

Special Issue Flânerie

# FUORI LUOGO

Rivista di Sociologia  
del Territorio, Turismo, Tecnologia

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Flânerie as a way of living, walking  
and exploring the city

Introduzione di Giampaolo Nuvolati e Lucia Quaquarelli  
Prefazione di Fabio Corbisiero

*a cura di*

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# Linking urban rhythms to emotions: the inevitable emergence of emotions in the covid-19 daily life's arrhythmia<sup>2</sup>

## 1. Introduction

The paper's goal is to highlight the necessity, already noted by Henri Lefebvre thirty years ago, to deepen our knowledge on rhythms and their correspondence in the micro and macro daily life, but also into emotions. Moreover, the paper wishes to highlight that emotional resilience is of great importance for a society in order to tackle social challenges, like the Covid-19 one, and this ability could, slowly, be achieved by small daily practices in the micro life, based on the concept of rhythms.

In the first part of the paper, we discuss the work *Elements of Rhythmanalysis* of Henri Lefebvre, in which the author studies the link between rhythms (cyclical & linear) and space. Lefebvre describes how the frequency of rhythms within spaces, can manifest signs of health or illness (*Arrhythmia*, *Polyrhythmia*, *Eurhythmia* and *Isorhythmia*). Arrhythmia (otherwise indicated as non-rhythm in Greek language), characterized by an unstable frequency and a lack of repetition, is a condition manifesting signs of illness, biologically, but also, according to Lefebvre's theory, in an individual's daily life-pattern and, more generally, in daily urban rhythms. Sudden events, in the micro or macro life, could interfere with frequency and interrupt rhythm. As a result to a sudden interference of rhythm in various scales of our daily lives (economical, social, cultural, etc.), the paper proposes that, a series of negative emotions inevitably emerge related also to the loss of the daily, well-defined, routine. Undoubtedly, the main emotions in a situation of arrhythmia (biological or also socio-economical) are fear and insecurity, with which individuals, but also larger scale systems (cities, institutions, governments, communities, etc.) have to deal with.

Afterwards, we discuss about the importance of emotions and their relation with social sciences. Western culture was founded on the perception of "reason", which was immediately separated from the "emotion". In general, the role of emotion in social life and in action, has been denied, or even when it has been taken into consideration, has been negatively addressed. During the development of the western world, analysts were taught to separate cognitive and emotional qualities of judgment and tended to study cognitive rather than emotional relationships. Nevertheless, sociologists of emotions suggest that emotions are fundamental for the study of the individual, while they are also related to socio-cultural factors. As a result, in moments of social challenges, emotions inevitably emerge and it seems like our society is not prepared enough to deal with emotional imbalance.

In the third part of the paper, we discuss about Covid-19 rhythms, emotions and the importance of constant daily rhythms in the micro life, in order to maintain a positive emotional status. During the Covid-19 quarantine, the individual had to adapt him/herself to a new daily pattern of life and to change profoundly him/herself routine. Apparently, individuals who managed to maintain a constant daily rhythm, although in quarantine situation (in other words, being eurhythmic inside the Covid-19 arrhythmic situation), seem to be those who managed better their emotional status and proved to be more resilient. We believe that healthy micro rhythms could contribute in tackling negative emotions, during social challenges; small but significant "bottom-up" interventions could have a huge impact on how society bounces back after sudden social threats.

It is important to note from the beginning, that the paper intends to indicate a reflection approach rather than to sustain consolidated epistemological data and views. Above all, the paper intends to highlight an interesting path for studying socio-spatial effects, that of rhythms and

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their possible links with emotions. Moreover, regarding the socio-spatial effects of Covid-19 in particular, and because of the small quantity of scientific publications so far on this subject, our views could only constitute possible hypothesis and alternative ways of approaching a socio-spatial diagnosis of the Covid-19 and quarantine effects.

