

‘Walking With’: A Rhythmanalysis of London’s East End

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Abstract

In this paper, I will be looking at the practice of walking through the lens of rhythmanalysis. The method is brought to attention by Lefebvre’s last book *Rhythmanalysis* (2004) in which he suggests a way of interrelating space and time; a phenomenological inquiry hinged on the concrete experience of lived life. My interest in the nuance of walking was initially evoked by the structural film *Fergus Walking* which was made by the film maker William Raban in 1978. I will explore the potential of using structural films in sensitising us to the temporal-spatial relationship of things. The main body of the paper centres around two themes: Firstly I address the primacy of movement as a mode of engaging with the world. It is through ‘muscular consciousness’ (Bachelard 1964: 11) that walking becomes a form of experiential knowing, feeling, connecting and protesting. Secondly, I examine the practices of walking in relation to the radical transformations of the Docklands’ landscape since the beginning of the 1980s. I propose that the contesting interests of different groups can be explored by analysing the rhythmic interactions of their activities. The transition and recomposition of an economy from locally based industrial activities to globalised financial services were manifested in the syncopation of regeneration rhythms to the living rhythms of the Docklands. The fast changing urban landscapes were negotiated through alternative ways of navigating the streets, hence engendering a different set of rhythms.

Keywords: Walking, roads, rhythmanalysis, structural film, Docklands.

Walking as Inhabiting

Henri Lefebvre's sustained interest in the Capitalist system and the organisation of daily lives culminates in his last book *Rhythmanalysis* (2004). The emphasis of rhythmanalysis is placed on its mode of analysis rather than a scientific analysis of rhythms. In other words, it is foremost a method and a way of attending to cultural phenomena. An understanding of the concept can only be arrived at by looking at the enactment of rhythms, that is through the analysis of the temporal-spatial relationships of entities. The first focus is on the ontological state of being - what and how things happen at the experiential level. The second focus is on the interactions of being and the way things relate through rhythmic orderings. Several sites of rhythms are distinguished by Lefebvre - that of the biological, social, intellectual and so on. In particular, the philosopher emphasised that the rhythmanalytical project has never lost sight of the body (Lefebvre 2004). Bodily rhythms are points of contacts of the social and biological rhythms. How our bodies function and attune to other social entities can be used as the initial point of investigation and the aim of which is to unravel a multiplicity of rhythms at work which infiltrate the various sites of rhythmic productions. In the subsequent section of the paper, I shall focus on the practice of walking as an example of illustrating the method of rhythmanalysis.

The bipedality of the ambulatory movement engenders a rhythm of essentially two alternating beats. One foot may support more weight than the other and the extreme case of which is found in a limping gait. With a stride that presses the ground with more force than the other, an accent forms to punctuate the walking rhythm. With one leg swung into the air, our bodily tension accumulates as the upright body is on the verge of falling. To maintain the momentum, the foot needs to touch the ground and let the other leg stride forward. The coordination of body parts are crucial (for instance, the eyes intermittently check the ground and the immediate horizon). There are bundles of rhythms at work - heartbeat, breathing, swinging arms and the less visible operations of muscles, joints and blood flow. The accumulation and relaxation of bodily tension generates a rhythmic flow with which not much consciousness is required to perform such mundane operation. Toddlers who learn to balance bodily weight or adults who walk in unfamiliar environment are less fluent at doing so. The singularity of a person's ambulatory rhythm is subjected to reformulation and negotiation with the surrounding material agents. Lefebvre and Régulier (1999) point out the centrifugal actions that are taking place on the various dimensions of rhythmic interaction:

this human body is the locus and center of interaction between the biological, the physiological (nature), and the social (or what is often called the 'cultural'), with each of these levels or dimensions having its own specificity and therefore its own time and space or, if you will, its own rhythm (1999: 11).

