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## PLAYING THE JIGSAW: SENSES OF RHYTHMS AND RHYTHMS OF THE SENSES

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**Abstract:** In *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, the French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre illustrated vividly the infiltration of rhythms in our concrete experience of lived life. Sparse comments on the relationship of psychoanalysis and rhythmanalysis set up a contested terrain. The proposition that rhythmanalysis as a tool of cultural investigation will eventually replace psychoanalysis provokes major lines of arguments in this paper. In assessing their forms of attention, analytic techniques, interactions with the world and the nature of their pursuit, this paper suggests that instead of conceiving an antagonistic relationship between the two fields of enquiry, a constitutive and dialogic form of relation lies at the heart of the problem. I argue that by examining aspects of psychoanalysis through the optic of rhythmanalysis and vice versa, concealed perceptions and interpretations of each are made visible. A tentative reformulation of D. W. Winnicott's object relations theory within the framework of rhythmanalysis is undertaken. The credentials of employing psychoanalysis and rhythmanalysis in cultural criticism are evaluated and the synergy of rhythmanalysis and psychoanalysis in the arena of cultural studies is emphasised.

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### Introduction

The rhythmanalyst will have some points in common with the psychoanalyst, though he differentiates himself from the latter; the differences go further than the analogies. He will be attentive, but not only to the words or pieces of information, the confessions and confidences of a partner or a client. He will listen to the world, and above all, to what are disdainfully called noises which are said without meaning, and to murmurs, full of meaning – and finally he will listen to silences ... Does the rhythmanalyst come close to the poet? Yes, to a large extent, more so than he does to the psychoanalyst (Lefebvre, 2004: 19).

The introduction of rhythmanalysis as a method of exploring lived life culminates in the last book written by the Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre. A rhythmanalytical project entails observations of the dynamism in the spatial-temporal relationships that configure phenomena. From one's daily routine to the circulation of capital on a global scale, the role of a rhythmanalyst is to bring into focus the concatenation of rhythms which organise the

different scales of life. The portrait of a rhythm analyst was asserted to be superior to that of a psychoanalyst in the writings of Lefebvre. However, he withholds any further elaboration of how they would resemble and differ, and more importantly, the nature of the comparison. Some kind of assurance is found in the brevity of the following sentence: ‘the unconscious? ... It designates a level of reality and a direction of research’ (Lefebvre, 2004: 44). This paper sets out to explore in turn what a rhythm analyst and a psychoanalyst might be engaged with. It puts various aspects of these two methods under examination to uncover how they relate to each other as ways of understanding the world – their orientations towards the subjects under investigation, modes of interaction with the world and the nature of their pursuit (what they intend to achieve and the purpose of their investigations). I argue that rhythm analysis can be seen as a form of psychoanalysis and vice versa, thus advocating a dialogic relationship of the two pursuits. This argument can be demonstrated in a case study of D. W. Winnicott’s *Playing and Reality* in which I adopt a rhythm analytical perspective towards the theorisation of the psychic development. I will evaluate the ways of incorporating psychoanalysis and rhythm analysis to the arena of cultural research towards the end of the discussion. Methodological assumptions, theoretical frameworks, practical orientations set various intellectual traditions apart in the history of psychoanalysis. Object relations theory and its successive adherents are delimited as the contexts of evaluation.<sup>1</sup>

### *The portrait of a psychoanalyst as a rhythm analyst and vice versa*

In the proceeding section of the paper, I shall formulate a dialogic relationship of the psychoanalyst and the rhythm analyst by tentatively exploring the kind of attention and analytic techniques shared between the two disciplines. In particular, I put forward four strands of argument. Firstly, I suggest that the rhythmic phenomena (intrinsically repetitive) can be perceived as a rich reservoir of ‘symptoms’, which the rhythm analyst could work with. Secondly, I suggest that the enactment of rhythms is comparable to the operation of the non-conscious or the unconscious, which although intangible, finds expressions in material forms. Thirdly, I draw a parallel between psychopathology with arrhythmia (the breaking apart of rhythms that create disorder). Finally, I argue that central to the works of both a rhythm analyst and a psychoanalyst is the detection of the interconnectedness of phenomena. Inherent in the efforts of both methods are the constructions of a constellation of forces and effects of historical bearing. In terms of practising psychoanalysis, the implications of

counter-transference struck accord with the illusory demarcation of rhythms between those of the rhythm analyst and his or her surrounding rhythms.

### *Rhythm analysis as a form of Psychoanalysis*

The multiplicity of rhythms enmeshed in our daily life set up a woven network of temporal experience. How does a rhythm analyst begin to disentangle the forces so that a particular rhythm can be distinguished within a concatenation of rhythms? Rhythms of breathing, heartbeat and hunger operate on the surface whereas others spring from hidden sources. The diverse range of rhythms interacts and each one of them can only be singled out for a moment before being pulled back to the nexus of rhythms. There is no doubt that a rhythm analyst should be attentive to the order and disorder of things. Noise and chaos are relevant to the disclosing of truths as much as silences, absences, indentations. After all, rhythms are born out of contrasts. Even if we fail to grasp the rhythms that animate bodies and landscapes, they are nevertheless there and play a subtle yet profound role in the regulation of activities. The concrete reality of rhythms ‘whose existence is signalled only through mediations, through indirect effects or manifestations’ (Lefebvre 1991: 205) are embodied in the media of objects, spaces and human bodies and the appropriation of which commands certain laws of temporal-spatial configuration. The diffusion of rhythms manifested in concrete phenomena provides the rhythm analyst with a rich reservoir of ‘symptoms’ targeted for analysis. The animation of rhythms implies repetition, though not strictly identical occurrence. Our routines in the realm of daily life impregnate a vast array of rhythmic phenomenon as Lefebvre remarked: ‘certain terms that have become routine are not without interest: the instinctual, the impulsive, the functional, the directional, even the behavioural; they correspond to research and explorations. Do they reach the level of the *conceptual*? Doubts persist’ (Lefebvre 2004: 43).