## 2. Studying rhythms

### 2.1. *Rhythms: body, time and space equations*

The recent translation and publication in Italian language of Henri Lefebvre's "Elements of Rhythmanalysis: Introduction to the knowledge of Rhythms" [1992; 2020] couldn't have chosen a better moment to arrive; on time to remind us the truth in the words of Lefebvre, about the importance of building knowledge on daily rhythms of people, places and institutions and on «the spatialisation of temporal processes» (Borelli in Lefebvre, 2020, p. 10). This punctuality is related to the Covid-19 quarantine, ordered for millions of people around the world for the protection of public health: a period that made time stop; time interpreted in economical, social and cultural terms.

As Borelli (the curator of the recent Italian translations of *Rhythmanalysis*) explains to the reader, the interest in rhythms existed in Lefebvre's mind from a young age; a concept that requested time, in order to become mature, while it was also inspired by the works of other authors (Bachelard and Gurvitch mainly). Lefebvre in *Éléments de Rythmanalyse* (1992), proposed the study of rhythms «for understanding the links between time, space and daily life by analyzing biological, psychological and social rhythms» (Borelli in Lefebvre, 2020, p. 11). In particular, as Borelli explains in the preface of the book: «the foundations of *Éléments de Rythmanalyse* emerged for the first time in the second volume of *La critique de la vie quotidienne* (Lefebvre, 1961). There, Lefebvre used the term *rhythmology*, announcing the need for a critical methodology on the social time of the capitalist industrial society through the study of the conflict between the linear and cyclical forms of time» (Borelli in Lefebvre, 2020, p. 9). With time, Lefebvre elaborates further the concept of rhythms, until the arrive of his book *Éléments de Rythmanalyse* in 1992. Little did we know at that time about how his work would find an empirical proof, during a global "lockdown", because of an infectious disease called Covid-19 spread all over the world versus the end of the year 2019.

The study of daily rhythms and the relation between time, space and bodies, which Lefebvre tried to explain the importance of in his work, is indispensable in our opinion, in order to experiment a socio-spatial reading of the Covid-19 effects. More than ever the quarantine situation gave us the opportunity of understanding how much our daily lives are immersed in rhythms and their translation in spatial terms. «The study of the rhythms of the body and its subjection to training and rules (dressage) (cf. infra, chapter IV) is indispensable not only for analyzing how capitalism shapes classes, but above all to understand how capitalism acts as a system that is built on the contempt of the body and its times of life» (Borelli in Lefebvre, 2020; p. 18). In conceptualizing dressage, Lefebvre talks about how animals are broken in to certain patterns of working behavior. These behaviors are learned through repetition, reinforced through punishment and reward. Jones & Warren (2016) point out that dressage can thus be thought of in terms of how rhythms create modes of behavior that can be easily slipped into with relatively little thought. In humans this could be a learned bodily behavior such as operating a machine, dancing (Hensley 2012), cycling (Spinney 2012) and so on; alternatively it could be a set of habits such as the rhythms of coffee, email, meetings and so on in the post-industrial workplace (Begole et al. 2003). Dressage is activated in the socialization of children and adults, in school education and in work apprenticeship, but even more to inculcate gestures and movements in

those who become part of total institutions such as the army, the prison, or the asylum. In the form of rituals, argues Lefebvre, the rhythms govern social conduct without however excluding deviance and insubordination due to the interference of rhythms of cosmic and biological origin (Gaeta, 2020).

We, therefore, argue that, the sudden pause of our consolidated daily patterns of life because of the lockdown, made us understand how the interruption of our daily rhythms had economical, social and cultural implications. Losing the everyday bodily routine and habits, generated stress and a series of negative emotions. The quarantine situation unveiled the strong relation between emotions and bodily routine seems, in other words the relation between time, space, body and emotions. However, how are emotions related to daily life routine and socio-spatial factors?