Our limbs reach out to the world and the potential differences of their haptic experience are being reminded of by Ingold:

how does the feel of a surface differ, depending on whether the organ of touch is brought down at successive spots, as in plantigrade walking, or allowed to wrap around or slide over it, as can be done with the fingers and palm of the hand? (2011: 45)

The sensual aspects of walking may shape one's rhythms of wayfaring. In the case of treading through the industrial ruins, Edensor illustrates that it is likely to 'take on a stop-go character, a staccato rhythm rather than a repetitive pulse' (2008: 127). Contingent bodily adaptations are required to 'tackle the risks of slippery timber, loose floorboards, protruding nails, trap doors, rickety stairs' (ibid.: 129). The case of walking through the ruins also alerts us to the fact that moving in space by foot is not to be confounded with travelling in vehicles since the embodied knowledge of environmental perceptions can not be substituted by the enclosed interiority that constrains somatic experiences.

The movement of the body is in constant negotiation to the material affects of the surroundings, prompting a range of bodily gestures that mutate and reinvent the rhythmic formations of walking. The rhythms of a pedestrian are never metronomic nor monotonous. Slow paced strides may be altered immediately by an unpredicted downpour as one scuttles off looking for shelter. A pavement cluttered with street furniture or ongoing construction work may impede the freedom of movement. One's gestural rhythms invariably changes so as to navigate one's way through. From the asphalt pavement to the cobblestone lanes to the pebbled beach, the ease of trudging through varies hence the transformation of walking gait and rhythms. By following the routine trails in the humdrum of daily commute, the more or less repetitive encountering of paths, stairs, subways enables one to slumber into bodily rhythms which may not be consciously reflected. The term 'muscular consciousness' invented by the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1964:11) was later unpacked by Ingold (2011: 47) as he noted that 'as people, in the course of their everyday lives, make their way by foot around a similar terrain, so its paths, textures and contours, variable through the seasons, are incorporated into their own embodied capacities of movement, awareness and response'. It is a way of experiencing temporality whereby sensual impressions are deposited in the anticipation of being retrieved upon in the future; thus proposing a bodily consciousness that is submerged in lived time. Whether it is switching on the bathroom light at night, walking up the stairs of the front door or formulating a pace that is sufficient till the traffic light changes, our everyday life is replete with experiences of rhythmic attunements. The term 'causal efficacy' (Manning 2009: 54) suggests the activation of movements through a bodily memory - 'the stage of perception that refers to the immanent relationality of all experience' (ibid). Without the capacity of 'causal efficacy', the overwhelming sensual information presented at each moment becomes the

‘infinities of nuance’ (ibid.: 57) which makes the body immobilised. She argues that,

Through causal efficacy, we immediately feel our connectedness to the world in its present appearance. This explains why for most of us, taking the next step is not an issue. We know the ground is there: we trust our capacity to gauge space. We walk easily with the implicit knowledge of the intrinsic relation between body, ground and space time...we intuitively know how to field space-time because space-time appears to us as a fold of relation. (Manning 2009: 54-55)

Carter (2009) emphasised the rhythmic property of muscular consciousness in his writings. He argues that ‘rhythm is the formalisation of the eido-kinetic intuition, organising the chance marks we make on the world into a memorable pattern’ (Carter 2009: 272). The term ‘Eido-kinetic intuition’ is explained as ‘the inherent sense mobile subjects have of their relationship with their surroundings [...] it is the capacity to intuit directly the nearness of things and to have measure of them. It seems to stem from our capacity to see the components of our world under the aegis of movement’ (ibid.: 268). Notions of ‘muscular consciousness’, ‘causal efficacy’ and ‘eido-kinetic intuition’ underlined the intertwined nature of bodily cognition and the social world one inhabits. A temporal awareness in the study of movements is inherent in such notions. Moments of twitching, elevating, stillness are not to be perceived in isolation but they presume a spatial-temporal relationships that are rhythmic. The peripatetic being can no longer be considered as a solitary walking figure enclosed in private thoughts. A whole world of historical thing-relations participates in the making of one’s walking rhythms. The person on the move is intimately making contact with the rich fabric of social formations which are sedimented in the street corner, a road junction or a deserted lane. His or her walking movement activates these relations so that they become alive and revealing.

