

## **Performing Place: A Rhythmanalysis of the City of London**

### **Abstract**

Through its focus on the City of London as a particular work sector and setting, this paper emphasizes the symbolic and material significance of place to understanding the lived experiences of power relations within organizational life. The socio-cultural and material aspects of the City are explored through an analysis of the rhythms of place, as well through interview data. Using a methodological approach based on Lefebvre's *Rhythmanalysis* (2004) in order to develop an embodied, immersive sense of how the City is experienced as a workplace, the paper makes a methodological, empirical, and theoretical contribution to an understanding of the way in which rhythms shape how place is performed. Using rhythmanalysis as a method, the paper shows the relationship between rhythms and the performances of place, foregrounding a subjective, embodied and experiential way of researching the places and spaces of organizing.

**Keywords:** The City, organizational space, place and setting, rhythms, Lefebvre, Rhythmanalysis

## Introduction

The study which forms the basis for this paper is concerned with exploring the rhythms of place, arguing that rhythms and workplace can be mutually constitutive. As discussed below, the City of London<sup>1</sup> is cited as a distinctive workplace by the people who work there. Through its focus on such a particular organizational setting dominated by a single industry, this paper examines the relationships between places of organization and their situated rhythms. It uses Lefebvre's *Rhythmanalysis* (2004) as its methodological starting point, which I argue is a relatively underused method for researching work places. The paper is an attempt to map and explicate how rhythmanalysis can be developed and applied for scholars of organization who are familiar with Lefebvre's theorizing of space as socially produced, but perhaps less familiar with his work on rhythms. In this way, I aim to develop an organizational rhythmanalysis which could be replicated and extended to other empirical studies of workplace settings.

Lefebvre's theorisation of urban space is developed from a Marxist dialectical critique, with a focus on the continually expanding reach of the urban in capitalist societies. Lefebvre's concern is with the way in which capitalism penetrates the details of everyday life, and the ways in which everyday life is thus relentlessly controlled (Lefebvre, 1991). It is this focus on the centrality of everyday life to Marxism, combined with his phenomenologically based approach to sensemaking, which is fundamental to his work on rhythm and the urban. Lefebvre highlights subjective, embodied and experiential ways of sense making which can

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<sup>1</sup> The City of London, or the Square Mile, to use its metonym, is the heart of the UK's financial services sector and is the financial and business hub of one of the world's largest cities. It employs approximately four hundred thousand people, mainly in the financial services industry (CityofLondon.gov.uk, 2016).

help researchers respond to calls for the use of immersive methods in research into the sensory aspects of working practices (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2009).

The overall aim of the paper is to illustrate how a rhythmanalysis can emphasize the connection between work, industry sector and spatial performances. Whilst there have been empirical studies focusing on the City (Allen & Pryke, 1994, McDowell, 1997, Thrift, 1996, all discussed below), there is little in the literature that discusses what it is like to work in such a distinct and distilled work setting. In this paper, the empirical setting of the City illustrates the relationship between meaning and materiality and the ways in which the rhythms contribute to how City workers experience and make sense of their workplace.

Whilst Lefebvre's theories of space as socially produced (1991) have made major contributions to organization studies (Beyes & Steyaert, 2012; Dale, 2005; Dale & Burrell, 2008; Taylor & Spicer, 2007, Wasserman & Frenkel, 2015, Watkins, 2005), the application of his work on the rhythms of urban space to the development of research methods has had less impact (notable exceptions are discussed below). Yet as this paper demonstrates, a rhythmanalysis can provide a sensory method of researching place, and here highlights how rhythms and the performances of place can be co-constitutive.

Notwithstanding the burgeoning literature on organizational space and place over recent years, (e.g. Dale & Burrell, 2008, Kornberger & Clegg, 2003, 2004), as Taylor and Spicer (2007) pointed out over twenty years ago, there has been less of a focus on boundaries that cross analyses of individual workplaces, the boundary between the inside and outside of the organization, and the regional or national setting. As Hirst and Humphreys (2013) remind us, the assumption that organization is contained within the walls of a particular organization can lead to a lack of attention to the wider setting in which they are placed. Looking beyond what Ashcraft (2007: 11, cited in Hirst & Humphreys, 2013: 1506) calls the 'container metaphor,'

the paper argues that paying attention to the non-contained leads to more focus on how organizing might take place beyond the spatial confines of ‘organizations’.

This paper draws upon concepts of performance, that is, the particular and situated demands of this place and sector. Goffman (1967) approached social interaction through a dramaturgical metaphor involving staged performances, with a conscious and performing self behind each interaction. Gregson and Rose (2000) extend this to encompass spaces, which they argue can be thought of as brought into being through performances. I take this conception of the relationship between performances and space as a ‘jumping off point’ to explore how rhythm analysis draws critical attention to the body as a medium through which place is enacted.

Hence, the paper adds to studies which use Lefebvre as a methodological and theoretical starting point, connecting spatial materiality to the ways in which space is lived and experienced. It shows that where work takes place matters to how it is perceived and experienced, and how in turn the perceptions and experience shape the material and cultural environment. I argue that rhythm can be a means of emphasizing this, illuminating how work and work sectors are enacted. The paper also contributes to studies of organizational space and place by showing that this type of analysis can move towards an ontological shift, in terms of when and where organizations exist in terms of their spatio-temporal settings, and in what form.

The research discussed here provides an empirical update to studies such as Allen and Pryke (1994) and McDowell (1997), who discuss the highly stylized culture of the City. In particular, I build upon the previous studies of the City mentioned above by focusing on the way in which work is performed in the City. What role does the wider setting play in compelling or constraining particular behaviours, and how can an analysis of rhythm help

analyse this? Geographers have studied the spatio-temporal rhythms of place (DeLyser & Sui, 2013, Edensor, 2010, 2012 inter alia), and some have related this directly to performance on the streets (Simpson, 2012), but rhythmanalysis has been less used in organization studies (Lyon, 2016, discussed below, is a notable exception). Where rhythms have taken centre stage, the focus has been either on temporal modes of organizing, for example Shi & Prescott, (2012), who explore the temporal relationship between rhythm-type strategic actions and firm performance, or rhythmic patterns, for example Hatch (1999) uses improvisational jazz performance as a metaphor for re-describing organizational structures. Borch et al (2015) bring rhythm into a focus on industry sector, in this case finance, by exploring the relationship between bodily rhythms and the rhythms of capital, adapting Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis to the financial markets in an attempt to analyse 'how capital's own everyday is organized' (2015: 4). This paper builds on this through a spatial focus on rhythm, analysing the rhythms of a place of capital.