## 2.2. Covid-19 and Arrhythmia

A rhythm itself, explains Lefebvre, implies repetition, measure and frequency (*ibid.*, p. 79-82), but also a body from which the rhythm is calculated: «the theory of rhythms is based on the experience and knowledge of the body (*ibid.*, p. 146). The experience of rhythms through the body is crucial for the theory of rhythms. In fact, Lefebvre proposes a classification of the various states in which a body can find itself with a certain frequency of the rhythms: *isorhythmia* and *polyrhythmia*, *eurhythmia* and *arrhythmia*. «Polyrhythm is composed of different rhythms. *Eurhythmia* (that of a living, normal and healthy body) presupposes the association of different rhythms. In *arrhythmia*, the rhythms are broken, altered and excluded in synchronization (a term that usually designates this phenomenon). A pathological situation [...] Pathology, in a word disease, is always accompanied by a rupture of rhythms: arrhythmia that goes as far as unhealthy and then fatal de-synchronization» (*ibid.*, p. 146-147). In other words, the loss of rhythm (arrhythmia from the Greek word ἀρρυθμία, α-ρυθμία: non-rhythm) means the disturbance in frequency and repetition and, as it is widely known also in the medical world, describes a pathological situation. A heart losing its rhythm is a non-healthy heart; a body losing its rhythm can manifest, in certain conditions, signs of disease. Applying the concept of arrhythmia in a larger scale, the loss of rhythm in a socio-economic system could manifest a «pathological» situation, in other words, signs of malfunction. «The Lefebvrian concepts of *polyrhythmia*, *eurhythmia* and *arrhythmia* have been variously declined to show that places and times are constituted and function through mobile flows of capitals, objects, energy or substance that they cross and surround them. In this respect, places and times exist in a constellation of rhythmic intertwining: the polyrhythmia that contains multiple temporalities, in harmony (eurhythmia) or in contrast (arrhythmia) with each other in a rhythmic assembly in continuous evolution» (Borelli in Lefebvre, 2020, p. 28).

As we noted above, according to Lefebvre, the adaptation of the body in a series of everyday rhythms (dressage), can help us understand also how capitalism acts as a system that is built on the contempt the body. Thompson (1967), before Lefebvre, also discussed about the rise of clock-based time as a key tool for regulating the bodies of workers as Britain industrialised in the 18th and 19th centuries. Despite the dominance of the clock, older modes of task-based, rhythmic, 'natural' time still persisted in the post-war employment landscape, for example among dock workers, writers, artists, farmers and students (Jones & Warren, 2016). Today, even in post-industrial economies, clock time has become indelibly associated with the capitalist urge to maximise production (Reisch, 2001). The biopolitical imposition of capitalist regimes to maximise productivity into individual bodies via the regulation of time has been referred to by Freeman (2010) as *chrononormativity*. The manipulation of time via schedules, calendars, watches is made to seem natural and inevitable while at the same time reinforcing asymmetrical power hierarchies. Jones

& Warren (2016) point out that, Freeman sees this not just in clock time, but also in the ways that marriage, accumulation of wealth, reproduction and childrearing are constructed as inevitable rhythms within the lifecourse – implying, of course, that bodies outside these rhythms can be considered abject. This is an interesting point to take into consideration and one of the possible hypothesis for understanding why emotions emerged during the quarantine status (the emotions not related to the fear of getting infected but the ones related to the loss of the repetition in daily life routine, in other words related to an arrhythmic situation, as we noted above). What Lefebvre proposed is that the cure for this pathology (arrhythmia) was to try to institute new rhythms that return the system to a eurhythmic condition.