A rhythm analytical study of walking does not preclude human agents from other animate and inanimate things. The constituted action of the alliance of agents (pedestrian, vehicles, wind, rubbish bins, ticketing machine, traffic island, stairs and so on) continually weave street rhythms. Rhythm analysis calls for an attention to the study of things in their alliance formation. The enactment of rhythms is always initiated by material agents which according to their ways of interrelating, marking out ‘a localised time, or if one prefers, a temporalised space’ (2004: 89). Paul Carter noted that ‘things arranged spatially as possessing a rhythm, as spatio-temporal relations’ (2009: 274). The transitory and precariousness of material agents in their relational mode of being prompts timing and spacing practices from which rhythms are enacted. Muscular consciousness is rhythmic as it is formed through interacting with the material affects of things which is then translated to intervals of motion and repose. Traffic lights, yellow lines, parking meters, road signs and zebra crossings are interspersed in the cityscape and they are the rhythmic agents of the metropolis. As the ownership of

cars quadrupled between 1950s and 1970s, the presence of street furniture took on the role of regulating movements between pedestrians and motor vehicles. For instance, ‘bollard’ is a generic name given to a variety of posts erected on the ground. The distance between the bollards demarcates an area designated for certain use. A pedestrian area is enclosed and marked off from the flow of traffic so that strollers feel secure to roam around with fluid paces, forming a contrast to those controlled rhythms of walking across the traffic lights. By exploring the rhythms of the urban pedestrian, we would invariably take into account of the entangled interrelations of entities which conduces a localised attention to the study of walking. The practice of walking is essentially a way of interrelating material entities. Ingold uses the metaphor ‘meshwork’ to capture such a mode of perceiving the world (Ingold 2011: 71).¹ The ‘meshwork’ is materialised in the concatenation of rhythms which inter-penetrate and configure each other. The transmission, interaction and exchange of rhythms on the street comprises the dynamic of the meshwork.

Fergus Walking

My interest in the mundane practice of walking was evoked by the structural film *Fergus Walking*. The film is part of the trilogy *Autumn Scenes* (1978) which was made by the film maker William Raban. It was not only an experiment on the materiality of the film medium, but also of the perceptual relationship between the viewer and the moving images. Firstly, I shall carefully describe the scenes of Fergus walking down Bromley Street in the East End of London. Secondly, I aim to analyse the major tenets of the structural film movement and suggest the potential of using moving images in the heightening of rhythm analytical perceptions. In comparison to the mainstream commercial productions, I argue that structural films comment and contribute to the exploration of cultural history in its own ways. The film shows images of a deserted street with derelict houses and they may invite the viewer to extract the implied socio-political connotations. However, it is worth pointing out that the film does not set out to conduct a socio-historical study of the East End of London. What it really does to the viewer is to sensitise them to a different angle of perceiving such a mundane practice. Pedestrians do not glide over the surface of the street but they walk *with* the material surroundings. The body walks but does not solely form the centre of actions. Raban remarks on the central tenets of his film making:

The time element of film, and its relationship to the actual time of filming, has been a central concern in my work. More recently, I have been finding ways to incorporate the space that is filmed too; space perception and time perception being shown to be absolutely related in film. (Raban 1976 : 130)

I took the length of the street... their length was related to the standard roll of film stock you’ve got, so I knew I wanted Fergus Walking to be 100 feet of film,

because that's the standard roll size. 100 feet of film is 2mins 45secs and so I drove down that street at walking pace. (Interview with William Raban)

