



Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life

London and New York, NY: Bloomsbury

ISBN: 978-1-4725-0716-7

XIII + 118 pp.

Translated by Stuart Elden and Gerald Moore with an introduction by Stuart Elden.

Henri Lefebvre is best known, at least in the English reading world, for his work on space and how rigorous analysis of the use of space under capitalism has contributed to the ability to accumulate surplus by extracting it from others and through technological progress. This will be evident to anyone who has compared the economy and business class sections of a passenger airliner. His work and insights have become central to the analysis of cities by influential authors such as David Harvey and Saskia Sassen, as well as the new economic

geography associated with the leading bourgeois economist Paul Krugman and his colleagues. However, Lefebvre completed his career (he died in 1991) with the thinking that is gathered together in this book. The difference centres on the simultaneous consideration of time and space through the prism of rhythm as a means of analyzing the world. Stated in this way, it does not seem to be such a revolutionary idea. We are all surely aware of the circadian rhythms that are so influential in our daily lives, as we eat and sleep at more or less the same time and are expected to devote approximately the same hours of the day to paid (or unpaid) labour. When even minor variations to these rhythms occur, especially when these are beyond our control, they can lead to considerable inconvenience. When the variation becomes more severe, then it can lead to health issues and psychological stress. This is the problem at the heart of the alienation that can be caused by physical and structural change, such as the move from the agricultural society to the factory world and the breaking of the link between the physical light of day and the working rhythm of the factory hand.

However, Lefebvre has another level of analysis to add, which is that of the interaction between time and space and its role as the Hegelian dialectic which produces rhythm as a synthesis: “(Social) space and (social) time, dominated by exchanges, become the time and space of markets, although not being *things*¹ but including **rhythms**, they enter into **products** (p.16).” Marx, he observes, does not discover rhythm, although he did observe: “... the transformation of brute nature through human work, through technology and inventions, through labour and consciousness (p.17).” Consequently, extending the analysis of time and space moves beyond Marxism (or at least Marxism in its aspect of economic determinism) to take on new forms and new ways of understanding everyday life: “**Rhythm** reunites **quantitative** aspects and elements, which mark time and distinguish moments in it- and **qualitative** aspects and elements, which link them

¹ All examples of emphasis in this review are present in the original.

together, found the unities and result from them. Rhythm appears as regulated time, governed by rational laws, but in contact with what is least rational in human being: the lived, the carnal, the body. **Rational**, numerical, quantitative and qualitative rhythms superimpose themselves on the multiple **natural** rhythms of the body (respiration, the heat, hunger and thirst, etc.), though not changing them first (pp.18-9).” This is an holistic mode of thinking about the world and one which might be identified in Eastern philosophies such as Buddhism or animism. However, while animists or Buddhists might use the method of thinking to identify connections between living and non-living things and the moral implications of those connections, Lefebvre belonged to the European tradition of philosophy and praxis. Consequently, he wishes to use rhythmanalysis as a means of exploring the ways in which the forces of capitalism shape the everyday lives of people and what, by extension, may be done to resist the negative aspects of this. The essays in rest of the book start the work of expanding the concept to different phenomena in the world. He does so (alone and in two papers with Catherine Regulier) in ways which some people, myself included, will find occasionally frustrating. The ideas are good and the applications evident but where is the proof? Where is the empirical testing of the concepts to try to determine the importance of the rhythmanalysis overall and the various elements incorporated within it? Blatantly, these rhetorical questions are not going to receive an answer, at least not at this stage of conceptual development. He is the intellectual pioneer and the bean-counting experiments can be conducted by a new (and possibly lesser) generation of scholars to come. There is an epistemological difference with management studies, where scholars are expected both to conceive of new conceptual arrangements and then find some ways of obtaining data to explore the relevance of such arrangements. However, other forms of epistemology are available and perfectly valid.

This book is part of a series published as Bloomsbury Revelations, which contains a variety of authors important for their groundbreaking

and sometimes radical thinking and ranging from Baudrillard to Churchill and from Heidegger to Zizek. Any such series is much to be welcomed for making important and influential work more accessible. This is particularly the case for the current work, which brings together for an English reading audience work from Lefebvre not previously assembled. The translators have done well to make the work easy to read and provide the original terms when ambivalence between languages requires that they do so. The introduction is compact and informative.

Lefebvre is perceptive and entertaining and worthy of being read and studied more than once. This should be axiomatic; after all, the rhythm of my life when I first read this book has changed in the intervening period, not least because my appreciation of how such rhythms work has been changed as a result of reading it. However, profound ideas appear deceptively simple at first sight, as described above, while containing extraordinary power in being able to explain the world. More should be done to operationalize the concept.

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