Undoubtedly, the disturbance in our daily rhythms during the Covid-19 pandemic (an arrhythmic situation) turned to be a challenge for individuals, with consequences in the micro and macro life. Frustration and boredom related to isolation, caused by the loss of the usual routine (e.g. normal household and work activities, shopping out of necessity) and limited social and physical contact with others, was described as one of the stressors related to the Covid-19 quarantine effect (CSTS, 2020). In the same report, analysts explaining emotions and daily life, propose that getting back to normal work and social routines can take anywhere from a few days to several weeks or even months; being aware that it may take some time to return to normal habits can help to cope with worry, anxiety and frustration. A recent study, which was conducted two weeks after a complete lockdown was imposed in Wuhan, highlights two important findings (Tang, Liang, Zhang, Kelifa, He & Wang, 2020): «first, the mental health was worse in the quarantined area than in unquarantined areas, and deteriorated most in the quarantined unaffected areas, depression and anxiety were common mental health problems among people in quarantine. Therefore, it is crucial to include psychological interventions as an integral part of the prevention and control measures during public health crises, while also prioritizing high-risk groups such as quarantined people». What emerges is a relation between space, time, body and emotions. Landry & Murray also suggest the creation of a link between time, rhythm and emotional status (2017, p. 47):

«Linear time took over after the industrial revolution, as people became distant from a deep sense of seasonal change and the clock began to rule daily life. There was rhythm, but grey, unvarying. Time in this perception is a commodity – it literally is money – and benefits and negatives follow. A strongly linear perception of time is associated with anxiety and depression as everything races ahead and people cannot see an end point, they are neither in the moment nor do they have the certainty that the moment will change. Shifting that perception can relieve such symptoms [...] The lessons from our lived primitive experience are that we need rhythm, cycle, as well as places and events to step out of time, to lose or find ourselves, and quite space to reflect on who we are and might become».

We believe that during the Covid-19 quarantine, emerged the realization of how important emotional resilience is for our societies, in order to survive and to “stand up” fast. The Covid-19 emergency highlighted, in our opinion, two significant facts: a) how important is daily rhythm for bodies and cities and, consequently, the study of urban rhythms and b) how little prepared we are in terms of emotional resilience as a society. In order to understand the role of emotions in daily life and their social dimension, we need first to have a brief overview on the relation between emotions and social sciences.

### **3. Emotions as sociocultural products**

Emile Durkheim, in his texts on social solidarity, about a hundred years ago, suggested that emotions are the “glue” that holds society together (Durkheim, (1897)[1997]; (1893)[1956], cit in

Thoits cit. Thoits, 1989). To understand, therefore, society and its relationships with the individual, the study of emotions is crucial. Even Marx's perception of human nature speaks of human "passions" and "emotions" as fundamental aspects of our social nature. Basic emotions affecting fear, anger, disgust, sadness, happiness/pleasure, boredom and (perhaps) contempt (Ekman, 1982; Ekman & Friesen, 1986), probably evolved as species-specific physiological reactions and expressive signals due to their usefulness for individual and group survival (Thoits, 1989, p. 319). Over time it became clear that emotions are mainly sociocultural products (Kemper, 1980; 1981, Shott, 1980; Hunsaker, 1983; Thoits, 1989), and that they are linked to certain sociocultural factors. What determines, writes Thoits (1989, p. 320), an emotional experience, is not a physiological but a sociocultural factor, for example the fear of something foreign and unfamiliar or the happiness/sadness derived from the acquisition of material goods. What scholars have tried to point out with time is that emotions are fundamental to social stability and social change and determine social relationships. Emotions lead to changes in one's behavior that could affect relationships with other individuals and ultimately have consequences on the social structure (*ibidem*.)

Despite this, during the twentieth century, sociology, both in research and in theory, somehow overlooked the study of emotions until the last decades. As Weyher (2012, p. 343) notes, Western culture was founded on the perception of "reason", which was immediately separated from "emotion". In general, the role of emotion in social life and in action has been denied, or even when it has been taken into consideration, it has been negatively addressed. Only recently has this traditional view of human nature been questioned. According to neuroscientist Antonio Damasio: «emotion, feeling, and biological regulation all play a role in human reason. Instead of opposition, there is an interaction of the systems underlying the normal processes of emotion, feeling, reason, and decision making» (1994, p. 54; cit. in Weyher, 2012). Reason and emotion are not only not antithetical, but today they are considered complementary, if not necessary for each other (Barbalet, 1998, Damasio, 2007, Turner, 2007, 2009, Weyher, 2012). Emotions are fundamental to human nature, it is our "essential force" that forms the character of our species. According to Marx ([1844] 1974, p. 390):