It is a grey autumn day as we first notice the raindrops on the window of a moving vehicle through which Fergus is observed. In and out of the frame, there is a man who walks. His movement carries a constant rhythm; the swinging of the arms and the stride he made are steady; for what is more unusual of an urban pedestrian, the eyes do not wander in search of excitement or danger. Indifferent to his surroundings, Fergus marches along in a mechanistic manner as if his body is a metronomic device that marks the passage of time. One may be reminded of the minimal settings in the motion studies of Muybridge, yet the street scene is far from a monolithic background. There is not much associative meaning that can be derived from Fergus' walking practice. It is not long before we notice something baffling is going on. The film enacts a temporal consciousness in tension with our habitual perceptions. In order to decipher the relations of movement that render a skewed sense of time-space, one has to pause, rewind and fast forward the lingering images deposited in the memory. Our eyes dart back and forth between Fergus and his surroundings. Although the strides he made render an illusion of progression and normality, other perceptual data gleaned by the viewer quickly inflicts a contradictory experience of observing people walk. Fergus walks in relation to a number of things: a window, a black car, a door, etc. Instead of 'leaving them behind' as he marches on, they reappear ahead of Fergus. He walks past the street sign 'Bromley Street' and in the next few scenes, the sign is seen to 'jump' in front of him. Is he walking backward in space when the body propels itself forward? What estranges us from our habitual perception is not Fergus' movement but the shifting order of perceptual relationships. So we would wonder at the repeated appearances of the same brick daubed walls, street signs, cars passing, house doors and so on. A clashing sense of progression and regression resonates in the vicarious experience of the viewer. The edge of the car window frame is shown (as the shot of the interior of the car eclipses parts of the street scenes) so that the viewer is reminded of his or her vantage point - one that is mobile. The orchestration of rhythms on the streets are interposed with that of the moving vehicle. As we see him going in and out of the frame (sometimes he is in the centre of the frame whereas other times he is abruptly positioned right at the edge of the car window), the viewer is again puzzled by the vehicle's positioning in relation to Fergus. Could it be that the car is driven at an erratic speed and if so how do we reconcile the spatial-temporal relationships of not only Fergus and the car but also the domain of objects that shape the dynamism of the streets?

There is no recourse to audio information. The viewer can not hear the rhythms of the clattering footsteps nor the traffic noise that reverberated on Bromley Street. The effort in making sense of the rhythmic interplay in the film relies on our memory, anticipation and imagination. One is provoked to question how relations of movements are conceived in time-space. Left foot, right foot; the

consistent beats of the steps evoke a kinetic rhythm which intoxicates the viewer. The rhythmic interchange of images aligns itself to the pace of Fergus' movement. The pulsation of the graffiti on the brick wall, 'Homes not Hotels', 'Stuff the Queen' and '25 Yrs of Poverty', becomes a visual poem as the words dance and beckon for attention. One is appropriated to the cadence of Fergus' footsteps thus participating actively in the construction of an experiential temporality.

William Raban is one of the leading figures in the London Film-Makers Co-operative (LFMC). Formed by a group of film makers who pioneered the production and ethics of structural films, they radically rejected the mainstream commercial and documentary film making practices.² Collective ownership of equipment, production and distribution meant that there were cross-pollinations of ideas which shaped the ethics of the group.³ One of the distinct features of these films is the deliberate abolishment of narratives. Schneider (2011) argues that structural films are about what they *do* to the viewer as opposed to a mimesis of a life world which designates the representational functions of the medium. For instance, he points out that structural film makers produced flicker films which are reflexive of the very process of visual perception in the construction of moving images (the exploration of the 'afterimage' that persists on the retina). Whereas with narrative films, the progression of a storyline is often held together by images and words which elicit the viewers' identification with the protagonist. Every single shot is instrumental in the construction of a sequence of shots in the transmission of meaning and emotions. Lucien Sève (1947) offers an interesting account of the contrasting approaches adopted by narrative films and its counterpart. The focus on the single shot (or at least the non-connection of them) favoured by anti-narrative films 'tends to isolate itself and attract an attention of the inquiring variety', whereas the adoption of narration presupposes a 'sequence which creates a definite unity of meaning between the shots and arouses in the spectator an intense desire for continuation' (Sève 1947, cited in Kracauer 1960: 176). The priority of decoding and identification with the moving image inculcate a habit of film viewing comparable to that of novel reading – 'a quest for intentions rather than shapes, an intense desire for drama, not gestures' (ibid.: 177). Devoid of narrative contents, structuralist film making refuses to present a constructed world of emotions and connotations. The kind of viewing experience activated by structural film also defines its ethical tenet. Instead of being absorbed in the film's plot, the viewer becomes attentive to the unfolding of a phenomenon as he or she makes sense of his or her own sensual-cognitive development in the duration of viewing. The discontinuity of the moving images as shown in the case of *Fergus Walking*, thrusts our order of visual experience (which comes from memory and does not solely rely on the eye but also on the other sensibilities). The very habit of distinguishing a foreground figure from its backdrop is challenged by the film. To make sense of the temporal-spatial structures in *Fergus Walking*, the viewer heeds to the details of things in order to map out the