Rhythms slip into the lived life in a manner that may not be registered by the consciousness. The not always luminous character of rhythmicity beckons a way of obtaining knowledge outside immediate reflection. The fact that many daily operations demand only minimal level of decision making and they are often carried out without rational explanations means that rhythmicity may well belong to the domain of the non-conscious or unconscious. A cognitive act once digested and retained by the senses, our non-conscious operates sufficiently in the futural repetition of such an act. The psychoanalyst Nicolas Abraham noted, ‘if a consciousness were to remain within time continuously, it would ultimately annihilate itself-sinking into sleep or catalepsy’ (Abraham, 1995: 23). On the non-conscious

level, rhythms are enacted in the habitual flow of words, gestures and movements that occur ‘naturally’. Whether it is the sequence of movements in the morning shower or manoeuvring one’s pace on the pavements so that a socially acceptable distance may be kept, we develop rhythms that are at once personal and social. How does the working of rhythms resemble the operation of the unconscious? Neither of them are ‘things’ in themselves yet they have always been busy sowing the seeds in lived life. Their intangibility finds expression in materialised forms; bodies, objects and spaces are in perpetual interactions. Is the organisation of temporality driven by the Freudian unconscious desires? At least the unconscious is seen by Lefebvre as an obscure force which manipulates the formulation of rhythmic life in ‘sexuality, fertility and social life ... Such rhythms have to do with needs, which may be dispersed as tendencies, or distilled into desire’ (Lefebvre, 1991: 205). The psychic structure evolves in the temporal sphere, hence it is rhythmic in nature. Infants are bathed in the rhythms of lullabies and the gentle rocking of the cradle. Satisfaction and frustration of the baby’s needs are dependent on the adaptation of the mother, and an alternating pattern of ‘excited’ and ‘quiet’ times are established.<sup>ii</sup> Through ‘remembering, reliving, fantasising and dreaming’, the evolution of the psyche is a temporal process of integrating the rhythmic ordering of internal time with that of the external (without the infant’s ability to fully grasp how things are present and absent at a certain time, therefore the external time is partly seen as ‘imposed’) (Winnicott, 1971: 12). The traces of the ‘there and then’ and the way they bear upon the ‘here and now’ are not always unconcealed or at least some excavation work needs to be undertaken. Birksted-Breen remarked that ‘it is the reconnection of the temporal link between the two (“there and then” and “here and now”) which is the psychoanalytic endeavour. Psychoanalysis, one could say, operates in that “transitional space” which is the ambiguous play between temporalities’ (Birksted-Breen, 2009: 37). Pathological conditions such as compulsive neurosis and attention deficit disorder may be attributed to a disturbed sense of time/space and the symptoms of which can be found in a number of morbid manifestations. A parallel can be drawn with rhythmanalysis, as Lefebvre noted ‘it is only in suffering that a particular rhythm breaks apart, modified by illness. The analysis comes closer to pathology than habitual arrhythmia’ (Lefebvre, 2004: 27). Rhythms enter into the lived without being fully discernible in the conscious reflections and the breaking-apart of which present opportunities of inquiry.

No details elude the attentive observation of the rhythmanalyst since ‘for him, nothing is immobile’ (Lefebvre, 2004: 20). Having his or her bodily rhythms posited as referential

points, the bundles of rhythms are to be seen, heard, touched and smelled. An awareness of one's own rhythms is as important as acknowledging the interaction with the surrounding rhythms. The boundary of where rhythm resides is often fluid. At times, the rhythm analyst may unwittingly incorporate rhythms 'outside' his or her own self, while effecting the formations of the surrounding rhythms. The rhythm analyst needs to be sensitive to the temporal dimensions of life. To assist him or her with identifying tendencies and disruptions, some kind of record in words or pictures needs to be kept. The analysis of rhythms is related to the rhythmic experiences. Affectivity punctuates durations, enabling the rhythm analyst to recognise the nodal points in the stream of consciousness so that a rhythmic structure of temporality can be constructed. The affective fluctuations of anticipation, satisfaction and disappointment underlie the sensing of rhythms and they can only be grasped reflexively. When the expectation of recurrence is disappointed, 'rhythmising consciousness will remain within this disappointment in order to set it up immediately as a law for its future expectations' (Abraham 1995:78). The effort of a rhythm analyst is to synthesise moments occurring in different temporal modes so that the 'present retains the past – a past that is not rigidly fixed, but capable of being recreated in a future synthesis – and extends toward a future in order to deliver this past to it' (Abraham, 1995: 77). It is a creative attempt to uncover the hidden links, allusions and connections not just of 'moments' but also of the dynamic exchange among concrete material entities. Rhythms are not things yet they enter into the known by leaving traces on the body, space and objects. To use the metaphor 'investment' in describing the relationship between rhythms and things, the following statement is illuminating,

