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Abstract

This article assesses some potential approaches to museums and cities propelled by a theoretical preoccupation with modernity as a condition of speed. Here, we can extrapolate two variants in the writings and interventions of Marinetti, Simmel, Virilio and writers in the postmodern tradition; 1) the museum is slow, it is a brake on modernity, it is modernity's sedentary other, and 2) the museum is fast, it is as quick as the city, reflecting modernity's impulse towards acceleration. In order to finesse these approaches, the article will move towards the method of rhythmanalysis and an emphasis upon time-space considerations. It is Lefebvre's teasing last snippets on the concept of rhythm, the paper will argue, presaged by Benjamin's approach to the variant tempos of modernity in *The Arcades Project*, that point to a fuller and more advanced approach to urban-museological relations and the multiple rhythms that feature in both.

Keywords: Museums, Cities, Rhythmanalysis, Speed, Time-space

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Speed, Rhythm and Time-space: Museums and Cities

Nick Prior

"Everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm." (Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, 2004: 15)

Museums are, historically, urban institutions. Coterminous with the birth of the modern city and the advent of urbanism as a "way of life" (Wirth, 1938) they belong to the vicissitudes of the metropolis – an emblem, in fact, of modernity's obsession with civic progress, refinement and social regulation (Bennett, 1995). Today, the museum has become the *sine qua non* of every self-respecting urban regeneration plan and badge of metropolitan chic. They are the "can-do" institutions of our time, hailed as palliatives to everything from social exclusion to adolescent anomie.

Yet, despite some emergent case-study literature on particular cities and museums there exists very little reflection on how we might think of their relationship. For the most part, it has been the nation that has taken precedence over the city in studies of the museum, especially in relation to "Universal Survey Museums" such as the Louvre and the National Gallery (Duncan and Wallach, 1980). Here, the museum serves as a crucial evidentiary institution corroborative of the identities and trajectories of the modern nation-state (Preziosi, 1994). Inspecting the innards of the museum then becomes a matter of reading how narratives of the nation are inscribed in the collection, its layout, meaning and purpose (Duncan, 1995). When the city does make an appearance, it does so only tangentially as a setting for new forms of governmentality or civic seeing (Bennett, 2006), a sort of subspace out-muscled by larger configurations such as the field of power, national and supra-national blocs.

The following article offers up an approach to the urban embeddedness of museums. It begins by assessing some potential approaches to museums and cities propelled by a theoretical preoccupation with modernity as a condition of *speed*.

Here, we can extrapolate two variants in the writings and interventions of Marinetti, Simmel, Virilio and writers in the postmodern tradition; 1) the museum is slow, it is a brake on modernity, it is modernity's sedentary other, and 2) the museum is fast, it is as quick as the city, reflecting modernity's impulse towards acceleration. In both cases, a gravitation to the classic modernisation narrative aligns certain places with certain speeds, the assumption being that museums are *either* slow or fast. This gives us some analytical purchase on broad tendencies inherent in the museum's on-going conversation with the city, especially as both have undergone transformations from the late 20th century. However, such formulations also tend to operate with logics of confrontation and conjugation that reduce the museum to a reflection or an opposition.

In order to finesse these approaches, the paper will move towards the method of rhythmanalysis. It is Lefebvre's teasing last snippets on the concept of rhythm, the paper will argue, presaged by Benjamin's approach to the variant tempos of modernity in *The Arcades Project*, that point to a fuller and more advanced approach to urban-museological relations and the multiple rhythms that feature in both. It is an orientation to rhythm, in other words, that affords us an opportunity to capture the multiple and cross-cutting layers of practice, influence and effect that revolve around the museum, the city and beyond.

Boxes…

In an interview on the dematerialised city, Paul Virilio argues that the city is a "box full of speeds" (Virilio/Lotringer, 1997: 66). No longer places to contain stationary populations, cities are interchangeable places, telescoped in time and connected by systems of instantaneous travel and teleprescence. Virilio's point is that space-distances and geography are being replaced by time-distances and chronography. "This is why", he says, "the airport today has become the new city…People are no longer citizens, they're passengers in transit" (Virilio/Lotringer, 1997: 67). Given the

emphasis on permeability and mobility it is somewhat surprising that Virilio uses the term “box” at all. Even as a metaphor, “box” tends to reduce space to conventional geometrical groupings and the city to a static enclosed space of emplacement. It conjures up a Russian dolls relationship between cities and their component institutions, where the city contains such units as nested sub-spaces, relatively separate and self-enclosed. In the context of the museum, this leads to all sorts of questionable assumptions, including that museums and cities are static, that the city somehow stops at the door of the museum and that the two are impermeable spaces, sequential and linear. It also conjures up conventional art historical conceptions of museums as sealed textual spaces or containers of objects severed from their broader social contexts.

Work across the humanities and social sciences has demonstrated crucial problems with this kind of analysis of space, not least its attachment to a Cartesian vision of a fixed and ordered spatial order manifested in grids, binaries and hierarchies (Lefebvre, 1991). In general, the reclamation of space in recent social and cultural theory has emphasised the fluid and processual nature of space. Space, here, is embedded in social relations. It is not a neutral backdrop, container or stage-set for action but is part and parcel of the unfolding of social relations, part of their production or construction. As Massey argues, for instance, space is created out of complex webs of relations of dominance, co-ordination and resistance such that “localities are not just about physical buildings, nor even about capital momentarily imprisoned; they are about the intersection of social activities and social relations and crucially, activities and relations which are necessarily, by definition, dynamic, changing” (Massey, 1994: 275). Here, as elsewhere, a movement takes place from “things in space” to space as lived, represented and produced (Bachelard, 1969; Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1989).

