

### **C3 Beaumaris 2 Wednesday 5 December 14.15-14.45**

#### ***Everyday Life in the Competitive, Accelerated Academy: politicising Belonging and Becoming through the lens of Rhythm. (0261)***

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This paper examines a range of findings from a recently completed pilot study (2017-18) that has sought to capture the spatio-temporal and affective dimensions of teaching and learning in a post-1992 HEI of the West Midlands (BCU). Showcasing an innovative methodology inspired by Lefebvre's work on Rhythmanalysis (2004), it addresses the crucial existential notions of being and belonging in the contemporary competitive, stratified and fast-paced university sector, encouraging us to think of space and time *differently* and, crucially, *together*.

Foregrounding the affective, aesthetic and political dimensions of everyday practices, rhythm reveals people's experiences (and struggles) of production and appropriation of time-space in higher education. The built environment in which higher education unfolds tells us powerful and often hidden stories about what being a HE student/teacher at a particular institution means, providing an alternative critique to the ways in which HE reflects, reproduces or challenges dominant cultural, economic and policy paradigms.

#### **Paper synopsis**

Addressing Lefebvre's call for the use of rhythm as a philosophical orientation and experimental methodology for cultural-historical research, this paper explores and critiques the rhythmic orientations embodied in the everyday life of the contemporary university. To this end, the first part presents and discusses the results of a pilot project conducted at Birmingham City University (2017-18), aimed at capturing the rhythms of teaching and learning occurring across its three main sites. The innovative combination of research methods employed, comprising audio-visually recorded walking interviews, time-lapse photography of the three campuses and of classroom/lab/studio teaching sessions, will be critically examined in light of its intended purposes. Excerpts of the teacher & learner's spatio-temporal-affective experience of institutional time-spaces will be shown, to reveal how teachers and learners in a post-92 higher education institution produce, appropriate/occupy and belong in the time-spaces they inhabit. This will, in turn, allow to test the strength of the rhythm analytical project in two distinct guises: as a method capable of translating the rich complexity of these articulations in their simultaneity, materiality and inevitable idiosyncrasy. And as a political instrument enacting a form of critique aimed at changing the social and institutional conventions that enable pathological re-productions (arrhythmias) and zones of exclusion within the contemporary, highly stratified, accelerated university (in line with Boltanski and Thevenot's call for a sociology of critical capacity). The second part of the paper tackles the theme of the conference in more depth, arguing that Rhythmanalysis, in its diagnostic and political capacity, can effectively counteract the

'disbenefits of current trends', introducing alternative beliefs and values capable of challenging what seem to have become the unquestioned norms and reality of extreme marketisation; competition fetish; steep institutional stratification; deep inequality in both educational access and outcomes. Against such scenario, the key to crafting and promoting a space for diversity and inclusion in higher education might be found in the promising, yet unexplored, relationship between rhythms of teaching & learning and anticipation. It will be argued that that a lot more can be achieved, methodologically and theoretically, by examining the anticipatory potential inherent to rhythm.

Teaching and learning in higher education are not only quintessentially rhythmic activities, but fundamentally and increasingly future-facing and future-oriented. In this respect, the contemporary university could be used as a laboratory to explore and test ideas related to rhythm and anticipation, and to promote alternative spatio-temporalities *in* and *for* education (Wozniak, 2017; Neary & Amsler, 2014; Bennett & Burke, 2017): here, education becomes a form of suspension from the dominant time-economies and an incubator for possible, rather than probable futures (Poli, 2014).

Now more than ever the existential crisis of the university must be turned into an opportunity for imagination: political, cultural and educational shifts are crucial to bring out the anticipatory potential intrinsic to higher education as a rhythmic, future-oriented system. Facer (2011), for instance, urges a 'recalibration' of educational curricula to draw-out anticipatory elements and update disciplinary knowledge through stewardship, modelling, reflexivity, experimentation, and through the fostering of emotional intelligence. Put it differently, working towards a 'future perfect' for the university allows a conceptual and practical synergy between rhythm and anticipation.

Starting from Appadurai's characterisation of the future as a 'cultural horizon' capable of replacing the past as a 'cultural reservoir' (Piot, 2010), the paper will expose how and why the contemporary university subscribes to aspiration, imagination and anticipation yet fails to acknowledge the fact that futures are socially differentiated and aspirations unequally distributed.

In conclusion, the paper will make a strong case for the use of Rhythmanalysis as a philosophical orientation, heuristic method and radical pedagogy to transform the university into an agent and enabler of anticipation. Interrogating the rhythms of teaching and learning by examining their arrhythmic and eurythmic dispositions will be a first step towards expanding the field of imagination and promoting true aspiration. Two essential conditions for the development of a future inclusive, creative and critical (academic) citizenship.

## References

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