An organ has a rhythm, but the rhythm does not have, nor is it, an organ; rather, it is an interaction. A rhythm invests places, but is not itself a place; it is not a thing, nor an aggregation of things, nor yet a simple flow. It embodies its own law, its own regularity, which it derives from space-from its own space-and from a relationship between space and time. (Lefebvre, 1991: 206)

The body is directed towards an object and a specific rhythm is elicited based on the properties (sources of sense impressions) of the object. Through sensory interactions with the surrounding environment, for instance walking up the hill elicits accelerating heartbeat and breathing cycle, we gradually develop a repertoire of sensations to which we return. The

mere presence of things may send out complex signals (colour, temperature, texture, smell) that provoke changes in muscular tensions, attention spans and so on. The senses register rhythmic experiences. Within the network of rhythms that superimpose and transpose, no entity or subjects should assume a privileged position. Established recurrences may be disrupted and be replaced by alternative rhythmic configurations of different frequencies, speeds and amplitudes. Utilising affectivity and creativity, the rhythm analyst constructs and reconstructs the continual metamorphosis of rhythmicity. Being playful and imaginative, it requires much of the interpretative work from the rhythm analyst to patch up possible hidden connections between recollections and affects. To borrow Freud's metaphor of the 'jigsaw', the purpose of a rhythm analyst is akin to that of the psychoanalyst which is 'to construct a complete picture out of its fragments' (Fenichel, 1946: 32).

### *Psychoanalysis as a form of Rhythm analysis*

A rhythm analyst attempts to undo the hidden forces that organise our activities. The fundamental task of a psychoanalyst is not dissimilar in the sense that he or she is required to 'reconstruct from certain given manifestations, the constellation of forces that produced the manifestations' (Fenichel 1946: 23). To reconnect the link of repressed desires or disrupted relational problems with the manifest symptoms, the psychoanalyst needs to find out how events in the past could exert a dynamic influence on the present. There are powerful forces (on the unconscious level) to stop him or her from 'knowing', often leading to short-circuited expressions, attitudes, emotions and behaviours. In the psychoanalytic session, the patient is encouraged to talk about anything from consciously elucidated stories to mindless utterances. It is often in the most insignificant details, in Lefebvre's words 'noises and murmurs' (Lefebvre, 2004: 19), that motivations and urges in their derivative forms are expressed. The psychoanalyst does not merely listen to the words of the patient. The tonality, rhythms, and musical qualities of conversation also need to be listened to and felt. If the rhythm analyst was portrayed as 'listening to rhythms as a whole and unify them by taking his or her rhythms as references' (Lefebvre, 2004: 20), I argue that a similar kind of attention is adopted by the psychoanalyst. He or she does not stop to examine each word, expression or gesture carried out by the patient. By the time the psychoanalyst has taken reflections on each point, the patient has already moved on to something else. It is the alternating use of consciousness and unconsciousness that is actively at work in performing both rhythm analytic and psychoanalytic activities. A form of non-directing attention was characterised by Freud, in

his phrase, as ‘evenly hovering attention’, a technique which ‘disclaims the use of any special aids, even of notetaking, and simply consists in making no effort to concentrate the attention on anything particular, and in maintaining in regard to all that one hears the same measure of calm, quiet attentiveness’ (Freud, 1991: 154).

The psychoanalyst, Ogden, presents a case from a session. ‘A patient who talks in clumps of words, cramming as many words as she could in a breath of air, may have been related to her experience of growing up with a father who had severe depression, with whom she often sat with for long periods of time as he sobbed uncontrollable, choking on his tears’ (Ogden 2009: 23). The patient appropriates a speech rhythm that assimilates the father’s psychic conditions, which is expressed outwardly in the act of sobbing. The patient unwittingly took on the role of speaking on behalf of him, to finish the sentence for him before being choked by the tears. The cadences of his father’s sobbing are transformed to the patient’s punctuation of speech. Consciously or unconsciously, thoughts, emotions and desires reverberate in the space between the analyst and the patient. A third space is opened up between the psychoanalyst and the patient, a space that germinates fiction, reverie and free association that belongs neither to the patient nor the analyst; a space that allows a joint working through of emotions. Ogden draws an analogy with the experience of reading; ‘the voice heard/made is a voice that is neither exclusively that of the poet nor that of the reader; it is a new and unique voice, a third voice that is generated in the creative conjunction of reader and writer’ (Ogden, 1998: 444). Each case presented in the psychoanalytic session is unique. The intersubjective ‘reading’ and ‘decoding’ commands a coordinated means of communication based on the singular scenes of analysis. In other words, the psychoanalyst is engaged in the ‘interactive play’ with the patient<sup>iii</sup> (Felman, 1987: 57).