There’s no special need to dwell on Virilio’s choice of words, particularly given his aim to theorise acceleration and his use of alternative terms such as “gear-shift”

(Virilio/Lotringer, 1997: 66). Still, it does provide us with an initial foil. “Box” is an inadequate schematisation that should be dispensed with immediately. Museums and cities are certainly not boxes, unless one can imagine non-Euclidean compartments that inter-penetrate, flow into one another and mutate whilst doing so.

…of Speed

The question of speed and time, on the other hand, might not so easily be jettisoned. In fact, there’s an influential social-theoretical lineage that runs from Simmel to Virilio, settling on the dimension of speed as an engine of modernity and assessing the impact of a new urban timespace upon the social. In Simmel’s case, the essence of modernity is founded upon an increase in objective forms consistent with rational-exchange based societies. Simmel’s characterisation of urban modernity turns on a description of the increasing rapidity of things (Simmel, 1995, [1903]). As with Tönnies’ *gesellschaft* concept, the city produces conditions of daily life that are rushed and transitory. This is in contradistinction to the more stable milieu of smaller places subsumed by the *gemeinschaft* concept, where social order is based upon a system of interdependence and “consensus of wills” (Tönnies, 1955, [1887]: 223). Tönnies is a lot more critical, even fearful, of the big city than Simmel. In fact, it is evident that Simmel sees the metropolis as infinitely preferable to the small town precisely because it is the condition of intellectual and creative life. In other respects, both Simmel and Tönnies represent urban life similarly, as the site of a fundamental shift in how everyday life is experienced by a newly-anonymised urban mass. In both cases, metropolitan life is a life of increasing pace, of density and the bombardment of individuals by images and information. Modes of experiencing urban life, as a result, have become bound by discontinuities and fragmentations, “of time as transitory, space as fleeting and causality negated as the fortuitous and arbitrary” (Frisby, 2001: 2).

Indeed, the whole of twentieth-century urban studies, from the Chicago School to David Harvey, works with some version of the motif of speed up. Typically, it then becomes an issue of accounting for the positive or negative implications of urbanisation. Anti-urbanists will generally take stock of the personal and social effects of modernisation such as the creation of pathologies and the disintegration of communities. Pro-urbanists, on the other hand, will see the rise of omnipresent speed as a cause for celebration of the modern era itself. In Marinetti's declarations, the onset of a restless push towards a culture of velocity radiates from the motorised conditions of the city (Apollonio, 1973). It is the city where the violent paroxysms of a thousand technological revolutions have ushered in the triumphant progress of science, and where, as in Simmel's essay, a new disjointed spatial and temporal experience can be found.

In both cases - denigration and celebration - there is a unifying account of modernisation and its time-space quotient, where pace is superimposed or embedded in place. It is Mikhail Bakhtin who developed the idea of a chronotope as a way of understanding the spatio-temporal functions of literary imaginings. In his essay of 1937-38, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel", Bakhtin serves up a description of how, in particular literary genres or epochs, time and space are articulated and narrativised. Defined as "the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied" (Bakhtin, 1981, [1937-38]: 250), the chronotope is a means of measuring how "spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole" (Bakhtin, 1981, [1937-38]: 84). In some chronotopes, for instance those centred on the road, the trajectory of an individual's life merges with their spatial pathway. But, as Holquist reminds us, whilst the chronotope can be a useful tool in literary criticism and the arts, it is always in dialogue with "specific, extra-literary historical contexts" (Holquist, 1990: 112). It can be seen, more generally, as a way of understanding how metaphorically-saturated conceptions of time and space are shaped in concrete historical settings and transmitted through

narrative forms such as writing. For this reason, it might also be addressed to narratives of modernisation in which certain places get associated with certain speeds. A common perception being that rural areas, landscapes and small villages enjoy a slower or more "natural" pace of life, whilst cities are units of speed, density and overload. Geographer Mike Crang puts it as follows:

> "This is a story…of density, proximity, planned and unplanned contact that create a civil society. And yet the moment we think of these terms they surely lead us to others – proximity and density to hustle and bustle. The popular account of metropolitan life is of one of increasing pace. It is a recurrent motif that we can read repeatedly in modernisation theories; there were cold societies of slow change, now there are hot ones" (Crang, 2001: 188).

Clearly, places serve as proxies for a range of attitudes, oppositions and imaginaries. Bakhtin himself laments the passing of the chronotope of the public square associated with Greek and medieval literatures of the carnivalesque and its replacement with the more privatised bourgeois form. What is neutralised in this shift, for Bakhtin, is the total exteriority of the agora and its fulfilment of certain communal functions. From the eighteenth century, instead, the interiorised chronotope centres on domestic spaces such as the drawing room.

These are points which are prevalent in a range of influential accounts of urban change, not least Richard Sennett's version of the rationalisation of modern urban space in books such as *The Fall of Public Man* (1977). We had thriving public markets and now we have anaesthetised or empty spaces, such as suburbs. This chronotope is particularly well entrenched in modernisation theories, then, that position the city as central to the condition of modernity. But other places feature in the modern imaginary, too, from parks and prisons to arcades and museums. Indeed, museums are particular targets for urban acceleration accounts precisely because they occupy a pivotal position within modernity (Prior, 2002).

Museum/City/Inertia

Two dominant narratives can be identified, in particular: one that designates museums as slow, and another that designates them as fast. In accounts revolving around the idea of inertia, the museum is aligned with, or perhaps even becomes a metonymy for, a slow and traditional order - modernity's sleepy other, not the juggernaut but the slug. This is exactly the position afforded the museum by a range of key figures central to debates about modern culture. In its most polemical form, such as Marinetti's diatribe against tradition, the museum is a backward institution to be tallied with libraries and academies as instances of a reactionary time-space. It is a slow and anachronistic space of conservation belonging to a spiritual idyll. The Futurist Manifesto's demand for canals to be diverted into the cellars of museums is a particularly vivid example of this alignment. Modernity is to come rushing in on a sleepy backwater and submerge it. "Museums: cemeteries!", the 1909 manifesto declared, "identical, surely, in the sinister promiscuity of so many bodies unknown to one another. Museums: public dormitories where one lies forever beside hated or unknown beings" (Marinetti, 1999, [1909]: 207).