Theoretically, the paper develops Lefebvre's (2004) concepts of eurythmia and arrhythmia in relation to the City. These are, respectively, a subjective sense of harmony with the particular situated rhythms, and a sense of dissonance or malaise incurred by a conflict between rhythms. These are discussed in more detail below.

The contributions of the paper are threefold. Firstly, the contribution is methodological, by applying rhythmanalysis to the streets of the City. My subjective experience of conducting a rhythmanalysis formed the basis for part of the fieldwork, which involved walking the streets of the City to experience its rhythms, but was enhanced and complemented by participant interviews. Secondly, it makes an empirical contribution to the literature on organizational place by analysing the relationship of rhythm to the lived experience of the City. The third contribution is that extending Lefebvre's theorisation of space to encompass his work on rhythms highlights how places and rhythms can be co-constituted and enacted.

The paper is structured as follows. In order to situate the research within the growing literature on organizational space and place, it begins by considering three related themes in the literature; namely, place, performance and rhythms. I then turn to the research design and a description of the methods, explaining how an embodied methodology, combined with participant interviews, allows for a rich understanding of the rhythms of place. I discuss the different ways in which the City performs place, with a particular focus on how it is rhythmically sensed. In the final part of the paper, it is argued that the connection between rhythms, place and performance can be discovered via a walking based rhythm analysis, making a case for what it brings to the fore as a method of organizational analysis and why it is appropriate in this particular setting.

## **Place**

Gieryn (2000) identifies three defining features of place as location, material form and meaningfulness; a sense of place is not only, therefore, the ability to locate things cognitively, but also evolves from the way that meaning is given to a particular location. Agnew (2011: 22) points out that a sense of place ‘expresses a certain communality and performance’. The sense of a shared cognitive understanding, an emotional and subjective attachment or non-attachment to a particular locale, and of situated performances, underpins this paper.

The conceptual definition of place outlined here is that place represents a localised intensification or distillation of human experience, where ‘localised’ is taken to refer to a particular setting. Shaped by association, place can therefore be explored via a focus on lived experience and the collective meanings that are ascribed to it.

The role of place in organization studies has been studied in relation to the everyday lived experience of work (Courpasson, 2017), and to the relationship between the social and the material in workplaces (Dale, 2005). Courpasson, Dany and Delbridge (2017) highlight the

blurring boundaries of organizations (resulting from flexible working practices) which enable workers to create their own meanings. This blurring of boundaries is important to this study in terms of a spatial, rather than a temporal, blurring of boundaries between the inside and outside of organizations. Shortt (2015) extends what we think of as organizational space by researching liminal spaces within workplaces, concluding that they evolve through meanings and associations from spaces to (transitory) places. These associations of place – in particular the materiality of place - with meaning is taken up by McNulty and Stewart (2015) who adopt a socio spatial perspective of organizations and role performance, connecting specific workplaces with specific performances. Liu and Grey (2017) draw on Lefebvre to explore the relationship between the materiality of place and shifting organizational identity, focusing on how buildings can contribute to an organization's sense of what it is. I draw on this interdependent relationship between place, meaning and materiality in this paper, with specific reference to work settings, and it is the exploration of how rhythm can be used to analyse this relationship that will be highlighted.

Lyon (2016), in one of the few studies using rhythm analysis as a methodological tool to investigate organizational place, analyses the rhythms of Billingsgate fish market. Arguing that it is rhythms which constitute a particular and situated space-time which shape the peculiarities of place and the work carried out within it, she notes that it is not just temporal patterns which structure a place, but the activity and movement of people within it. Exploring the relationships between rhythm, atmosphere and mobility, Lyon depicts a place which is perpetually forming and re-forming as a result of its situated rhythms.

### **The situated performances of place**

This study explores how City workers make sense of the place in which they work and how the meanings they ascribe to it form part of their work based identity, and asks to what extent

the socio material context of where work is carried out influences how it is carried out. Ackroyd and Crowdy (1990) draw attention to the way in which identity is situated – with particular regard to occupational cultures. Location and place are described as significant to understanding the lived experience of work and the meanings with which work in certain places is imbued (Tyler, 2011). The importance of place to work based identity has been addressed through formulating concepts of place in terms of social relations, and the multiplicity of social relations and identities across spatial scales, including the workplace (Agnew, 1987; Czarniawska, 2002; Hatch & Schultz, 2002, Massey, 1994, McDowell, 1997, 1999, Tyler and Cohen 2010). Whilst identities may always be unfixed, contested and multiple (Massey, 1994), place offers a distinctive way of analysing the processes of identity making (Halford & Leonard, 2006). The spatial and temporal contexts, therefore, within which management discourses and employee subjectivity occur can be used to interpret the practices of subjectivity in organizational life. Likewise, the importance of issues of spatiality and temporality in processes of organizing are debated in the rich and extensive literature on sensemaking in organizations (Brown 2000; Holt and Cornelissen, 2014; Maitlis and Christianson, 2014; Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld, 2005, *inter alia*). These studies theorise the ways in which organizational actors ‘make sense’ of events and through which they are able to construct and enact the situations and environments that they attempt to comprehend (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014). Kärreman and Alvesson (2001) connect processes of sensemaking with the exploration and elaboration of identity issues (Brown et al, 2015). Cunliffe and Coupland (2012) explore sensemaking as a lived, embodied, everyday experience, arguing that embodiment is an integral part of sensemaking in that it occurs through felt bodily experiences and sensing of our surroundings. These theorizations of sensemaking are drawn upon here in the discussion of the ways in which the City produces



meaning, with a particular focus on the importance of an embodied method to research working life within it.