interrelations of them. Kracauer notes on the peculiarity of the film medium in exposing the physical minutiae of an object. He suggests that ‘the motion picture camera has a way of disintegrating familiar objects and bringing to the fore – often in just moving about – previously invisible interrelationships between parts of them’ (Kracauer 1997: 54). One’s reflexive awareness of the daily experience, the triviality of how one moment is lived to the next, is brought to the fore by the sequence of images resembling a montage. Raban’s cutting strategy enabled the viewer to reflect upon the possibilities of the film medium in unveiling the spatial-temporal dimensions of experience. His practice is firmly rooted in the belief that ‘making films is about showing people things, not telling them how to interpret the world’ (Lux Online Archive). How structural films function in the exploration of cultural phenomena adheres to Merleau-Ponty’s (1964) conception of film as not to be thought but to be perceived. The philosopher refutes the tale-telling function of the film medium, those that signifies or exposes ideas. Instead, the joy of all art forms including film ‘lies in its showing how something takes on meaning – not by referring to already established and acquired ideas but by the temporal or spatial arrangement of elements’ (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 58). The experience of watching *Fergus Walking* heightens our attention to the interrelationships of things in their temporal-spatial unfolding. I argue that structural films discern and articulate daily experiences through the manipulation of the film medium. This kind of film making, privileging the concrete phenomenon and its unfolding in timespace is a form of phenomenological study (of the film material and the experience of viewing) or even a modality of rhythmanalysis. It is a cultural practice that exemplifies phenomenology as a method of investigating lived life.

Fergus did not walk in a vacuum but in the unfolding of temporal-spatial relations circumscribed by material agents. Walls, house doors, street signs, cars parked on the side of the road configure a mundane street scene, yet the estrangement of their relations to the pedestrian (due to the cutting strategy employed) sensitise the viewer to the dormant functions these objects operate in our day-to-day experience. The inanimate objects that jerk about with the moving body and the striking perceptual effects make the viewer look afresh at the seemingly separated existence of the animate and the inanimate. The graffiti, the pavement and other material affinities beckon our attention as they constitute the rhythmic bundle of walking. Are the rhythms of bodily movement conjoined by other things on the street worthy of attention for cultural-historical research? Or is it just a trivial pursuit on the periphery of the big political issues such as class, race and equality? Indeed, these are the questions that can be tangentially addressed by *Fergus Walking*, a film that challenges our perceptual architecture. The art form of the film and the effects it conveys are akin to what cultural theorist Ben Highmore argues as ‘the metapolitical pedagogy’, by which he means how cinema, photography and other visual art forms are also the ‘training ground,

sensitising us to the textures and tempos of the daily' (2011: 51). Thus the value of artworks does not reside in their representational role in relation to the everyday, but in 'the aesthetic regime of artworks on our senses, on the sensate world we perceive and experience, and in doing so gives new significance to the ordinary, as well as transforming our experience of the ordinary' (ibid.).

The attention to the ordinary practice of walking and a re-perceptualisation of the interrelationships of things unravels a concatenation of rhythmic relations. In the following section of the paper, I pursue a rhythmanalysis of walking in the Wapping area by the late 1970s and early 1980s. A series of campaigns were organised by the locals who used temporal-spatial tactics to combat the problems of mobility. The particular case I will be looking at is the East-West Road Campaign. It was initiated and participated by the local residents who were in opposition to a proposal for a trunk road that would cut through the centre of Wapping (which would effectively disintegrate the close-knit community). The provision of pedestrian pavement, children's play areas and parks were in a state of contestation with that of the motorways and flyovers. I shall tentatively map out how walking practices punctuate the daily lives of the residents which endow the community with a distinct set of rhythmic assemblage (for instance women walked to get their shopping due to the lack of public transport, children had to walk a long way to go to school and the inhibition to get close to The Highway where accidents happened frequently). Community here is referred to as 'a process of human action in time' (Farrar 2002: 90). Therefore the empirical dimension of community formation is given primary attention rather than the imaginary conception of it. By exploring the walking rhythms enacted by pedestrians (and other material agents) which were nevertheless imbricated in the rhythms of transportation and the pace of corporation development for instance, I am hoping to concretise the dialectical effect of urban gentrification (in this case the Docklands) and the spatial-temporal make up of a community. A rhythmanalysis of walking weaves a complex tapestry of social experience not only circumscribed in the area of Wapping but also of those other associated rhythmic assemblages. Lefebvre seeks to disentangle the rhythmic relations to unveil the enigma of social life:

How does *each party* (individual-group-family, etc.) manage to insert its own rhythms amongst those (different) others, including the rhythms imposed by authority? In this insertion of rhythms 'of the self' into rhythms 'of the other', what is the role of radical separation and compromises, of tolerance and violence (Lefebvre 2004: 99)?