Half a century later and Adorno begins his essay "Valéry, Proust, Museum" with a condemnation of the museum for emptying out the vitality of modern art works, and, like the Futurists, declares them cousins of mausoleums (Adorno, 1967). Bound by tradition and conservation, museums are antidotes to the principles of a vibrant modernity, for Adorno, ossified relics that sap the present of its needs. O'Doherty adds to this image the notion of the contemporary white cube gallery as a limbo-like structure more akin to the medieval church where, in return for a cloistered formality, the viewer is offered modernism's super-clean technology of aesthetics (O'Doherty, 1986). Even defenders of the museum idea have projected it as a niche space reserved for silence, contemplation and slowness, "a kind of holiday resort for thinking, where batteries can be recharged" (De Baere, 1998: 109). Indeed, museum directors are as likely to herald their institutions as "safe havens" from hostile urban

environments as they are to identify the essence of the museum in the slowing of movements, lowering of the voice and concentration of the gaze (Brock, 2001).

This is one set of associations or projections, then, that gather around the city-museum pairing. The museum is calm, sedentary and cold, the city is chaotic, buzzy and hot. The image of the museum is particularly important as standing for a set of residual traditions and oppositions that help purify the notion of what it is to be modern: to be "other" than the museum or to let the museum restore what is lost with the advent of modernity itself.

Museum/City/Symmetry

But this is not the only conception. Indeed, an alternative account has gained credence as a formulation of the museum's position in society, particularly since the late 20th century. Still in the register of speed, this is where there are no differences in tempo between museums and cities, they increasingly reflect one another. Unsurprisingly, it is Simmel who provides one of the first attempts to understand exhibitionary forms as distinctly metropolitan in this way. This is evident in two essays of the 1890s, "On Art Exhibitions" which appeared in 1890 and "The Berlin Trade Exhibition" of 1896. In both essays, Simmel senses the phenomena of the exhibition as inextricably bound to the phenomena of the metropolis. Hence, in "On Art Exhibitions", he writes:

> "the specialisation of our times produces the rush from one impression to the other, the impatience for enjoyment, the problematical strivings to compress together in the shortest possible time the largest possible sum of acquisitions, interests and enjoyments. The colourfulness of metropolitan life, both on the street and in the drawing room, is both the cause and the consequence of this continuous striving, and art exhibitions encapsulate this symbolically in a restricted space" (Simmel, in Frisby, 2001: 103).

The theme of reciprocity is developed in Simmel's discussion of the Berlin trade exhibition, a large-scale trade fair set up in 1896 to display industrial commodities. Here, the crowding of heterogeneous industrial products in close proximity "paralyses

the senses", for Simmel (Simmel, 1991, [1896]: 255). Piled one upon another like so many products in a market, the exhibition's objects meld into a unitary composition, the sole function of which is amusement. One is there to amuse oneself, to be assaulted with repetitious fragments and indulge in the visual consumption of transient forms that, by implication, fail to register. After all, in an echo of the city, the visitor cannot react with any substance to individual objects. Instead, "the many stimuli and the diversity of consumption and enjoyment" undermines the possibility of contemplating single objects (Simmel, 1991, [1896]: 256).

In this sense, Berlin's "world city" motifs and its proclivity towards exhibiting all commodities are reflected in the mirror image of the exhibition. Indeed, the exhibition's "heterogeneous impressions, and the ever faster and more colourful change of excitements" have the effect of compensating the worker for the monotony of their labouring lives (Simmel, 1991, [1896]: 256). In which case, not only do we get a provoking account of how speed accelerates exhibited stimuli to the extent that they become disconnected fragments, but also a sort of blanket description of an undifferentiated mass of passive consumers. The two are, of course, connected for Simmel. The audience is passive precisely because it is given a variety of fleeting impressions that have overstimulated the nerves. As with urban life, so with the exhibition.

By the end of the century, Simmel's "symmetry" account is cranked up in intensity to account for the extension, radicalisation and dissolution of modernity in the writings of contemporary authors such as Jameson, Baudrillard and Virilio. Most apparent in Virilio's study of speed, the unrestrained use of transmission technologies, together with the proliferation of visual data, positions human consciousness within the realms of abject telepresence. Whether it is the development of ocular micro-surgery, helmet technologies for fighter pilots, or the cinematic spectacle of the shopping mall, the result is the same for Virilio – an intense multiplication of visual surfaces and screens and a tangible invasion of

technology into our field of vision. This leaves us facing a “deluge of visual and audiovisual sequences, the sudden *motorization of appearances* that endlessly bombard our imagination” (Virilio, 1997: 96). In the city, technologies for abolishing time and space, technologies of travel and information in particular, have softened, disorganised and despatialised the city, for Virilio. This new economy of time annihilates urban space by dematerialising its architectural co-ordinates. In its wake emerges a particularly dark vision of an “overexposed city” in which technologies of electronic communication usher in time lived instantaneously.