«Human beings appropriate their integral essence in an integral way, as a total person. All their human relations to the world — seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, contemplating, sensing, wanting, acting, loving — in short, all the organs of their individuality, like the organs which are directly communal in form, are in their objective approach or in their approach to the object the appropriation of that object. This appropriation of human reality, their approach to the object, is the confirmation of human reality. It is human effectiveness and human suffering, for suffering, humanly conceived, is an enjoyment of the self for the individual»

Only by including emotions ("feeling", "perception", "wanting", "loving", "suffering", "enjoyment") as components of our "total person" can this "human nature" be understood and be realized. Marx constantly considers the human being as a totality, as a whole being. Emotion is seen as part of his conception of human nature, in other words, if we exclude emotions, we are not studying the "whole" of human nature and experience, but only a fragment. The notion of emotion therefore takes on a different character: it is not just about social products but rather about essential and constitutive aspects of social life (Barbalet, 1998). What Marx says, Weyher argues, is that we cannot study human nature and consequently its actions in the social world, we cannot have a complete vision of what builds social relations, if we do not take into consideration reason but also emotion. Without the study of emotions, our studies on the individual are fragmented, not complete.

Furthermore, the anthropologist Catherine Lutz (1986; cit. in Weyher, 2012), sheds light on another very important aspect in this regard: the absence of emotion is directly associated with "reason" and "alienation" in Western culture. We are not "ourselves" when emotion dominates our nature, but also, on the contrary, alienation also derives from the absence of emotion. All the

studies on the alienation of the individual in the Western world are directly related to emotion, a factor not taken into consideration so far. Here too, to understand the individual's relationship with the world and with himself, the study of emotions is fundamental.

According to Jack Barbalet: «Emotion is the necessary connection through the social structure and the social actor. Emotion connects different phases of the social structure over time; it arises in the patterns of structured relationships and forms the basis of the action which, subsequently, modifies social structures» (1998, p. 27, 65). To understand social relationships and what forms them, we need to study how emotion affects them. Social interaction is conditioned by emotion. Denzin writes: «Emotionality, the process of being emotional, locates the people in the world of interaction. [...] If all social life is essentially practical, involving human practices in the world, then emotions are grounded in [and in turn help to ground] the practical activities that locate individuals in the world» ([1984] 2007, p. 32). In other words, emotions are an essential component in the daily processes of human activity, conditioning them. During rapid changes in the economic and cultural life, such as those we are going through today, it becomes more complicated to understand the relationship between ideologies and emotions (Hochschild, 1990). Undoubtedly, emotions are determining factors for the social life and their study is essential in order to understand how the individual orientates his/her life and choices.

Daily life is marked by emotions, both collective and individual. It is precisely emotions that indicate the sensation of places, becoming a sort of "indicators" of "diseases/malfunctions" that the territory and society hide inside. Nevertheless, if emotions are sociocultural products, and are capable of indicating malfunctions in everyday life and if, also, rhythms can indicate, as we saw above, malfunctions too, it proves to be extremely interesting the ways which emotions and rhythms are linked together. Lastly, could it be possible to tackle negative emotions by trying to work on stable rhythms in the micro life?