Thrift (1996), discussing the City's ability to produce meaning and constantly reproduce itself, connects this to the City's small spatial extent. Its tight orbit forces the need for face to face communications; it is both practical and manageable, since the space is readily traversed, and this becomes a mark of its special status for those who belong, in that they are expected to be physically visible. Visibility as a mark of belonging can be traced to the way in which men gathered in City coffee houses to sort out disputes in the seventeenth century. The traditions, rhythms and materiality all combine to form what he calls 'a coherent City space ... confirming the identity of place and person.' (Thrift, 1996: 241).

This coherent space is also a place with a focus on accumulation and performance. McDowell (1997), in her rich ethnography of the culture of investment banks in the City, examines the multiple ways in which masculinities and femininities are performed, particularly embodied performances integral to certain occupations; she describes, for example, the noisy, sweaty atmospheres of trading floors in investment banks as 'carnavalesque'. This focus on embodied performances is important to this study because rhythms are experienced by and through the body, as the section on rhythm analysis below will explore in more detail.

How might City workers be skilful performers of place, and what is the relationship of rhythm to performance? In the section below, I will discuss Lefebvre's theorisation of space as socially constructed, and his later work theorising that spaces have their own rhythms which can be read, analysed and felt with the body, in order to develop an understanding of how performances and rhythms inter-relate in the City.

### **Lefebvre, cities and rhythms**

Lefebvre explains that just as everyday life has been colonised by capitalism, so too has its location; the urban is accorded a central place in his philosophy and politics. Lefebvre (2003 [1970]) argues that a central component of the overall dynamic of capitalist development lies in the production of the built environment and the process of city building. He conceptualises cities as subject to implosion and explosion; their destructive social and environmental characteristics lead to cycles of instability and crisis. In terms of financial centres, processes of capitalist enclosure lead to the intensification and extension of the urbanization process, directly connecting accumulations of finance capital with urban agglomeration (Lefebvre 2003). Cities (and by extension, urban constellations within them, such as the City of London), have been described as webs of connectivity (Castells, 2007) facilitating the network society (Castells, 1996). This is emphasized in relation to finance, since global financial markets represent an industry reliant upon fast communication networks, moving beyond preoccupation with geographic location.

Previous studies of financial districts have examined the relationship between location and industry sector (Allen & Pryke, 1994, Amin & Cohendet, 2003, Buena & Stark, 2002, Ho, 1990). Amin and Cohendet (2003) explore the relationship between the urban and finance, in particular the ability of organizations to use spaces other than the physical one to transfer knowledge. Financial centres are both constructed in and through global connectivity, but also through their particular geographical location. Buena and Stark (2002) ask what the role of locality might be under conditions of global connectivity. They point towards the changing urban geography of finance and the tension between the pull of proximity to facilitate innovation, and the push of dispersion for security. Yet Ho (2009), in her ethnography of Wall Street, describes the geographical habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) of a place which produces practices and constructs social worlds and structures which are so particular and situated that they push her into alternate conceptions of space and time; while she is in situ, the dominant,

taken for granted experience of spending early mornings and late nights on site becomes habitual and natural and she finds it hard to believe that other experiences of space and time exist outside of Wall Street. Vesala and Tuomivaara (2018), however, focus not on cities but on a rural archipelago, exploring how liminal places can alter work rhythms, bringing the focus back to specific places rather than specific industries. Given that, like Wall Street, the City is produced in conjunction with social and historical imperatives, I argue that place and industry sector can converge to create meaningful associations, which can be analysed and understood via attention to rhythm.

Cities are entangled, as Lefebvre predicted, with endless contemporary growth, a world of megacities, suburbs, and various sorts of concentrated agglomerations. In the case of the City of London, it is inextricably connected to the wider city around it, by infrastructure and flow of people, and beyond wider London to the other financial centres around the globe; it could be said to pulsate with global, national, regional and local connections (and rhythms). Indeed, Allen and Pryke (1994) analyse the routine spatial practices and global networks of those who work in the City's financial markets, connecting the social production of space (Lefebvre, 1991) in the City with wider networks across the globe. Yet at the same time, the trend towards ever increasing urbanization has been termed the non-city (Arbodela, 2015), a move towards networks with no geographical connection at all. This leads to questions around the importance of location, particularly for financial districts, as seen above. Czarniawska (2004) moves towards an 'unsiting' of organizational analysis. Her claim that contemporary organizing moves not only from one place to another but happens in several places at once leads to the description of an action net approach, whereby organizations themselves are products, rather than the source, of organising. Conceptually, this presents a parallel argument to the one explored in this paper, in that the City is experienced as the organizing force, and the individual organizations located within it can be experienced as its

‘products’. Beyes and Steyaert (2012) develop concepts around the sites and places (and times) of organizing by looking at what happens outside and beyond clear institutional demarcations. They argue that new sights and sites of organizing are not necessarily located in hitherto unrecognized places, but can be found, for example, in inner city streets and monumental squares, and that analysing organizations by ‘unsiting’ them makes the practice of theorizing affective, spatial and embodied (2012: 24).

From the above, themes emerge around both the city and the City as sites of organizing: That they are at once entangled with the process of continual urbanization, leading to less emphasis on the importance of geographic location; that organization itself can be ‘unsited’, leading to questions around how they can be analysed empirically; and that performances and places can be mutually constitutive. It is through Lefebvre’s critical approach to the commodification of everyday life, resulting from his Marxist orientation, and his use of rhythm to analyse urban everyday life, that ways of empirically researching urban sites of organizing can be signposted. Here, I use rhythm to answer questions about the importance, or otherwise, of geographical location, how the performances of place are enacted, and how we might be organized beyond the confines of organizations.

Lefebvre (1991) describes how social space is produced and experienced through a conceptual triad of spatial practice, representations of space, and spaces of representation, or, in other words as perceived, conceived and lived. Whilst Lefebvre wrote little about organizations, his writing on spatial and rhythmic processes help us to understand the organizing mechanisms of place. It is the combination of his commitment to dialectical materialism and its focus on motion and cycles, along with his focus on embodied ways of knowing and experiencing the material, which can provide insights into the interplay between subjective experience and objective materiality in the City. Other scholars, (notably Ingold, 2011), bring together discussions on embodiment, place and materiality, but it is Lefebvre’s

depictions of urban agglomerations, and his exploration of their situated rhythms, which not only provide a methodological foundation for this research, but help to place subjective, embodied experience as a form of epistemic knowledge. As Ronneberger (2008: 135) reminds us, ‘the declared goal of his intellectual project was, above all, a revalorisation of subjectivity’. In this paper, I explore how rhythmanalysis as a methodology emphasises subjective experience as a form of epistemic knowledge with the body as the medium of analysis.