Digital Museums, Soft Space and the Aesthetics of Distraction

The implications for the museum could not be clearer. The dissolution of material, geographical space into real time is also a dissolution of the material entity of the museum. This takes André Malraux’s (1967) *musée imaginaire* (the museum without walls) to its logical end: dematerialised not by photography alone, but by Internet technologies, virtuality and globalised consumer culture. The advent of digital archives, on-line exhibitions and virtual museums, fits Virilio’s diagnosis of deterritorialized hyperspace networks. At the site of the museum’s birth, for instance, a cybersuite known as “cyberLouvre” now battles with the “real” collection, inserting the whole canon of art into time-saving information technologies that render the old-fashioned visit less necessary. On the Louvre’s main website, the visitor is invited to take a 360° “virtual stroll through the museum”, sending the digital body into the museum’s hyperspace. And if the visitor does eventually make it to the museum, they are encouraged to partake of logics of acceleration and fashion via subterranean links between the museum space and the shopping mall, the *Carousel du Louvre*.

It’s not just that digital audio guides and multimedia tours are the means by which the visit is managed, however, or that web-based collections substitute information for objects. It’s also that contemporary exhibition design is increasingly parasitic on the form of the World Wide Web, with collections increasingly taking on

the experience of interactivity and hypertext. At Tate Modern, the visit is syncopated as one jumps from shop to exhibit, to information post to café, to spectacular views of London. There is a disjunctive nature to the space, where pathways and interactions jump off from strategic points in the visit, including the semi-sequestered information booths inviting visitors to browse information on nearby exhibits. Even the collection's narrative order fragments into a series of loose themes, creating unusual and accidental juxtapositions between cultural forms ordinarily separated by the big historical story. As with digital sampling in music, diverse styles and movements from art history are spliced together, creating an art historical mash up, whilst short-lived installations, flexible partitions and video art reinforce the modality of the accelerated event by delineating the space as weightless, mediatised and manipulable (Kotz, 2005).

As for design and style, contemporary museum buildings often originate and replicate key features of the postmodern cultural landscape as imagined by writers like Jonathan Raban, David Harvey, and Jean Baudrillard. Museum buildings have become signature projects for architects, directors and cities alike and their striking forms expand the repertoires of the museum beyond the technocratic universalism of the white cube (Newhouse, 1998). Both dreamworld and corporate badge, the Guggenheim at Bilbao, for instance, draws its visual power from various image repertoires, including Brancusi's studio in Paris and Fritz Lang's expressionist film *Metropolis* (Gilbert-Rolfe and Gehry, 2001). It belongs to a breed of cultural forms that resonates with entertainment and motion in that moving through the building becomes an experience of sensorial intensity, where Frank Gehry's motile architecture evokes a kind of cinematic rush of space (Krens, 2000). This is reinforced by the play of the city reflected across the titanium surface, giving the whole ensemble a sense of plasticity and mobility. The lack of apparent physical boundaries between floors and the dreamlike layering of cybernetics and aesthetics

reprises the motif of dematerialization in the museum. This is clearly not Adorno's mausoleum.

And what about the modes of perception encouraged in these soft spaces? If Simmel had identified nervous saturation as a core feature of the early 20th century exhibition, how can we make sense of the modes of perception fostered by contemporary exhibitions and displays? Again, for Virilio (1994), as visual impressions increase in intensity and quantity, the eye ceases to discriminate between images. What we are seeing, here, is the demise of contemplation itself as an aesthetics of meditation, associated with the operation of Bourdieu's (1993) "pure gaze", is replaced with a culture of distraction. Older modernist ways of seeing have been replaced with a more extreme form of Simmel's *blasé* attitude, the inner life given over to a series of momentary sensations such that individual art works lose their aesthetic boundaries and become cast adrift in a vastly accelerated visual *mélange*. The very foundations of aesthetic judgment are displaced under such conditions because one has no time to make value decisions about images (Jameson, 1998). All of which is reinforced by the episodic nature of contemporary architecture, which belongs increasingly to an effect of speed, media and transience. Like Benjamin's film audience, we experience architecture in motion or as a representation, "never fixed, as in baroque architecture…but always in motion, as in film or in the city" (Colomina, 1994: 6).

A lot of these formulations are purposely provocative, but they also lead one to imaginative theoretical territories. A gravitation to speed is one way, for instance, of assessing the rise of the blockbuster exhibition, cultural tourism, commercial sponsorship, and the prominence of the shop. It might even anticipate the museum's demise, or at least its convergence with the cinema, the shopping mall or the theme park, all configured through a phenomenology of mingled perceptions to which reaction times are reduced, and where the only response is an instantaneous "yes or no" (Baudrillard, 1993). Still, the reprise of speed and acceleration is not without its

problems. For a start, it tends to reduce to a caricature the relations between museums and cities, either as opposites or conjugations. As opposites, we have a somewhat dichotomous characterisation of the museum and the city incorporated into academic and popular discourses, where the museum is a timeless enclave, frozen against the city. As conjugations, the institution has been so *completely* de-autonomised that a kind of similitude is posited which fails to account for the specificities of each. Interestingly, there is none of the tangible ambiguity that Simmel reserves for the city - as site of intellectual variegation *and* arena of calculated detachment - with the Berlin exhibitions. Indeed, exhibitions seem to have no specific or redeeming features of their own in Simmel's writings. They merely represent the most problematic aspects of the city. As for Virilio *et al*, the version of speed offered is almost a corporate or paranoid version, where *la vitesse* inhabits everything, colonises everything, dissolves everything. Not only does this suppress other urban-museological temporalities, but feeds a particularly bothersome trend in cultural theory, where theory itself becomes faster than events.

So, asking the question "are museums and cities quick or slow?" entices a partial answer to the problem because it fails to see them as containing a wide and densely-packed range of functions. After all, one might reasonably say that museums and cities have always contained variant speeds, a mix of tempos that are suppressed in acceleration narratives: not just of commodities, but bodies, decisions, occupations and archives. At the very least we need to seek out supplementary ways of thinking about museums and cities that do not end up reducing them to one-dimensional types or otherwise under-estimating their complexity. We need, instead, to recapture the intricate conversations that take place within urban-museological contexts: not to dismiss speed as a dimensional prism, but to articulate supplementary approaches and narratives. Two such supplementations, I will argue, can be found in the work of Walter Benjamin and Henri Lefebvre.

