

## Editorial: Rhythms

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## Editorial: Rhythms

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### Introduction

Rhythms are the basics of life. The earth's elliptical movement creates recurring rhythms of day-night and the seasons. Rhythms are the placement of sound and silence in time, in a piece of music and in speech. Rhythms are the beat of your heart, arrhythmic at times. Rhythms are repetition and variation, emphasis and relief, giving and receiving.

Rhythm refers to a variety of temporal and spatial experiences such as flow, synchronization, being out of time and going through a phase. In everyday life, we follow a work schedule (or play truant), we march (for peace or to war), we applaud in unison the players at the soccer field or the eloquent agitator. In research, rhythm is used in a wide range of writings within the arts, philosophy, technology, critical theory and in studies of the everyday (Crespi & Manghani, 2020).

There is a renewed awareness of rhythm across the social sciences and humanities — an awareness that can be seen as a response to the radical shifts in the pace and reach of modern life (Lyon, 2019). In this issue of *Qualitative Studies*, we are inspired by the concept of rhythm as it appears in the writings of the French sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1901-91), the American philosopher, psychologist and educational reformer John Dewey (1859-1952) and some of those who are inspired by them. In *Art as Experience*, Dewey talks about the rhythmic “drama” of conflict and resolution in which action, feeling and meaning are one:

Experiencing like breathing is a rhythm of intakings and outgivings. Their succession is punctuated and made a rhythm by the existence of intervals, periods in which one phase is ceasing and the other is inchoate and preparing. (Dewey, 1934, p. 158)

According to Lefebvre (2004 [1992]), rhythm is “everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy” (p. 15). It requires an element of recurrence, but it is not an exact repetition — it is a summing up as well as a carrying forward. As such, rhythm involves both linear and cyclical conceptions of time and offers a complex approach for the study of place, materiality, movement and the body (Lyon, 2019), as well as transgressions of boundaries and issues of power (Reid-Musson, 2018). Rhythms are not *good* or *bad*; they just *are*, and even though rhythms elude firm categorization, we all have a sense of what they are, how they affect us and the ways in which they can be used for good or evil purposes.

Lefebvre suggested the term “rhythmanalysis” as an orientation or a strategy comprising a set of methods that can be applied depending on the object and field of inquiry. He argues that the human body has several rhythms and that rhythms outside of the body can be studied with the researcher’s own rhythms as a point of reference. The researcher must situate her- or himself simultaneously inside and outside by actively and creatively engaging with his or her own rhythms and with the rhythms in the field of investigation. As a research practice, rhythmanalysis has much in common with ethnography and its ambitions of being *there* and observing through a spatially, temporally and sensually attuned practice. Analyzing rhythms involves an intimate feel for the transaction between and entanglement of bodies and spaces and a commitment to experimenting with different ways of attunement (McCormack, 2013) or, in Dewey’s terms, experimenting with experience.

The contributors to this issue apply rhythms as a prism into analyzing phenomena as diverse as the acquisition of writing skills, entrepreneurship in welfare education and presidential election campaigns, and in developing a framework for studying meaning making when confronted with individual, social or environmental rupture. Each of them uses the notion of rhythm to theorize time (and space) beyond the linear rhetoric such as “accelerated” (Rosa, 2013) or “slow” (Honoré, 2004). Rather, they show how all rhythms are “fragile orderings emerging from, and potentially returning to, chaos” (McCormack, 2013).

In “Phenomenology of rhythm: The role of rhythm in written language,” Casper Feilberg and John Maul present existential-phenomenological perspectives on a case study of a high-

school student with written language difficulties. Throughout the article, they elucidate connections between rhythmic perspectives in movement, speech, working memory and language as prerequisites for the acquisition of written language skills. By combining developmental psychology, neuropsychology and qualitative observations, they work towards a rhythmic understanding of dyslexia. By presenting different perspectives as a contribution to an overall understanding in the light of a phenomenological ontology of the human being, which takes the experiencing body-subject as a basis and a starting point, they conclude that combining these approaches is in line with the work of Merleau-Ponty.

In the second article, “The pitch as meaning-directing activity: Implications for students and education when fast pace and a striving for novelty set the scene,” Nicolai Nybye investigates the elevator pitch as part of a tendency toward homogenization of entrepreneurial content in educational programs. Drawing on data from innovation courses for health students at a Danish University College and on the work of Dewey and professor of education Gert Biesta, he shows how the pitch as a phenomenon in education organizes the way students orient themselves, guides their meaning making and reduces the space for reflection. Nybye concludes that values of speed and the striving for novelty become affordances for the health students in specific ways. Through the pitch, the students are expected to act as a version of saleswo/men in a marketplace for new solutions to an audience of assessing judges, while the active, reflective student as figure is left behind.

“Rhythm politics in a changing Brazil: A study of how Bolsonaro and Haddad mobilized voters musically in the 2018 election” is based on Kjetil Klette Bøhler’s fieldwork during the 2018 election campaign in Brazil. It provides a conceptual framework and offers a new concept of *rhythm politics*. *Rhythm politics* is used to carry out an analysis of how musical rhythms and melodies activate other rhythms (e.g. psychological, biological and social) and thereby mobilize political sentiment, values and visions through aesthetic means. One, and perhaps the most important, lesson to be learned from the study, Bøhler states, is that music and arts may humanize and popularize fascist movements that threaten human rights. To fight against such movements in the future, it is important to know more about how jingles, national anthems and other music phenomena are used to mobilize voters.

Consider your life-course as a piece of music. This is what Sarah Awad suggests in “Experiencing change: Rhythms of everyday life between continuities and change,” in which she inquires into meaning-making processes in times when everyday rhythms are disrupted. In such times, argues Awad with inspiration from Zittoun’s idea of *melodies of living*, we reconstruct our past and

imagine possible alternative futures in a pursuit of continuity following disruption. Paying attention to how personal, social, and environmental changes reciprocally influence one another, she argues that the experience of change could be understood through looking at rhythms in five interrelated domains that are tied together with a core focus on meaning making: time, space, body, social others and symbolic resources.

We trust that you, our readers, will engage in rhythmic transaction with the texts and that they will inspire further attunement in your research practice as well as in everyday life.

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## About the Author

**Charlotte Wegener** is associate professor in social innovation. She is also passionate about writing and has explored the art and craft of writing in several ways. She teaches graduate and postgraduate writing courses, runs writing retreats and seeks to expand the field of academic writing by involving music, fiction, and the rhythms of everyday life.