### **The rhythms of place: Towards a situated, embodied methodology**

In *Rhythmanalysis* (2004, first published in France in 1992), Lefebvre pays particular attention to urban rhythms, arguing that by listening and analysing the rhythms of place, we can better understand their particular character and the effects they create. To analyse rhythms successfully means becoming ‘more sensitive to times than to spaces, to moods than to images, to the atmosphere than to particular events’ (2004: 94).

Lefebvre also writes about degrees of rhythmic consistency, tempo and intensity. It is the ways in which rhythms collide that produce various rhythmic states in the body, which he describes using musical terminology. Polyrhythmia is the experience of multiple, related rhythms, eurythmia is where the rhythmic state is characterised by regular repetition, working together in harmony, the optimum state for healthy bodily rhythms, and arrhythmia is the state of disordered rhythms, characterised by anxiety and pathology. These concepts will be explored in relation to the experience of City workers in the analysis below.

Whilst offering little in the way of methodological guidelines, Lefebvre insists on an analysis of the experience of rhythm, not merely observation, and that no camera or series of images alone can show spatial rhythms. The only way we can do this is through bodily engagement, drawing upon a multiplicity of the senses. What differentiates rhythmanalysis from more

straightforward observations of the temporality of urban life is this stress on the body as the medium of analysis. As Lefebvre (2004: 29) explains, the rhythm analyst ‘listens – and first to his body ... his body serves him as a metronome’. Lefebvre does highlight a methodological concern, however; ‘in order to analyse a rhythm, one must get outside it’ (2004: 95). What he is recommending is both observation and immersion, for we cannot experience rhythms unless it is through our body, and we cannot analyse our experience unless we observe; we need to be therefore both inside and outside, participant and researcher; a reflection of Lefebvre’s phenomenological orientation. Ybema et al (2009) draw attention to the paradox of participant-observation which is inherent in the simultaneous engagement with participation and observation as a requirement of fieldwork; there is a tension between engagement and detachment whilst trying to both experience and observe the lived reality of the observed. This tension is at the heart of rhythm analysis (and of phenomenology more generally), yet Lefebvre suggests that the more the rhythms are internalised, the better chance the rhythm analyst will have of noting and reflecting on them; in other words, that sensory engagement is essential as a precursor to observation.

Building on these insights, I illustrate that one way to research organizational place is to walk through it, with the aim of better understanding one’s own perceptions of place and setting, as well as those of others. I argue that in this particular setting it also replicates the experience of City workers, most of whom arrive at transport termini but then traverse this small bounded place on foot during the working day.

### **Methods, data collection and analysis**

Scholars and authors have drawn upon various forms and practices of walking in order to understand or critique city life (Edensor 2010, 2012; Elkin, 2016; Matos Wunderlich, 2008). More recently, Zundel (2013) suggests walking as a method for management reflection,

drawing on Ingold (2011), and arguing that walking represents a way of rethinking our relationship with space as it emerges from everyday engagement with our surroundings, and through it distinctions of inside and out, as well as self and environment, intermingle.

Traditions of urban walking include the urban consciousness developed in Paris in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by the ‘flâneurs’ (strollers, wanderers) of the mid-nineteenth century. Benjamin (1999) draws upon the tradition of the flâneur in his nostalgic Arcades Project, as did the Situationists as they developed the purposeful drifting of the *dérive* in the middle part of the twentieth century. Lefebvre moves beyond the somewhat detached observations of the flâneur, in that he relates walking in the city to the sensation of immersion in music and dance. Rhythmanalysis is therefore connected to aesthetic ways of knowing (Linstead & Höpfl, 2000, Strati, 1999).

This approach for this study was, by its nature, highly subjective, and I wished to compare my own findings with the experiences of City workers. It involved research participants, anonymised by the use of pseudonyms, in order to better understand the lived experience of those who regularly work in the setting, and to help facilitate the validation of data gathered<sup>2</sup>. This will be discussed below.

## **Research design**

The aim was to use my own body to immerse myself within the research setting, sensing the rhythms of both my body and the wider setting. Composing field notes involved several different stages; immediate notes and jottings, more reflexive writing during coffee breaks,

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<sup>2</sup> I had worked in the City for a period of ten years in the 1990s and early 2000s, and whilst I no longer had extensive contacts in the City, I used a snowball sample from one initial contact, with whom I was put in touch via a former colleague, to recruit research participants. Only five participants were previously known to me and I had worked with none of them, so as not to impose my own feelings and memories of particular rhythms upon them; I also wanted to interview as wide a range of job roles and organizations as possible.

and writing up retrospectively whilst immersing myself once again in the setting, with the rhythms of the City all around me. The walking stage of the fieldwork utilised visual material to help develop a richer understanding of the setting, and to capture data that illustrated the environment in a way that written accounts cannot do in isolation.

As well as the focus on seeing and sensing, the walks were also mapped retrospectively so I could see the spatial patterns of my walks when conducting the analysis. The maps created a visual memory of the walks, and helped me to plan future walks by evaluating areas of the empirical setting which I hadn't explored in enough detail. A 'rhythmanalysis map' of the walks, alluding to the rhythms of each area walked and the emotions that surfaced within them, is attached as Appendix A.

### **Walking the City**

I conducted my rhythmanalysis of the City by walking, at the same pace as the majority of people around me, for an hour or so, occasionally stopping to take photographs, then pausing for a coffee break and a chance to observe the waves of rhythms around me and write up notes. I then continued the walk, repeating a pattern of pausing every hour. Whilst I covered much ground, I also dipped in and out of the City rhythms as I stopped to rest, get coffee and to write up notes. In this way I was briefly and minimally 'grasped' by the rhythms, yet these experiences of embodied rhythmic activity, and the feelings of eurythmia and arrhythmia which they produced, became my method of analysis and brought subjectivity to the foreground of my observations. The focus throughout was on apprehending the rhythms – perceiving, discerning and living them – which will be returned to in my analysis below.