Modernity's Variant Tempos: Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project*

Much of Benjamin's excavation of Second-Empire Paris in his infamous tome, *The Arcades Project,* is taken up with a description of how the city's new technologies of display give the city its phantasmagorical splendour. And in many ways, this has to do with a radical proliferation of things – myriad displays of ephemera scattered through the arcades and the quick changing fashions found in Paris at the height of its power. But lest we forget, it is the *flâneur* who is this milieu's most revealing figure, for Benjamin. The orientation affected by the *flâneur* allows him to grasp the magical quality of the city, capturing how "existence in these spaces flows…without accent, like the events in dreams" (Benjamin, 1999, [1927-40]: 106). This is achieved not by participating in the urban spectacle as a man in the crowd, but by adopting an insouciant orientation towards *flânerie* that, in tempo at least, is slow enough to orient to what Benjamin calls "the rhythmics of…slumber" (Benjamin, 1999, [1927-40]: 106). In other words, the *flâneur* adopts the gait and pace of the idler, strolling the streets as if they appeared as a domestic interior and contemplating the urban spectacle from the advantage point of the leisured male. Indeed, the gender preconditions of this orientation are significant and have been the subject of several biting critiques (Wolff, 1985; Wilson, 1992). Accounts of *flâneurs* taking their tortoises for walks on the boulevards in 1839, however, don't just point to the absence of women in urban accounts, but also to the absence of other urban temporalities. After all, Hausmann's boulevards did not just open up the city to traffic and fresh air, but also accentuated the existence of sedentary and stagnant backwaters, slack zones and sluggish orientations (Highmore, 2002). Ragpickers, sandwich-board men, barrow boys, costermongers are figures caught in the contrapuntal rhythms of urban modernity – rhythms that vary according to time of day, day of the week and from place to place.

In fact, throughout the *Arcades Project* Benjamin's description goes beyond the classic acceleration story. His method of reflection joins objects and spaces in a much more fluid way, running together descriptions of fashion and interiors with

exhibition halls and sweeping boulevards as if they appeared in a dream. In other words, Benjamin is concerned with setting out a palate of Paris that spans its "dreamworlds of consumption", from street galleries and waxwork museums to fountains and speciality shops. And he does so by describing the rhythms of these spaces and the sensation of newness and pleasure they give rise to. He details the micro-movements of bodies as they cross the spatial thresholds of this dreamworld with measured paces or imbibe the new urban views opened up by Hausmann's urban plans. Modernity, in short, is never just experienced as a juggernaut for Benjamin, but also a languid dream with its varying tempos, flows and excitations. This is evident in his description of exhibitions, which, on the one hand, "glorify the exchange value of the commodity" (Benjamin, 1999, [1927-40]: 7), but, on the other, enter into complex historical relations with department stores, spas and gates. In this sense, "the city is only apparently homogenous; even its name takes on a different sound from one district to the next" (Benjamin, 1999, [1927-40]: 88).

Benjamin's *Arcades Project* was not published in Frankfurt until 1982 and not until 1993 in Paris (Kofman and Lebas, 1996: n4:11). It is unlikely, therefore, that Benjamin's early explication of rhythms would have influenced Lefebvre. However, Benjamin himself annotated some of Lefebvre's collaborative early work in the 1930s and the influences are common enough – Nietzsche, Marx and Surrealism in particular. As are the themes, including the notion of the city as a sensuous and fluid form of everyday life. But it is Lefebvre who develops the notion of rhythm most explicitly and in doing so provides us with a more advanced way into the analysis of cities and their various circuits.

"From Corpuscles to Galaxies": Henri Lefebvre's *Rhythmanalysis*

The French Marxist sociologist Henri Lefebvre is well known for his treatise on the production of space, his work on cities and urbanism and his expositions on everyday life. What he is less known for at present, particularly in the English-

speaking world, is his final book *Elements of Rhythmanalysis* - published in 1992, a year after his death and only recently translated into English (Lefebvre, 2004). The project is inspired by Lefebvre's fascination with music as a model for understanding the city, as he watches a particularly busy junction from his flat in Paris. From his window Lefebvre begins to ponder the "garlands" of sounds, circulations and movements associated with street life. He describes the rhythmic cycles of footsteps, traffic, noise, tourists, routine, chance, foliage. The interaction of these "diverse, repetitive and different rhythms animates the street and the neighbourhood" (Lefebvre, 2004: 30) and to fully grasp the cacophony is to attempt to found a new science or field of knowledge that makes rhythms the centre of attention. As an initial step, Lefebvre differentiates the rhythms of the body such as the heart, walking and intimate actions, from macro rhythms such as seasons, epochs and the circulation of commodities. He also makes a conceptual distinction between cyclical rhythms and linear rhythms where cyclical repetition is a more endogenous time associated with nature and the cosmos, and linear repetition is a "measured, imposed, external time" (Lefebvre, 2004: 99), the rhythm of work, the hammer or the metronome.

Never one for under-ambition, Lefebvre declares that the rhythmanalytical project must traverse all natural, social, economic and political phenomena – "from particles to galaxies" as he puts it (Lefebvre, 2004: 42). It is a radically interdisciplinary project, to be aligned in magnitude with Benjamin's immense (and also unfinished) *Arcades Project*. It requires that issues of space and time are comprehended together. After all, a rhythm works both through measure or repetition and through locations or places. It assumes that rhythms can only be grasped comparatively. One is quick only to the extent that the other is slow. And it locates the body as a constant reference point for the alliances and conflicts of rhythms - not just the anatomical, physiological body, but the body as being-in-the-world, perceiving, acting, thinking and feeling.