If a rhythm analyst is seized and intoxicated by the multiplicity of rhythms, that is to have ‘objective rhythms translated into our own rhythms’ (Lefebvre, 2004: 69), in a similar vein, the psychoanalyst is at his or her best in unison with the patient. It does not suggest a psychoanalyst’s complete identification with the patient nor acknowledging a patient’s appropriation of the analyst as total projection. Instead, the type of ‘unison’ achieved implies a dynamic shift of perceptions looped between the two. There are frustrations, digressions and displacements in the kind of back and forth, push and pull operations at work. A temporary encounter of oneness is later replaced by a critical distance. It is analogous to the disenchanting moment when a rhythm analyst reflects on being seized by the rhythms of the ‘Other’. To discover the emotional obstacle experienced by the patient, the psychoanalyst

needs to have intense sympathy with the patient. To dream with the patient, in whom the analyst's unconsciousness plays an active role, the analyst is really dreaming through the patient. As much as the patient is exercising free association, the analyst is participating in a similar process. It is summarised by Ogden: 'the patient's dreaming, under such circumstances, manifest itself in the form of free associations (or in child analysis, in the form of playing); the analyst's waking-dream often take the form of reverie experience' (Ogden, 2009: 15). A collaborative mode of inquiry is taking place in the consulting room. In order to work through the patient's problems, the psychoanalyst has to be reflexive of his or her own emotional proclivities resulted from past occurrences, which may be triggered by the patient's affections projected towards the analyst. The emotions elicited from the patient could have profound resonance in the analyst's psyche, inciting the analyst's resistance in responding fully to the phenomenological evidence submitted by the patient. Memories, emotions and words permeate the psychic boundary of the analyst and the patient in which a persistent exchange is happening. In a similar vein, the rhythm analyst also works in the intermediary space. Possessing a bodily rhythm that is temporarily one's own and against which other rhythms can be measured, the rhythm analyst is unconsciously giving off and receiving 'external' rhythms. The practice of a rhythm analyst overcomes the old philosophical divide of subject and object, a relationship stated by Lefebvre as 'the passage from subject to object requires neither a leap over an abyss, nor the crossing of a desert. Rhythms always need a reference; the initial moment persists through other perceived givens' (Lefebvre, 2004: 26). In the exercise of both psychoanalysis and rhythm analysis, a reflexive awareness of symbiotic exchange is critical. Winnicott designated the 'overlap of two areas of playing, that of the patient and that of the therapist' as the site of psychotherapy' (Winnicott, 1971: 38).

### ***A rhythm analytical approach to Playing and Reality***

I intend to reinterpret Winnicott's object relations theory (specifically those proposed in *Playing and Reality*) through the prism of rhythm analysis. I will firstly present a broad overview of some of the major ideas and themes proposed in *Playing and Reality*. It is followed by a discussion that directs our attention to the rhythmic character of interrelations which takes place in the course of infants' psychic development. Based on Winnicott's observation and his psychoanalytic theories on the formation of a relational subject, I shall argue that Winnicott also undertakes the role of a rhythm analyst. Integral to his study is the



observation of the undulated pattern of a child's biological needs, which arise out of the contrast of excited and quiet times. Rhythmic relations are crucial as it is through the oscillation of which that a child establishes an ego formation. When the mother's appearance and absence coincide with the temporality of the child's needs, an enchanting eurhythmia marks the relation. When the mother's rhythmic (dis)appearance forms a syncopated relation to her child, in the case of her belated presence for example, a disillusion of an omnipotence on the child's part occurs. Transitional objects may be also described rhythmically as the biting, sniffing, touching of which constitute a temporality characterised by intervals, resumptions and cessations. Winnicott's remarks on the adult's work of cross-identification are mentioned in the discussion. However an extended exploration of this topic is beyond the scope of the paper. The tentative study of *Playing and Reality* proposes a dialogic relationship of the two methods. To what extent is rhythmanalysis a form of psychoanalysis and vice versa?

#### *Overview of Winnicott's Theories*

Winnicott emphasised the evolving relationship of the infant and the external world in the initial period of psychic development. His theories present the 'complexity and significance of the early stages of object-relating and of symbol-formation' (Winnicott, 1971: xiii). In *Playing and Reality*, Winnicott introduced one of the key elements (or rather stages) in the psychic development of infants – transitional objects and transitional phenomena. It is an intermediate area of experience designated as inbetween the 'me' and 'not me' objects, 'along with the use of objects that are not part of infant's body yet are not fully recognised as belonging to external reality' (Winnicott, 1971: 2). The infant becomes attached to a corner of blanket or a soft toy. He or she regards the object as part of the self, signifying a tendency of the infant to incorporate not-me objects into the personal via proactive play with the object (the baby puts it into the mouth for example). The transitional object becomes vitally important to the infant as it convenes the initial reality testing with the environment. Relationship with the object may persist into childhood and it may even exert an influence on the behavioural pattern in adulthood. It is important for the infant to transit smoothly from a state of omnipotent control to a realisation that external objects exist independently regardless of the child's fantasies. To facilitate the journey of exploration on the child's part, Winnicott emphasised the role of 'the good enough mother who starts off with almost

complete adaptation to her infant's needs, and as time proceeds she adapts less and less completely, gradually, according to the infant's growing ability to deal with her failure' (Winnicott, 1971: 12). It is through such alternations of the presence and absence of the mother's breast (hence the satisfaction and frustration of the baby's needs) does an infant develop a capacity to make objects (mother and mother's breast) real— in which case to transit from a state of being non-differentiated with the mother to a stage of perceiving her as a separate entity. A sense of 'objective reality' obtained by the infant proliferates so that more complex relationships with the external world can be dealt with. Although the child can eventually distinguish selfhood and external reality, the intermediary area of experience is always active. 'It is assumed here that the task of reality-acceptance is never completed, that no human being is free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality, and that relief from this strain is provided by an intermediate area of experience which is not challenged (arts, religion, etc)' (Winnicott, 1971: 15).