I spent ten days walking in the City<sup>3</sup>. The routes were ‘semi structured’ in that I planned to visit a particular area each time, and had an approximate idea of where I would be walking, but allowed myself to take unexpected deviations, and follow points of interest as they emerged, rather than being too prescriptive. In this way, the preparation for the walks was similar to preparing an interview schedule for semi-structured interviews. I walked at the same pace as the City workers around me; I actively ‘disengaged’ from the fast pace when I stopped to take photographs, or stopped for coffee and observed from a stopping point. Walks varied in length, but ranged between three and six hours and were timed to coincide with particular times of day.

### **Participant Interviews**

In addition to walking the streets of the City, eighteen participants were interviewed, ten men and eight women, from a range of backgrounds and ages and covering a variety of City occupations<sup>4</sup>. The focus of the interviews was on their sensory and emotional reactions to the setting and the daily rhythms of City life.

### **Data Analysis**

Field notes were written up as soon as possible after the walks and when writing up the findings, I used photographs along with the notes to recreate the sense of the setting. Once all the data was collected, I carried out an analysis of each data set, allowing a thematic narrative

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<sup>3</sup> Most of the field days took place during the week, at different times of day; for example some days I travelled early in the morning to see the City wake up, other times I travelled in to coincide with the busiest rush hour period, and sometimes I arrived later and came back in the evening rush hour. I spent two late evenings in the City, and one Sunday. I started in the winter, and ended in high summer.

<sup>4</sup> A demographic summary of research participants is included in Appendix B.

to emerge. Following the patterns which emerged was made easier by re-visiting the setting to write up the analysis, and attune myself to the feelings of eurythmia and arrhythmia which once again took hold as I immersed myself in the data. Rhythmanalysis as a method actively centres the importance of sensory and embodied data, so that the researcher's own body becomes a source of epistemological data. The findings are inductively derived from the body via the process of participating in the rhythms, as well as via observation. Walking abreast with groups of people on the streets formed part of the embodied experience of the research, and whilst the knowledge generated is necessarily personal and partial, it did help to develop close connections with the experience of the observed.

### **Findings and analysis: Eurythmia and arrhythmia in the City**

To summarise the findings, it is the fast pace of City working life, perhaps unsurprisingly, which was immediately noticeable. With reference to how this is expressed rhythmically, the most common participant reply was that it is through speed, focus and purpose; and a reluctance – or fear – to ever pause during the working day. Feelings of eurythmia and arrhythmia help us understand how the City is experienced rhythmically and spatially. They are also useful concepts for analysing shared embodied rhythmic experiences, in that they allowed me to compare my own reactions with those of research participants.

Whilst the linear rhythms of the City are partly imposed by the temporal rhythms of global finance, the findings show that they are also local, shaped by its particular history. The findings and analysis are presented below in two parts; the first dealing with the overall rhythms of place, the second showing how a rhythmanalysis reveals how the City is constructed through its performance imperative.

### **The dance of the City**

On weekdays, I was conscious of the way that I walked speedily, my head down, conscious of getting in the way if I paused or stopped. The weather and the seasons make little difference to the daily routine. The buildings absorb and disgorge workers at the same times each day (morning, noon and evening), and all head for the same cafes (in bad weather) and any scraps of grass or outside seating (summer).

The rhythms observed and experienced are staccato, with a fast tempo and an accent on every beat; military rather than fluid. They build towards a crescendo at certain times of day, most noticeably in the early morning and early evening, but between these times the streets often empty of people. Occasionally, outside of these linear rhythms, flurries of activity on the streets, particularly as people move between offices, create frenetic scenes of activity, with the start-stop of the traffic and construction work as a perpetual background.

When discussing how rhythms are sensed on the streets, participants mentioned the need to understand not only the need to keep up with the pace, but also to understand the ‘shorthand’ of the City’s geography, and to be able to speedily navigate the streets, demonstrating a spatial confidence. One of the most immediately striking things about walking the City streets is the amount of people who use them as office corridors – greeting one another in the middle of the street, shaking hands, calling out to one another. People moved between offices with files and laptops under their arms, often in groups, walking four or five abreast across the pavement. The pace is fast, and the interruptions and pauses come from these informal meetings and greetings; almost like a dance with its collective movements. This highlights the way in which the rhythmic flow of the City shows how it functions and is experienced as an organization beyond the boundaries of individual institutions or workplaces:

Insert figure one here

Insert figure two here

Whilst walking in the City, I was also conscious of the purposeful nature of the place. Once I started to consciously think about and record my bodily responses, I started to notice rhythms everywhere; the way the traffic moved, the way that people moved in and out of buildings, the pace of walking on different streets. The stop and start of construction noise, especially road drills, is the dominant aural rhythm, blocking out any human voices, although it is accompanied by the regular swish of traffic, interspersed with the disruptive roar of motorcycle couriers travelling from office to office. Lefebvre makes the point that repetition in itself does not produce a rhythm – it is the insertion of difference which does that. So the noticeably fast rhythms of the morning and evening rush hours, and lunch times when the buildings disgorge hundreds of workers onto the streets, are created by also witnessing the slower rhythms of mid-afternoon, when only a few people rush up and down the streets, and the strangely tense and silent Sundays, when it seems as if the setting is holding its breath, like an orchestra waiting for the conductor to bring down the baton on a Monday morning. The daily pace of urban life varies within and between cities, with their hectic rush hours, quiet afternoons, and busy early evenings, but this is intensified in the City so that the distinction between work and leisure is perceived as absent – although there are shops, bars, restaurants, and so on, the rhythms are so fast paced and oriented around the linear rhythms of the working day that the experience of people on the streets is that these places of leisure become less visible. As Claire says:

It's just all about work, there is nothing else going on here ... whether this is true or not I don't think it matters, to me there are no schools, no hospitals, there are no parks, no theatres, no cinemas. You can't stop for them you see.

This reminds us of Ho's (2009) perception of alternate conceptions of space and time on Wall Street; like Claire, the particularities and peculiarities of place make it difficult for her to accept the existence of 'normal' life both within its bounds.

As explored above, Beyes and Steyaert (2012) 'unsite' organization, by critically examining where the new sites and sights of organizing take place. Building on these insights, I argue that the individual organizations of the City are in one sense 'unsited' as the City itself becomes the site of organizing.