More than just a way of sensitising oneself to speed, rhythmanalysis implies listening to a "plurality of rhythmic interactions; to diverse degrees and levels: from corpuscles to galaxies, one more time" (Lefebvre, 2004: 42). It is this consideration of diverse rhythms that gives us some purchase on the museum and the city, not in terms of singular tempos or accelerations, but as assemblages of different beats. We can then begin to think of Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis as a challenge to make sense of the various frequencies characteristic of museums and their relations with broader contexts.

The following picks up the challenge in relation to three inter-related phrases of rhythm which cohere around the museum: the building, the collection and the visitor. It briefly hints at some potential components of rhythmanalysis and the exploratory avenues it opens up, without claiming them to be exhaustive or definitive.

Towards a Rhythmanalysis: Buildings, Collections, Bodies

To start with material space, the museum building is itself suffused with variant rhythms: from the site-specific routines of work to the zoning codes enforced by urban authorities, from the museum's opening hours to the spatial co-ordination of front and back stage regions, from the social life of the toilets to the spatial production of silence. In each case, the building embodies a multiplicity of functions and uses, defining the institution's relationship to its setting whilst constructing the framework for diverse experiences. In this sense, the building's materiality is culturally inscribed with powerful regulatory interests but its everyday uses are variable and dynamic. It plays host to the everyday movements of bodies, but it is also part of something greater: an urban ambition, a global topology, a locality, a corporate badge (Sirefman, 1999).

An increasingly prominent force in the museum is the rhythm of the commodity. From the 1980s on, free market policies have opened up circulations of capital into visual arts institutions and multi-national corporations have exploited the

cultural kudos of the museum by sponsoring spectacular exhibitions in the biggest cities (Wu, 1998). The blockbuster exhibition, in particular, is an attractive timespace target for corporate culture because it acts as an inexpensive unit of high-class advertising. For three months of the year, top museums are adorned with the icons of sponsoring corporations, connecting the everyday rhythms of visitors with the interests of global capital. Here, the logics of Lefebvre's spatial relations of production meet the linear rhythms of capital as museum buildings become active agents in the circulation and reproduction of the new symbolic economies characteristic of advanced consumer capitalism (Scott, 2000; Zukin, 1996).

A central component of this circulation hinges on the management and disposability of subjects as well as objects. One of Baudrillard's insights in his essay on the Pompidou Centre is that the museum building is a machine made to transit human masses. It is the Pompidou's fluid surfaces, incessant merchandising and external elevators that, for Baudrillard, maintain an ultimately fatal acceleration of bodies yearning to participate in the spectacle of high culture. By flocking to the Pompidou the masses join a system of circulation – of commodities, culture, compressed air – demonstrated by "means of its *own accelerated circulation*" (Baudrillard, 1982: 9). This contrasts with the collection itself which, for Baudrillard, sits inside the shell as part of a frozen modernist canon, pointing to a sensitivity to variant tempos that moves him beyond traditional acceleration accounts.

Nevertheless, mass circulation is certainly an issue for cultural management, not least at the level of urban transport systems and population movements. Some of the biggest museums rely on complex transport networks that shuttle visitors from node to node. This operation embeds the museum in a logic of flexible automobility based on both the governance of traffic and the globalisation of travel (Featherstone, 2004; Urry, 2004). In some cases, purpose-made bus, train and plane routes carve out lines of flight to the museum. Indeed, a major feature of the reconstruction of the Louvre in the 1990s was the introduction of new parking facilities to ameliorate

congestion caused by tour buses. This was subsidised by leaseholders of the retail units in the underground shopping mall (Newhouse, 1998). In other cases, such as Donald Judd's Chinati Foundation in Texas, the museum space is purposely removed from popular routes, turning the trip into a sort of pilgrimage (Newhouse, 1998).

Moreover, a regular feature of urban transport systems are signposts, adverts and directions that highlight the existence and viability of museums on the tourist map. In its more mundane guise, underground stations display the signs of exhibitions and institutions in the form of posters and high-profile promotional literatures. As McTavish (1998) notes, for instance, advertisements publicising the Louvre's commercial and artistic offerings were posted in predominant areas of the métro during 1994. These depicted the face of the *Mona Lisa* and a slogan declaring "51 stores at her feet", an allusion to the underground shopping mall at the Louvre. In the case of Tate Modern, the very fabric of the street is contrived to direct visitors to the site in a series of repetitive bright orange lampposts that start half a mile away from the museum. Here, street furniture functions as a material-symbolic force through which everyday urban rhythms, including the footsteps of visitors, are channelled.

And yet, the built environment does not just dictate or stabilise motion, but meshes in mundane ways with tactics as imagined by De Certeau (1984). The plazas of museums make particularly good sites for skateboard turns and at museums such as *Kiasma* in Helsinki, skaters have actually appropriated the outside of the museum: their paths, turnings and returnings a good example of De Certeau's perambulatory utterances and styles of usage that striate the urban complex. This indicates that we need to take seriously the ways in which the building is more than concept, monolith, icon or commodity. It articulates with, and creates opportunities for surprising alterations and interactions – not just grand gestures like throwing eggs at portraits, but using museums as shortcuts, traversing the collection backwards or playing with

the limits of security. Indeed, to re-invoke Lefebvre, inasmuch as museum buildings are rhythmscapes, they comprise contradictions “between place, time and an expenditure of energy” (Lefebvre, 2004: 15). They therefore disclose diverse, contradictory possibilities, even if these possibilities are constrained within certain limits.