#### *Rhythmanalysis of the infant's relations to the world*

With the mother's adaptation to the baby's needs, there are two kinds of temporalities established, namely 'excited times' and 'quiet times' (Winnicott, 1988: 100). According to Winnicott, once the initial feed started, the infant goes through an excited period during which arises an expectancy of mother's breast. It is followed by quiet times when there is no such comparable expectancy. Driven by primitive biological rhythms, the infant's experience of the mother's presence and absence renders 'a subjective sense of time created by the reverberation between the mother and the infant ... "Reverberate" is akin to the word 'resonate' which is used metaphorically to describe the attunement of one person to another person's meaning' (Birksted-Breen, 2009: 39). Rhythms of feeding are negotiated through 'rehearsals' taking place between the infant and the mother, which can also be perceived as a mutual adaptation of rhythms.

The mother brings herself, her feelings, her unconscious into the interaction, so that transformation is always taking place ... It is an 'echo' which comes back slightly transformed, or, in Winnicott's terms, it is 'me and not me ... reverberation is not just reflecting back something identical, but is reflecting something transformed by another psyche. (Birksted-Breen, 2009: 40)

Successful adaptation means that a good enough mother manages to feed the child once 'excited times' becomes active, without causing frustration in the infant. A state of eurhythmia may potentially be reinforced through the repetitive adaptation of the good enough mother. The oscillation of excited and quiet times establishes a rhythmic interrelation of the baby and the mother.

It is worth noting that excited and quiet times are to be seen as contrasts of 'moments' for the baby's rhythmic ordering of temporality. Once the baby has been fed, the desire for milk decreases until the next moment arrives when the infant seeks and reaches out for the mother's breast. The establishment of the baby's psychic structure hinges on his or her capacity to experience an oscillated temporality. 'Excited experiences take place against a background of quietude' (Winnicott, 1988: 101). Memory begins to take shape as different moments start to connect with each other. Excited times can also be understood as times of expectation. The good enough mother makes herself available to satisfy the needs of the infant. Prompt adaptations afford the infant the illusion that he or she has omnipotent control over the breast. It is predicated upon the fact that 'the infant perceives the breast only in so far as a breast could be created just there and then...just where the infant is ready to create, and at the right moment' (Winnicott, 1971: 13-14).<sup>iv</sup> The first stage of the infant's emotional development is characterised by an almost complete overlapping of rhythms (in fact the rhythm of the mother and the child is intertwined as noted earlier) and it is predicated upon collaborative temporal configuration. The mother's role is then reversed in the second stage to precipitate the disillusion of the infant. In order to disillusion the infant of his or her omnipotent control of external objects (such as the mother's breast), the mother needs to frustrate the infant through a syncopated rhythmic interaction. The infant's eurhythmic sense of time reassured by the mother's successful adaptation is replaced by a deliberate obstruction, leading to an arrhythmic relation with the mother. As Winnicott stated 'there is a time limit to frustration. At first, naturally, this time-limit must be short ... If all goes well the infant can actually come to gain from the experience of frustration, since incomplete adaptation to need makes objects real, that is to say hated as well as loved' (Winnicott, 1971: 12). Desires and sensations are temporal phenomenon and hence rhythmic. Bearing in mind that one's rhythms (not wholly belonging to the subject) are the product of ongoing negotiations with one's surroundings (the formulation of our rhythms of walking, eating, resting operate in the transitional space between the 'me' and 'not me' objects), hence by altering the rhythms of desire and its (dis)satisfaction, it not only has an effect on the

subjective sense of temporal ordering but one's pattern of interrelating with others. Winnicott candidly remarked 'from birth, therefore, the human being is concerned with the problem of the relationship between what is objectively perceived and what is subjectively conceived of ...' (Winnicott 1971:13).

Through appropriation and negotiation, the infant takes on the mother's rhythms and the mother learns to accommodate the infant's needs (or not to, in the case of disillusionment) in rhythms. Winnicott noted that the transitional object should not be questioned as to whether it is created by the infant or being presented from external sources. The operation of rhythms (porous boundaries of rhythmic formations) that reverberate among entities is akin to that of the transitional object (neither the 'self' nor the 'Other'). The infant 'reaches out' for the transitional object and in a similar vein, the taking on of rhythms from the clattering of the train or from reading a poem is partially a creative process initiated by the subject. What rhythm analysis or object relations theory foregrounds is the often symbiotic assimilation amongst material entities. The study of causal relations and the isolated attention towards a single subject is made problematic in the analysis of rhythms and object relations theories. Winnicott stressed the central role of 'interrelationships' in communication as he noted that 'much of our lives is spent interrelating in terms of cross-identifications' (Winnicott, 1971: 161). Eliciting empathy and being receptive to other's influences are some of the everyday experiences where cross-identifications are put into play. The shuffling back and forth of one's reality and that of the others' constitutes the rhythmic cycles of introjection and projection. The dilemma of 'what is it like to think and feel like the other' is engulfed by attuning to the process of vicarious identification, a pattern of rhythmic intersubjective dynamism which Winnicott names cross-identification.