All participants mentioned cycles of crisis as contributing to the rhythm of the City. Whilst these are cyclical rhythms imposed by global economic circumstances, it was the way in which the frenetic pace of the rhythms speed up until they reach crisis point, characterised by a sense of panic and tension, and then slowly building again, that was perceived as typical of this place, and one that you just need to accept if you work here. Whilst the City rhythms are responsive to the global web connecting financial centres, with the working day starting early and finishing late in order to coincide with other global markets, the role of the specific locale of the City has been shown to be important in how it is experienced as a workplace. As Thrift (1996) reminds us, there is a special status conferred upon those who belong in the City, in that they are expected to be physically visible on the streets, and this research confirms this, as well as the need to be moving at a fast and purposeful pace.

The rhythms are noticeably slower and less frantic in the shared spaces in which the City abounds – the gardens, the squares, the churchyards – but all too often these places are inaccessible as my field notes show: 'Even on a sunny evening in May the parks and gardens are empty, and often locked; they seem to be created to be looked at, not to use.'

Insert figure number three here

It is as if the City discourages attempts to slow down, and let your body rest. At times, when looking for places of respite away from the fast paced rhythms, I felt a distinct sense of bodily unease. I noticed that my posture was often hunched when I walked through the heart of the City. Partly this was in response to needing to walk fast, but I noticed at times when I stopped for coffee that my shoulders and neck were aching in the way that they used to when I worked here; perhaps responding to the anxiety and tension which this place seems to produce – a sense of urgency, at least. When I wasn't in the setting, these symptoms disappeared. I experienced mounting anxiety at times; what Lefebvre (2004) refers to as arrhythmia, or a negative disturbance of bodily rhythms, which are only brought to our attention when there is a state of pathology or arrhythmic disturbance. The rhythms here are all based on what Lefebvre (2004) describes as the linear rhythms of industrialism and its repetitions and mechanisations, which seek to control, inhibit and accommodate the body and its rhythms. At times this resulted in arrhythmia.

During the interviews, participants expressed the stress of walking around this dense and compact space. Ian emphasised the need to be able to find your way around to understand the 'shorthand' by which insiders refer to particular streets or areas, as he says 'You just need to know where to go. You need to be able to find your way around,' stressing the need to be an 'insider' to be able to confidently navigate the setting. Dave also connected navigational confidence with a sense of belonging. In this way, an embodied spatial confidence and an ability to keep pace with the rhythms instils a sense of eurythmia (Lefebvre, 2004), or bodily harmony. Jennifer and Claire, both of whom have now left the City, associated walking in the space directly with embodied memory; as Jennifer says:

What is interesting is when I left the City, I went back and I'd completely lost my City walk and that 'elbows out' ability.

When I met Claire in the City to carry out the interview, she immediately expressed how uncomfortable she was being back in the space; the fast, purposeful rhythms brought back vivid memories of how much she had disliked working here. She asked if we could carry out the interview by walking the route that she had used to take every day from tube to office, as she said it would 'bring it all back'. For her, a sense of arrhythmia took hold once again as soon as she was back in the physical setting and was attempting to 'keep up' once again.

Lefebvre (2004) explains that the rhythmanalyst uses the body as a metronome, in order to internalize tempo. As I walked, I noted that I was experiencing both eurythmia and arrhythmia in alternating waves. This meant experiencing a rhythm of adrenaline surges punctuated by an underlying weariness, of waves of energy interspersed with a need for respite which is rarely granted. What I internalised was a sense of eternal readiness and preparation, and a sense of endless performance. It is this embodied engagement, fundamental to rhythmanalysis, which generates apprehension and insights in terms of empirical exploration and helps to make a methodological and epistemological contribution to studies of organizational place.

### **Performance, place and rhythm**

A sense of palpable and perpetual 'readiness' for performance in the City was most noticeable when I walked on a Sunday. It was easier to simply wander then, since the streets were empty, but it reinforced the sense of being in a place that is 'ready and waiting' for when the doors open, figuratively, and work can begin.

This culture of performance was raised by all interviewees, yet many did not work directly in finance and some were ‘back office’ staff or support staff rather than traders or bankers, so the pressures of performance are not necessarily linked to one sector or type of job; as Claire put it, ‘there is just something in the air here.’ What that ‘something’ is appears to be an intense focus on performing work.

This sense of the City as dystopian ‘after hours,’ is attributed to the performance demands that are expressed during the working week. The City was cited as having a performance and accumulation imperative. In terms of those who go to work there, Ian claims that ‘the whole buzz of the City is that it attracts some and deters others, you have to be able to keep up. It’s so fast paced.’ He and many other participants mentioned how you simply ‘mustn’t stop’ in the City, or else your place will be taken. This perceived ‘cut throat’ culture emerges onto the streets, where pausing is not encouraged; you become a physical impediment to those around you.

Almost all respondents, however, did conflate the intense rhythms of the place with a certain amount of excitement and opportunity. All mentioned the lure, almost the seduction of the City, with the fast pace adding to the excitement. Some were still very positive about it as a workplace, expressing a eurythmic state. Jo, in particular, talks about the excitement of the City and its vibrancy in relation to its rhythms:

I do love the City, everything about it. I mean, the buzz, the pace, all add to the excitement for me. I love the non-stop busyness.

Those who were less positive, however, cited the relentless pace and pressures of performance as the reason why the lustre had faded; they could no longer keep up and keep their place. For those who feel excluded by the relentless demands, the rhythms become



exhausting and arrhythmia takes hold; as Rob says: 'I've just had enough of the place. I don't want to be tired of London, but I am, I am.'

The idea that to earn – and keep – your place is linked to how you are seen to be filling your days was raised by many, 'presenteeism' being viewed as a key characteristic of City life. Many participants mentioned the need to be highly visible, but, as Anna explains, this presenteeism is played out on the streets of the City itself:

I feel like you're always on show here ... you're not allowed to even sit and have a coffee somewhere, if you are you'd better be seen to be checking emails and have your phone out while you do...if you ever try to leave early, it's like an alarm goes off outside or something.

Anna also emphasized how she found the material City to be intimidating, citing what she termed 'the big black monsters' and the skyscrapers that she felt were built to impress. Others agreed; as Neil said, 'they just scream money and power'. In this way the soaring buildings of the material City compete for physical space in such a small bounded space, but also for symbolic space, reflecting Lefebvre's preoccupation with exploring subjective responses to objective materiality.