The collection, too, is worth considering as polyrhythmic. Beyond the introduction of flexible display strategies and digital collections, the slow rotation of the permanent collection is an instance of what appears to be an almost cyclical rhythm of organic change. In appearance at least, the permanent collection is the museum’s great indestructible force, it stabilises, canonises and performs in daily rituals of display. A keystone of museum practice is the acceptance of gifts and bequests on the understanding that they will remain in the museum “in perpetuity”. Alterations and additions to the collection, in general, follow long and deliberative periods of decision-making whilst seasonal cycles are often marked by the display of parts of the collection. At the National Gallery of Scotland, for instance, the gallery’s Turner watercolours are displayed every year during January, to make the best of the watery light.

Collections are also part of an international cultural economy, however, involving cross-cutting exchanges between museums. The advent of routinized systems of international co-operation, collaboration and competition in the museum world is an instance of cultural globalisation, the effect of which is to free up the circulation of artistic commodities, including the blockbuster and the special exhibition (Rectanus, 2006). Indeed, artistic works are now sent on “world tours”, to become part of Appadurai’s (1996) “global flows”, or popularised and mediatised as Lash and Urry’s “mobile objects” (Lash and Urry, 1994). In each case, artefacts are units of time-space, consumers of time allotted particular spaces – walls, corners, aircraft crates, catalogues, labels, and so on.

But let's not forget the museum's other objects. In most museums of the world, the biggest part of the collection is not exhibited at all and remains inaccessible to the public. It resides backstage, sometimes to be processed into classified objects, at other times to remain hived off in relatively neglected spaces. As Hal Foster (2002) has argued, the status of the archive in modern art museums is particularly illuminating of questions concerning memory and forgetting, history and the dialectics of seeing. The latest stage in storage practices has seen a digital ordering and reordering of the collection, such that a collection might be accessed from anywhere. The gradual reinsertion of the collection into information networks is clearly a notable stage in the life of aesthetic objects which, in Featherstone's words, "offers new possibilities for speed, mobility and completeness of access to cultures" (Featherstone, 2000: 161). But many objects in collections do still languish, often concealed, often neglected, and the preoccupation with acceleration and mobility might gloss some of the more complex and mundane rhythms of the collection, from its narrativisation as a deep structure of time by art history, to its secret life after opening hours and the possibility of it returning in a later haunting (Latour, 1993).

Finally, there is the whole question of visitors' rhythms. As already mentioned, Lefebvre pays particular attention to how bodies register an interplay of internal and linear rhythms, as each living body constitutes an interaction of biological and social dimensions. Walking, noises, gestures, manners, are certainly elements of "being-in-the-world" but are acquired, learnt and shaped in moments of social repetition. In this sense, Lefebvre encourages us, like Bourdieu, to reflect on the bodily incorporation of the social, where bodily movements take on social significance to the extent that they are both sensuously experienced but also socially shaped by linear rhythms such as work. "In the street", he writes, "people can turn right or left, but their walk, the rhythm of their walking, their movements [*gestes*] do not change for all that" (Lefebvre, 2004: 40-41).

Clearly, visitor flows and visitor types are central to the museum's functioning and much research has focused on the orientations and interactions of the visitor in different museum settings. A recent development in museum studies has been a focus on the ways in which visitors experience and encounter exhibits in practical circumstances (Heath and vom Lehn, 2004). Drawing on interactionist perspectives, this work shows how visitors socially interact with exhibits and co-participate with others in the process of interaction. Video-based fieldwork reveals these interactions to include delicate negotiations through which visitors co-ordinate their approach to exhibits and maintain their focus of attention through conversation (von Lehm, Heath and Hindmarsh, 2001). It also shows the significance of corporeal micro-movements in setting the framework through which an orientation to particular exhibits is established. This certainly fulfils Lefebvre's call to attend to the importance of gestures in understanding "rhythms in interaction" (Lefebvre, 2004: 43). What it doesn't show, however, is how these bodily interactions also reflect socially-acquired forms of conduct outside the exhibitionary encounter and interact with larger concerns or rhythms beyond the museum, including the city.

It has been a strength of some recent historical studies of the museum to recognise the complex interrelations between visitors and urban contexts in establishing the terms of cultural engagement. Studies of the foundation of the National Gallery in London, in particular, have shown how the shift from Pall Mall to Trafalgar Square in the 1830s placed London's National Gallery into a space of multiple rhythms (Bennett, 1998; Prior, 2002; Trodd, 1997). Employing insights from Bourdieu and Foucault, this work reveals how the Trafalgar Square gallery was a space at the heart of the teeming metropolis in which various discourses and tendencies co-existed – from ideas of public accessibility and national improvement to discourses of hygiene, pollution and defilement. Bennett, for instance, shows how the Gallery's city centre location "presented something of a dilemma, for while that location was ideal because it maximised the Gallery's public utility, it also increased

the risk that the Gallery might be abused by the passing urban throng" (Bennett, 1998: 111). According to witnesses called before the various Select Committees of the 1850s, the popularity of the site lent itself to the attendance of all sorts of lower constituencies labelled "mob", "crowd", "idle", or "labouring" classes. Such groups, it was claimed, were not only giving off an unsavoury miasma, thereby destroying the surface of the pictures, but were entering the gallery in order to eat or shelter from the rain. The space had become sullied with orange peel, idlers and "country people" with their penchant for gin; sullied, too, by the "little accidents" associated with small children (Prior, 2002).

Sections of the public, then, were using the space as a site of sensuous amusement, a lower form of activity as the Kantian aesthetic had it. The bodies of such "lower bred creatures", the dirty rhythms of their attendance, their mere presence in chambers reserved for Raphael, Titian and Reynolds, disrupted the idea of a gallery as a pure space. All of which meant that the city created conditions it could not overcome: it was both the guarantor of an accessible National Gallery in the heart of the metropolis and the bane of the pure aesthetic and the idea of cultural purity. Two rhythms can be immediately identified, then, as present in the National Gallery's space: the turbulent rhythms of the metropolis, a tide of humanity with its commerce, its dirt and its uncontrollable crowds, and the quiet rhythms of civic humanism, of aesthetic purity and professional control. The oscillation between these two rhythms structured relations between city, social class and fine art for years to come.