### **Psychoanalysis and rhythm analysis – A dialogic relationship**

The relationship of psychoanalysis and rhythm analysis as two methods of cultural exploration was proclaimed by Lefebvre as 'rhythm analysis might eventually even displace psychoanalysis, as being more concrete, more effective, and closer to a pedagogy of appropriation' (Lefebvre, 1991: 205). By making such a statement, Lefebvre suggests the superiority of a rhythm analytical orientation in the direct observations of wider cultural phenomenon over that of psychoanalysis. I raise the question that if the deployment of sensibility plays a pivotal role in the psychoanalytic diagnosis of cultural symptoms, and in so doing, the taken-for-granted reality of ordinary life is given a rich and reflexive account of

how they come to be, can we postulate that a psychoanalytical informed cultural analysis has advantages over a rhythm analytical approach in decoding cultural practices? Or could it be that the deployment of sensibilities is already fully embodied in the rhythm analysis of culture? In the following discussion, I argue that both methods contribute to our understanding of the world and it is more productive to see their relationship as dialogic rather than antagonistic. I shall firstly focus on the parallel of rhythm analysis and psychoanalysis in their approach to the phenomenon under investigation. In other words, what is deemed of attention (what constitutes their 'data') and how both analytic methods may have wider resonance in cultural and political arenas. The field of psychoanalysis and its associated sociological research is often criticised for being individualistic and highly speculative in nature. I share with Frosh and other psychosocial studies scholars that it is a pursuit which is rather 'amorphous and at times worryingly dispersed terrain opened up for inspection' (Frosh, 2008: 350).<sup>v</sup> Therefore, I reassess the claim made by Lefebvre of rhythm analysis as being more concrete and effective than psychoanalysis. I also aim to reveal the kind of reflexivity at work both in rhythm analysis and psychoanalysis. Both methods acknowledge the mediated and complex process of knowledge formation. The technique of counter-transference struck accord with cross-analysis of rhythms.

The rhythm analyst can portray a vivid picture of all entities pulsating when he or she is immersed in the phenomena at hand. This is the case when Lefebvre provided a rich description of Parisian street flows when he stood on the balcony of his flat. The spatial-temporal unfolding of events are captured by the rhythm analyst with the assistance of all the senses. Although direct observations are privileged, it is not always possible for the rhythm analyst to be present in all kinds of situations. The measurement of rhythms requires cross-examinations both horizontally (with other events happening at the same time) and vertically (to detect significant rhythmic changes). Therefore, the rhythm analyst inevitably seeks recourse to cultural texts such as pictures, words both written and oral recordings and moving images. In order to conduct rhythm analysis of what is no longer present, the rhythm analyst chooses materials that are tireless descriptions which stage an array of rhythms inhabited in the concrete experience of living. Whether it is in detecting the rhythmic patterns of a person's gestures or capturing the pace of capital circulation on a global scale, rhythm analysis renders an optic to examine localised phenomenon and the scope of analysis moves freely from microcosmic to that of the macrocosmic. It is in the contraction and expansion of planes of analysis (micro and the macro, individual and social, rhythm of the

self and Other) that a relational study of rhythms is made potent. The ‘indissoluble unity of rhythms’ is illustrated in Lefebvre’s case study of Mediterranean cities as he explained,

The rhythmanalytical project applied to the urban can seem disparate, because it appeals to, in order to bring together, notions and analysis too often kept separate: time and space, the public and the private, the state-political and the intimate, it places itself sometimes in one point of view and in a certain perspective, sometimes in another. (Lefebvre, 2004: 100)

It is certainly beyond the Marxist’ ambition to merely indulge in the linking together of separate entities through rhythmic organisations. Lefebvre’s writing on rhythmanalysis drew our attention to the contesting relationships amongst the heterogeneous rhythmic centres. He explores social hegemony by asking ‘how are rhythms “of the self” and rhythms “of the other” determined, orientated and distributed’ (Lefebvre, 2004: 99)?

This is not to say that psychoanalysis, as an approach to cultural criticism, is outweighed by rhythmanalysis since psychoanalytic practice (progressive practitioners rather than the conservatives) encompasses and foregrounds the ‘psychoanalytic complex’:

The psychoanalytic complex is an ensemble of agencies, including clinical, educational, developmental and industrial psychology, psychotherapy and social work, whose discourses are not confined to particular sites of professional intervention, but which traverse the family, school and work-place-indeed, ‘the social’ itself’. (Ingleby, 1984: 43)

Far from an individualistic and an elusive inquiry into the conditions of existence, a politically informed theorisation of psychoanalysis designates a place of suture in articulating experiences of the individual as intersubjective. The main thrust of the project of psychosocial studies is that of ‘bringing together the psychological and the social without postulating these two spheres as distinct from one another’ (Frosh, 2008: 349). The patient who walks into the consulting room is a locus of material bearings, whose bodily manifestations trace interactions with those close and afar (both in the temporal and spatial sense). This is not to say that it is no longer valid to focus on the individual, but to direct our attention to the interrelatedness of the self and the other in the formation and articulation of

experience. In this sense, the term ‘inner reality’ as conventionally attached to the work of psychoanalysis is in fact embodied in the field of forces beyond the singular body. Object Relations theories particularly pinpointed the significance of interacting with other agents (human and non-human) in the cultivation of an individual’s psychic environment. Indeed, psychoanalysts adhering to the Object Relations tradition are ardent advocates of a dis-alienated way of living. Based on clinical practice, the political imperatives inherent in the work of British psychoanalysts such as Bion emphasised the space for thinking and Winnicott’s vision of creating a space for creativity and play opened up an uncompromising realm of cultural critique of existing ideologies.<sup>vi</sup>

