhythm policies. It is also an opportunity for researchers to reflect on their position in the face of unpredictability and uncertainty, and on possible forms of action. The exercise forced us to reflect at a time of crisis and at the pace of the pandemic and the seeming immobility of the lockdown. And so, we took the plunge and embarked on this adventure of reflection and action from the edge of an abyss. This was the main objective in revisiting this concept. The emergence of the COVID 19 pandemic only strengthened our convictions. We discovered that it is both possible and desirable to interpret crises and rhythm policies through the lens of rhythm. Rhythm is both a beautiful working space and a promising avenue for further research.

Biography

Manola Antonioli holds a PhD in philosophy and social sciences from EHESS-Paris and an HDR in aesthetics (architecture). She is currently a professor of philosophy at the École Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Paris-La Villette and a researcher within the UMR LAVUE 7218 CNRS. She has published numerous articles on the philosophy of architecture and the urban, aesthetics, the philosophy of technology, and design theory, as well as individual and collective volumes in the same fields of research. Her most recent publications include *Bio-mimétisme. Sciences, design et architecture* (Paris: Éditions Loco, 2017), *Machines de guerres urbaines* (Paris: Éditions Loco, 2015), *Paysage variations* (with Vincent Jacques and Alain Milon, Paris: Éditions Loco, 2014), and *Théories et pratiques écologiques* (Nanterre: Presses Universitaires de Paris Ouest, 2013).

Guillaume Drevon is a researcher at the Urban Sociology Laboratory of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne (EPFL). In his work, he has analyzed the strategies developed by families to cope with the temporal pressures of everyday life, placing the notion of temporal vulnerability into perspective. Today, he is developing research on life and urban rhythms to better understand how the relationship to time is evolving in contemporary societies.

Luc Gwiazdzinski is a geographer and professor at the École Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Toulouse, and researcher at the LRA laboratory. His work focuses on temporalities and urban rhythms, the night, mobilities, and the relationships between art and territory. He has published around fifteen books, including *La nuit dernière frontière de la ville* (La Tour d'Aigues: L'Aube, 2005), *La ville 24 h/24* (La Tour d'Aigues: L'Aube, DATAR, 2004), *Périphéries* (with Gilles Rabin, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007), *Sur la vague jaune. L'utopie d'un rond-point* (with Bernard Floris, Grenoble: Elya, 2019), and *Night Studies* (with William Straw and Marco Maggioli, Grenoble: Elya Éditions, 2020).

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