This paper builds upon Gregson and Rose's (2000: 434) analysis that 'space too needs to be thought of as brought into being through performances'. In this paper, 'brought into being' signifies shared association of meanings and communal performance, and draws on both Lefebvre's critical approach resulting from his Marxist orientation, and his phenomenological concern about the relationship between meaning and materiality, illustrated through the way in which the City comes into being by the meanings attributed to it. This meaning is experienced through its rhythms. The study adds to Halford and Leonard (2006), who foreground the importance of the spatial for the process of identity construction, by

highlighting the interdependent relationship of the City rhythms and subjectivity in spatial performances. In addition, it builds upon Kärreman and Alvesson (2001) by highlighting how the rhythms of the City contribute to a sensemaking connected to constructing and maintaining identities. Here, the particular focus is on everyday, embodied movement, since as Cunliffe and Coupland (2012: 83) remind us, sensemaking is inescapably both embodied and entwined with identity.

Themes developed in the literature have shown that place is significant in terms of the type of work that is carried out and how it is carried out (Ackroyd & Crowdy, 1990, McDowell, 1997, Tyler, 2011 *inter alia*). This paper shows a way of researching place which not only confirms this significance but shows how the place is produced and reproduced through rhythm. The theoretical contribution, therefore, of this paper, is that a rhythmanalysis shows how rhythms help to produce the City. It is sensed and experienced as a distinct and bounded place, not only via its material form but by its particular situated rhythms. It is through Lefebvre's emphasis on embodied subjectivity that the rhythms can be experienced as erupting onto the streets of the material City. A rhythmanalysis reveals that in the City, the spatio-temporal rhythms of the financial sector are replicated in the wider spatial setting (an example being Anna's point, above, about needing to be seen to be performing work outside on the streets, as well as inside). An understanding of how the City is made sense of through its rhythms shows it to be both a place of organizations, and a place of organizing.

I have drawn upon Lefebvre's critique to show the City as a performance oriented space, and in particular how rhythm makes it so. His concern with how the everyday is structured and organised in a spatial sense, and the use of rhythmanalysis to explore such a distilled and intense space of capital, has highlighted the accumulation imperative of the City and its functionalist orientation, resulting in patterns of inclusion and exclusion which can be analysed through rhythm.

Using rhythmanalysis as a method allowed me to witness the space being performed. City workers interact with the material City and perform and re-perform the space constantly, bringing the City into being. In addition, it has illustrated how workplaces are constructed and experienced beyond what are usually considered to be bounded organizations. It adds to studies on performance and place (Allen & Pryke, 1994; Gregson & Rose, 2000; McDowell, 1997), and to studies focusing on the relationship of work to its location (Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990; Tyler, 2011), by the application of a method which shows rhythm to be fundamental to the way in which workers sense and make sense of their workplace, focusing specifically on what it is like to work in such a distilled and distinctive place. Beyond this, the paper illustrates the importance of the epistemological contribution of rhythmanalysis since, as part of a process of sense making, it allows for a kinaesthetic understanding of how the materiality of organizational place is expressed. In this way it can be considered as a type of participant observation, with the emphasis here on a socio-material understanding of place. The researcher's body, in this instance, becomes part of the fast- tempo, polyrhythmic orchestra of the City. The analysis produced is developed from the body itself, rather than from outside. Just as the findings reveal that what happens on the inside of organizations can be seen to be erupting onto the streets, the interior, embodied experience of the rhythms is also replicated outside the body by the performances on the streets, reminding us of Lefebvre's emphasis on sensory engagement as a precursor to observation.

Walking and observing without recourse to Lefebvre's rhythmic framework would have neglected this emphasis on embodiment, and on the way that the temporal and spatial patterns of the City collide with the cultural imperatives to produce particular rhythms. The method used has allowed a multi-sensory and embodied sense of place to emerge, extended and enriched by participant accounts of the rhythms of place. Using only interviewing as a method to represent the experience of the City rhythms would not have captured enough of

the relationship between meaning and materiality, whilst the interviews helped with retrospective sensemaking, (Weick, 1995), both of my own and others' experiences, and reinforced the importance of the external setting to the overall context in which City workers experience, interpret and perform the City.

## **Conclusion**

The primary contribution of the paper has been methodological, by applying a rhythmanalysis to the streets of the City, leading to an experiential understanding of how people both sense and make sense of this place. Secondly, the research has made an empirical contribution to the literature on organizational place and setting, by presenting the City as enacted by the collective rhythms. The role of locality is confirmed despite the City's global connectivity. The paper illustrates how feelings of eurythmia in the City are characterised by navigational and spatial confidence and an ability to 'keep up' with the rhythms, whereas arrhythmia is characterised by feelings of anxiety, fatigue and a sense of displacement. Thirdly, Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis has been used as a theoretical as well as a methodological lens through which the findings can be explained. A rhythmanalysis of the City shows how the rhythms of intense urban capitalism in a global financial centre are experienced, and that organizational life exists beyond the immediate boundaries of the workplace itself.

The paper therefore provides a framework for how to carry out immersive research into the sensory aspects of work places (Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2009), and shows how we can empirically research, analyse and apprehend the sites where organizing takes place.

Some elements of this study, however, suggest the need for further research. One limitation is methodological; although almost all interviews were conducted within the boundaries of the City, either in participants' offices or in coffee shops, only one was carried out with the researcher and the participant walking the space together (due to time constraints on the part

of the participants). A more mobile method of interviewing might elicit further insights into the immediate sensory impact of rhythms. In addition to this, the walks did not specifically coincide with particularly structured temporal rhythms of the City, such as ‘bonus season’, or specific events, and this could be explored in future research to investigate additional rhythmic cycles of place.