The psychoanalyst accumulates ethnographic data (individuals’ symptoms and manifestations) on a case study basis. A psychoanalytical informed exploration of culture does not solely reside in the clinical setting. Cultural texts such as films, adverts, children’s fiction, pop music and so on offer a panoply of cultural symptoms which can be co-opted into a psychoanalytic informed reading of culture. The parallel of clinical analysis and cultural analysis is summarised as:

Both are concerned with exploring the unconscious meanings of the everyday, and indeed analytic work going on daily in sessions all over the world may be constantly generating insights into everyday culture which are not captured in intellectual work, unless either analyst or analysand writes them up for publication. (Richards, 1995: 18)

The exercise of interpreting cultural texts from a psychoanalytic framework contends with theories and discourses generated by each professional field (literature, film studies and so on). Guided by the contexts (social, political, economic) of their production, a cross examination of the possible ways of interpreting materials should be carefully conducted by the analyst. What distinguishes a psychoanalytic reading of culture from other modes of analysis is understood as ‘a particular form of sensibility’ which is referred to here as ‘a capacity to feel in a certain kind of way, distinct from and perhaps complementary to another way ... its substantive specificity lies in the significance placed upon certain kinds of feeling such as loss, guilt, reparation and rivalry’ (Richards, 1995: 21). Sensibilities such as ambivalence, anxiety, mourning, omnipotence and so on subsume in the daily production and reception of the cultural arena. The nuanced and intricate disentangling of psychoanalytic forces enriches our understanding of the world.

In practising rhythmanalysis and psychoanalysis, the analyst is a mediating agent in the process of knowledge production. He or she always serves as a reference point against which other rhythms are measured or sensibilities detected. Both methods are susceptible to criticisms. For example, in the case of deploying psychoanalytic orientation to the analysis of cultural texts, the process of conferring (verification of one's hypothesis) is not available in the diagnosis of cultural texts (whereas there is a development of interpersonal relationships in the clinical setting). In other words, it is difficult for the analyst to justify that his or her analysis are not simply subjective interpretations but which could have wider associations and implications. Rhythmanalysis may be subjected to a similar line of questioning. The presupposition underlying such criticisms is that there must be a systematic correspondence between subjective interpretation and external reality; assuming a clear demarcation of the self and other, internal and external reality, the analyst and analysand. In the case of rhythmanalysis, the analyst's bodily rhythms are constitutive (also intertwined with that of the 'other') of his or her observations hence what appears to be an exclusive relationship (my rhythms and those of others) is in fact an antagonistic unity. The counter-transference technique acknowledges the illusion of a detached, objective interpretation or analysis. Instead it promotes an understanding of the on-going process of introjection and projection of the 'Other'. In defending an interpretive approach towards cultural analysis shared by both rhythmanalysis and psychoanalysis, recourse to relativism is by no means implied. When knowledge production resonates across various fields of inquiry, the method of 'cross-checking' beckons the analyst to unveil the hidden links and connections:

And there is only one method of knowing that one is there, namely to map the network. And how is a network mapped? It is through the fact that one returns, one comes back, one keeps coming across the same path, it always overlaps and cross-checks itself in the same way...as you saw with the notion of intersection or overlapping, the function of return, *Wiederkehr*, is essential. (Felman, 1987: 57)

Now I return to Lefebvre's remarks. Which method is more potent in sensitising us to the world we live in and what is more, to open up possibilities of human emancipation? The paper sketched some common grounds shared by the two modes of analysis and I suggest that the relationship of psychoanalysis and rhythmanalysis is dialogic. Both methods commit to the studies of lived experience while acknowledging the not so easily recognisable forces of



(dis)order, be they the phantasies or the temporal-spatial regulations. The psychoanalyst taps into the rhythms of a patient's comportment just as the rhythm analyst is caught up in the embodied senses and phantasies of rhythmic formations. Lefebvre warned us of 'disorder' manifested as arrhythmia that 'goes as far as morbid and then fatal de-synchronisation' (Lefebvre, 2004: 68). Can we not formulate the psychopathology of OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder) and Attention Deficit Disorder in rhythmic terms and use rhythm analysis to shed light on the morbidity of a person or a social group? If interrelatedness is at the heart of object relations theory as it also underlines the primary attention in the mode of rhythm analysis, can we not propose that one method is only a form of another? The undulation of senses gives shape to the psychic environment which oscillates, or in psychoanalytic terms, is ambivalent. When we delve into the pool of psychoanalytic sensibilities that are palpable in the cultural productions, be it in romance novels, TV dramas and so forth, it is not difficult to detect the temporal shifts of ambivalent emotions. The villain's evil deeds are resented yet its character might be highly seductive to the destructive urge of the viewer. The desire to indulge in conviviality as opposed to the lure of solitude alternates, setting up what Bachelard noted as 'a rhythm of conciliation and aggression that goes from one pole to the other in the two contrary attitudes of the rhythm of self-love – love of others' (Bachelard, 2000: 148). Complementary moods oscillate in the psyche and they vibrate in rhythmic ways. The conflict and reconciliation of sensations characterise psychic environment. Rhythms of sensations are poetically encapsulated in the words of Bachelard:

Let us consider moods that are just a little melancholy and full of fickle desires; let us consider, so to speak, temptations that do not tempt, scorn that is indulgent, kind refusals, verbal joy... and we shall see time begin to oscillate, all its seconds slightly contradicting and colouring each other, either dull or brilliant. Opposites unite together and then part, only to unite again (Bachelard, 2000:149).