Posed in this way, such work reveals how the presence and experience of visitors' bodies might be subsumed under or twisted towards the concept of rhythm. Indeed, one can imagine a host of related studies that read the rhythms of the visitor in relation to its various contexts: from the helter-skelter rhythms of tourism and the rhythms of Bourdieu's *skholé,* in which time is freed from the urgencies of the world (Bourdieu, 2000), to the chaotic rhythms of the school trip, and from the electronic

rhythms of the museum's website, to the power of audio guides or labels to locate bodies in particular narratives. The point being that each constituency, each form of visit, each technology of seeing possesses its own distinct tempos, bodily orientations and lived experiences such that the generic type "visitor" or "tourist" cannot be used without serious qualifications. Indeed, whilst Lefebvre himself comes up relatively short in socially-differentiating his bodies, there remains the need to discuss the museum's use in relation to class, gender and social background, including the importance of time poverty and the rhythms and routines attached to work and domestic life. Lefebvre's concept of "dressage" and interactionist studies of visitor reception might then be given a more substantial twist towards *habitus.*

To conclude, then. A focus on the museum and city as "polyrhythmic ensembles" is entirely appropriate because it allows us to catch things in flight but without reducing either phenomena to a caricature. My suggestion is not necessarily that rhythmanalysis should replace other concepts in the museum studies field (Duncan's "civic ritual", Clifford's "contact zone", Bourdieu's field agent). Nor do I think that Lefebvre's conceptualisation is clear enough to apply without serious theoretical engagement. Indeed, as it stands, his description of rhythmanalysis can be a little vague and somewhat under-formulated. Moreover, rhythmanalysis provides us with a term for already recognised, but unnamed processes. However, what this paper has shown is how an attempt to undertake a rhythmanalysis sensitises us, methodologically as well as theoretically, to aspects of museums and cities, but also national and trans-national phenomena, that often remain hidden – flows, scales, proportions, circulations, bodies, time-space and the varying speeds at which these entities function. In short, an orientation to rhythm is better able to assess with precision, the complex transitions, differences and reciprocities between museums and their circuits, to speculate on the texture of museum-city relations in the unravelling of urban futures, and to enrich our understanding of the complex dynamics that structure and are structured by the museum's location in the social

world. We've come a long way from the conceptually-naïve notion of "boxes", but if there is explanatory value in seeing museums and cities as rhythmscapes we need to keep listening better.

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Notes

1. In a recent collection billed as a state-of-the-field assessment of museum studies, for instance, only one of the fifty-three chapters treats the city as a topic of examination (Carbonell, 2004). There are no index entries at all for urban-related phenomena such as "city", "urban", "urbanisation", "metropolis"; and this lack is certainly not anomalous in academic collections on museums.

2. The concept of "timespace" has recently emerged from critical geography as a way of exploring the mutual play of the spatial and temporal. Whilst this paper has not engaged explicitly with the concept, its overlap with Lefebvre's method of rhythmanalysis is certainly suggestive (see, May and Thrift, 2001).

3. In the register of avant-garde polemic, the Futurists lauded the advent of the modern era as one of ceaseless movement which had completely transformed human relations to distance and speed, accelerating all areas of social life and hurling its heroes into the whirligig of modernity (McQuire, 1998). "Time and space died yesterday. We already live in the absolute, because we have created eternal, omnipresent speed", declared the manifesto of 1909, which continued: "we will sing of the multicoloured, polyphonic tides of revolution in the modern capitals" (Marinetti, 1999, [1909]: 206).

4. Notwithstanding his attempt to set up a "museum of accidents", the original exhibition of which took place at the *Fondation Cartier* in Paris in 2002, Virilio spends little time on the museum *per se*. Still, we can begin to draw out some implications from what Virilio claims for the museum by aligning his comments with work broadly sympathetic with the postmodern turn in cultural theory.

5. As Highmore has written, “the new urban configurations that were successfully designed to increase circulation also evidenced phenomena of a more halting kind” (Highmore, 2002: 172). Highmore highlights the need for an examination of the plural rhythms of modernity eschewed by those preoccupied with acceleration and circulation. His analysis of Victorian London employs Lefebvre’s method of rhythmanalysis in order to reveal the city’s “uneven rhythms, its slowing downs, its torpid circuits as well as its faster flows of signs and bodies” (2002: 174). These include the slack spaces, the pubs and backstreets of the city, and the slow and stubborn rhythms of traffic, delays and latencies.

6. Moreover, the very writing of the *Arcades Project* inhabits plural rhythms – sometimes disordered at other times laid-back (perhaps even hashish-induced). Benjamin himself speculates that his writings on Paris belong to the realm of film, in which case rhythm goes backwards and forwards (Benjamin, 1999, [1927-40]: 845).#

7. As Shields notes, it is somewhat surprising that Lefebvre had no direct contact with either Benjamin or Bataille. Indeed, “Lefebvre’s interest in Nietzsche makes such near misses glaring and demands comment” (Shields, 1998: 25). Unfortunately, Shields provides very little to fill the gap himself, and there are only tantalising comments on their relations in Kofman and Lebas (1996: 11) and Anderson (1976: 37).

8. Indeed, as more and more ex-industrial spaces – from mining towns to flourmills - are turned over to the exhibtionary principle, so museums are becoming active agents in restructuring circuits of capital towards “economies of signs and space” (Lash and Urry, 1994).

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