The empirical approach could have wider applications in other contexts and work settings, helping to reveal the role of polyrhythmic places in terms of when and where organizations exist, how they are constructed and made sense of, and how they can be studied. This could particularly apply to studies exploring the embodied aspects of sensemaking, building on Cunliffe and Coupland (2012), and the spatial aspects of identity work (Halford and Leonard, 2006). Comparative studies researching, for example, the everyday rhythms of other financial centres and other places dominated by one particular organizational sector, or places dominated by embodied actions such as markets (cf Lyon, 2016) could replicate the methodological foundations of walking, sensing, observing, listening to, and mapping rhythms. In this way rhythmanalysis is a methodology for understanding the materially situated, ongoing performances of organizational place. It draws our attention to the way in which organizational life is structured and situated, and to how we might further research its exclusions and inequalities. Foregrounding subjective bodily experience as a form of participant observation, this study offers fertile ground for further exploring the lived experience of how and where we are organized.

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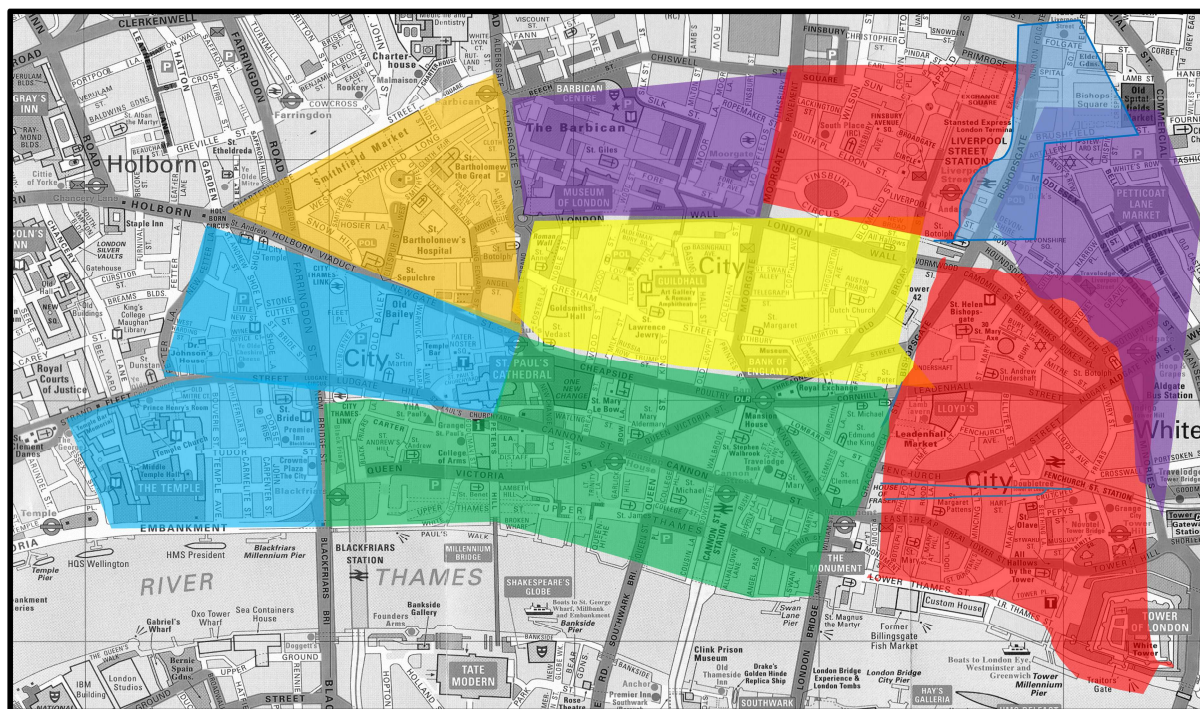
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## Appendix A

### A rhythm analysis map of the City



**Yellow:** Contained heart of the City; a sense of protection and containment, focused intensity of rhythms, monumental architecture

**Purple:** Fast rhythms, interspersed with lots of stopping and starting, but noticeably quieter and less frenetic at the start and end of each day, unlike the heart of the City. Lots of cafes and smaller shops, some visible graffiti

**Red:** Frenetic rhythms, skyscrapers, wind tunnels

**Blue:** Calmer, monumental architecture, professional/legal district, more tourists, more signage focusing on the historic City

**Gold:** Quieter rhythms, less focus on finance, more strolling observed, some residential streets

**Green:** Busy, frenetic, noisy, lots of wind tunnels, and a sense of being pulled in towards the heart of the City.

## **Appendix B: Demographic list of research participants, in order of interview**

Neil: Mid-forties, self-employed IT/AV consultant, works mainly in the City, and has done for over twenty years.

Maria: Late thirties, Head of HR for a global investment firm, a full time City worker for her entire twenty year career.

Jennifer: Late forties, Chartered Surveyor, was City based for several years and now has a portfolio career, including lecturing in business and management.

Jo: Early fifties, works as a freelance Account Director for a large Outsourcing organisation, all her clients are City based so ninety percent of her working time is spent in the City, supplemented by time working at home or at Head Office in Holborn. She has worked in the City throughout the last thirty years.

Pete: Forties, Partner in an Insurance Firm, has worked there for twenty six years. He has always worked in the City apart from a short spell working in the Home Counties at the start of his career.

Robert: Late forties, Technical Services Manager for an Insurance firm, has worked there for twenty three years, and for thirty years in the Insurance sector in the City.

Anna: Late thirties, part time Press and Communications Manager for an Investment Bank, has worked in her present company for ten years.

Dave: Thirties, Business Development Director for an Asset Management Company, has worked in the City for four years.

Phillip: Sixties, semi-retired former Actuary, worked in the City for forty years, now runs a consulting business dealing mainly with Actuarial firms.

Ian: Forties, Independent Financial Advisor, City based with City based clients. Apart from spells working abroad for the same firm he has been City based throughout his working life.

Nigel: Fifty, Operations Director for a Lloyds's Insurance Agent, has worked in the City for twenty four years.

Claire: Forties, worked in Investment Banking in the City for a number of years before moving to fundraising in the Arts.

Tim: Early twenties, Software Developer in a Technology start-up which has recently located to the City.

Matt: Mid-twenties, Software Developer for a Technology start-up, as above.

Nathan: Late twenties, Projects Director for a Technology start-up, as above.

Sasha: Early twenties, Business Development Manager for a Technology start-up, as above.

Elizabeth: Late forties, Partner in a global Professional Services firm, she has worked in the City for twenty five years.

Lorraine: Mid-twenties, works as a PA for an Investment company, and has worked in the City for five years