#### **4. Being *eurhythmic* in micro when *arrhythmic* in macro**

According to Mela, «the relevance of rhythms in urban life appeared even more evident in the phase just passed by the Covid 19 pandemic, characterized - in Italy as in many other countries - by the lockdown and closure of most of the activities, with the consequent alteration of the methods of functioning of the city and the extreme restriction of mobility. This has involved for a large part of the population the modification of their usual routines and the need - tiring and frustrating for many - to rediscover new ways of organizing time in spaces reduced to those of home and to adapt to different forms of synchronization and de-synchronization based on distance relationships» (2020). Very soon after the start of the quarantine in March 2020, numerous online journals dealt with the effects of quarantine in the individual's daily life and emotional status. «The effects of being quarantined may include: depression, anxiety, PTSD, irritability and other trauma-related mental health disorders which are in direct correlation to factors such as the length of the quarantine and the feelings of boredom and loneliness that often accompany self-isolation. Thus, the longer the quarantine, the greater the chance of feeling bored, lonely, or developing depression» (Brooks et. al., 2020). Research has shown that routines can play an important role in mental health (Arlinghaus & Johnston, 2018); usually routines can help in managing stress and anxiety (Eilam et. al., 2011). In particular, during the Covid 19 quarantine, numerous articles on how to deal with fear and depression caused by the quarantine situation, included the advice of scheduling a well-defined daily routine. The World Health Organization, in its website, suggest to keep up with daily routines as far as possible, as a measure of taking after our mental health. As psychiatrist Ramon Solhkhah suggests:

«while many of us complain about how busy our schedules are, it represents expectations and patterns that are an important component of good mental health. The pandemic has left many people

feeling adrift because those daily routines that were essential to us before the COVID-19 crisis have evaporated and been replaced by uncertainty and a lack of structure that can contribute to stress, anxiety and even clinical depression [...] Routines, even simple ones, can be important anchors to maintaining good mental health and dealing with anxiety during the pandemic. Routines can create a positive level of stress that keeps us focused and may avoid some of the depression that many people may experience as a result of the COVID pandemic, isolation, fear and uncertainty. I recommend creating and maintaining routines that you can follow even in quarantine that will help reduce the mental health impact of what we are experiencing» (interview to Ginsberg, 2020).

In other words, trying to achieve a personal eurhythmia (a daily routine) although being in a general arrhythmic condition (quarantine), seems to be important in order to "imitate" everyday life patterns of "healthier" times. Imitating the daily pattern of a normal day, although being at home and in quarantine, could be the key in tackling the emotions related to quarantine and to the loss of our consolidated bodily urban habits. We can only assume that time, space, body and emotions are in a direct dialogue with each other and that rhythms generate emotions. Those small, bottom-up solutions and micro-practices could prove to be life-saving also for the macro life; the sum of "eurhythmic" single cases in a micro scale, during a social crisis, we believe that could deliver amazing results in terms of emotional resilience, in a macro scale.

## 5. Conclusions

Our goal in this paper was to present an interesting, in our opinion, approach for a socio-spatial diagnosis, the approach based on rhythmanalysis, and their possible connections to emotions; non-stable rhythms may indicate "diseases" in the micro and macro scale and they are often connected to negative emotions. In times of big global or local social challenges, apart from the socio-economic consequences, a variety of emotions emerge, related to fear, anxiety, depression and uncertainty. Our societies seem to be not trained enough in order to deal with emotions; a social skill which turns to be crucial for surviving in social crisis. For a long time, the study of emotions and their relation to everyday spatial practices has been not taken into consideration seriously from societies. We believe that little attention was given so far to the individual's emotional wellbeing, which is directly related to his/hers ability to perform resilience during difficult times. Covid-19 was the occasion to realize how important emotions are in relation to every day's bodily rhythms.

A deeper knowledge on urban rhythms and emotional cognition could enrich our "tool-kit" of socio-spatial diagnosis tools. Studying urban rhythms with greater detail could, on one hand alarm us in situations of socio-economic daily arrhythmia and on the other hand, help us in understanding how to maintain eurhythmy in such times. During social challenges, an eurhythmic condition built by a well-structured daily pattern applied in a micro scale, could contribute immensely in dealing with the negative emotions of such challenges. A great number of eurhythmic conditions in the micro life is eventually translated in success also in macro scale. Above all, those bottom-up practices could contribute in building emotional resilience, which, as we saw in the recent Covid-19 pandemic, is crucial for societies to survive and to tackle difficulties.

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