## **Conclusion**

To echo the title of this paper 'Playing the Jigsaw: Senses of Rhythms and Rhythms of the Senses', the use of the metaphor 'jigsaw' vividly points us to the kind of work undertaken by both the rhythm analyst and the psychoanalyst. They can be crudely summarised as mapping a

network of relations of rhythms and senses. The paper draws attention to some parallels of how both methods operate. Rhythms are the undercurrents that run through various levels of lived life, the making explicit of which is analogous to the uncovering of unconscious forces in the psychoanalytic session. Arrhythmia (rhythms which are broken and de-synchronised) and morbid compartments are phenomena that invite the work of rhythm analyst and psychoanalyst. A psychoanalyst synthesises moments of a patient's life history and that of his or her own and it is not dissimilar to how a rhythm analyst detects rhythmic patterns and transformations. The connection of 'moments' in the mapping out of networks of relations, an orientation embedded in both rhythm analysis and psychoanalysis emphasises a historical approach to the understanding of phenomena. Whether it is the analysis of rhythms or of the senses, the analyst is fully immersed in the situation and he or she abandons preconceived ideas. An intermediary space in which the analyst's (un) consciousness is in unison with that of the patient blurs the boundary of the subject and the object. The psychoanalyst and the rhythm analyst both use their own senses and rhythms as points of references. Being attentive to silences, traces and repressed forces, the contribution of rhythm analysis and psychoanalysis to the study of culture is to disclose the often unacknowledged aspect of lived life. The relationship of psychoanalysis and cultural studies is noted by Highmore as he alerts us to the pitfalls of simply migrating the concepts and interpretations of one discipline to the other. What psychoanalysis, as well as rhythm analysis, offers to cultural researchers is their 'form of attention' or 'modes of production' (Highmore, 2006: 65).

The antagonistic relationship of rhythm analysis and psychoanalysis proposed by Lefebvre may be overcome by setting up a dialogue between the two forms of analysis. Instead of conceiving a relationship that precludes each other, the arguments trailed in this paper emphasise the synergy of rhythm analysis and psychoanalysis in the arena of cultural studies. When a psychoanalytic investigation is undertaken, whether it is the individual or the cultural texts that are brought into focus, a rhythm analytical perspective reminds the researcher of the concrete phenomena manifested and how the interrelationship of events unfolds in time and space. The form of attention afforded by both rhythm analysis and psychoanalysis uncovers the links of interrelatedness of material entities in space and time. Therefore the interplay of parts and whole sketches a web of possible connections, influences and tensions. Psychoanalysis and rhythm analysis are both methods and practices of possibilities and imaginations. The tentative reinterpretation of Winnicott's object relations theory in *Playing and Reality* demonstrates the imbrication of rhythms in the senses and the

senses in rhythms. Intervals of presence and absence of the mother are crucial to the psychic development of the child in achieving a sense of reality. In other words, the mother's rhythmic adaptations to the child's needs provide a basis of reality testing for the child so that he or she could establish a way of relating to the world. The tentative approach of conducting a rhythmanalysis of Object Relations theories formulates 'interrelatedness' as an orchestration of polyrhythms. It is not within the scope of this discussion to excavate and explicate the following thoughts which are nonetheless worth pursuing: To what extent can we unpick the interrelationships of material entities (human and non human) as eurhythmia, isorhythmia, arrhythmia and other possible forms of rhythmic dynamisms? If the individual's capacity for cross-identifications is identified by Winnicott as an essential factor on which community, collective identity and culture are predicated, how could a rhythmanalytical study of interrelationships enlighten the humanistic dimension of cultural life? In what way can we reconstitute the analysis of care, empathy, attunement of emotions, nurturance and reparation into a rhythmanalysis of cultural phenomena?

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## Notes

<sup>i</sup> 'Objects' are loosely defined here as entities which lie outside of the individual and they are used in ways that address the relational aspect of reality emphatically.

<sup>ii</sup> 'Excited times' refers to the baby's readiness to find stimulants, not knowing what, at the right moment, the mother offers her breast to feed. There is no such expectancy of the presence of something in the unexcited times (quiet state). (Winnicott, 1988: 100).

<sup>iii</sup> Felman stressed that psychoanalysis is first and foremost a practice. He explicated the

relationship of theory and practice in the following sentences: 'The reading is not theory: it is practice, a practical procedure...But the practice, the partially unconscious analytic reading practice, always inescapably precedes the theory. There is a constitutive belatedness of the theory over the practice, the theory is always trying to catch up with what it was that the practice, or the reading, was really doing' (Felman, 1987: 24).

<sup>iv</sup> Winnicott emphasised that the nature of an expectation is not totally passive as he or she has the illusion that objects are 'created' at the command of the infant. 'The mother's adaptation to

the infant's needs, when good enough, gives the infant the *illusion* that there is an external reality that corresponds to the infant's own capacity to create' (Winnicott, 1971: 13-14).

<sup>v</sup> Psychosocial Studies connotes 'normative work dealing with social adjustment or interpersonal relations' (Frosh, 2008: 348).

<sup>vi</sup> Rustin, Michael and Andrew Cooper. (1996) *Psychoanalysis and the Public Sphere: The Projection in Changing Times*. [http://www.psychanalysis-and-therapy.com/human\\_nature/free-associations/rustcoop.html](http://www.psychanalysis-and-therapy.com/human_nature/free-associations/rustcoop.html), accessed 09 June 2011.

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