The East-West Road Campaign

In East London, broken-backed dockers of a certain age possess that distinctive hunch which, when they walk, makes them roll from side to side, like the ships they once serviced; these days they can be observed sitting in fold-up chairs on

little squares of grass, gently nodding to the rhythmic thud of pile-drivers
(Schwarz 1991: 83).

The physical landscape of London's Docklands went through a vast transformation by the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. Activities of the local manufacturing industry had already declined and the dereliction site awaited private investment. With every effort composed to efface its history of the docks and of the dockers, private enterprises projected a future plan for the Docklands as a place of leisure and hedonistic consumption. The St Katharine and London Docks closed in 1968 and as the dock activities moved downstream, the local economic plight turned Wapping into a series of derelict industrial sites surrounding a population of some four thousand people. The young and economically active Wappingites were moving out of the area to find new jobs, leaving behind those who were unable to find suitable employment. The low level of public services in the region was partly attributed to the decline of the working population. The area of Wapping was 'one of the very few in Docklands (Surrey Docks is another) in which land for large-scale renewal is immediately available' (A Local Plan for Wapping 1976: 1). What should happen to the renewal of what became known as the Docklands (which included Wapping but extended for miles downriver on both sides of the Thames), was at the heart of strategic concerns of five local authorities, the Greater London Council (GLC), and central government. More significantly was the question of who should have the determining role in shaping the future for places like Wapping. In whose interest was Wapping to be transformed, and whose needs would be met in the process? The rights of its inhabitants were felt to be neglected and constant battles took place with authorities who ignored the voice of those who lived there. A sense of struggle was clearly conveyed in the commentary from the Wapping Parents Action Group (WPAG) – 'Plans for the future of Wapping have been floating down river from Westminster, Chelsea and the Home Counties for thirteen years.

The latest to be washed ashore comes from the Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC)' (WPAG Questionnaire 1983). In 1981, the London Docklands Development Corporation was created by the government as an organisation that oversaw the regeneration of the Docklands area. It had a clear vision of the pace and type of development that was required by market forces. London's Docklands became a testing ground for the Conservative government's urban policies envisaged by Margaret Thatcher. Designed to activate interest and investment from commercial private enterprise, the LDDC was set out to transfer planning controls from the five elected Docklands local authorities to an appointed private sector body. A widely held view shared by local authorities, residents and local trades unionists was that 'the Government is seeking to solve the wrong problem by setting up the LDDC' (Joint Docklands Action Group 1981). The LDDC embodied the Thatcherite's vision of gentrification through privatising public resources. One of the consequences of selling off publicly

owned land (most of the industrial sites were owned by the Port of London Authority) to the hands of entrepreneurial developers was the creation of segregated population. The wealthy lived in close proximity but they were separated from the recently rehoused poor and a rooted community. The recomposition of an economy from locally based industrial activities to globalised financial services was manifested in the syncopation of regeneration rhythms and those of the Dockland's old community. Schwarz (1991: 85) describes the pace of change bearing a week-to-week physical transformation of the landscape as 'inducing in some of us who have witnessed it a queasy vertigo'. The pedestrian had to adjust their walking practices in negotiation with a different set of entity relations, and this in turn generated new rhythmic characters to the area's social interactions. With newly built roads and the provision of public facilities, the old Wapping residents may bear the hope of relief. However, Schwarz emphasised the parallel existence of the new rich to the dispossessed onlookers in the Docklands – 'the old dock walls may have been demolished but at every turn one discovers that "the edge situation" has diligently been privatised, allowing only the most limited public access...the alarms and electronic surveillance, the dogs and private guards' (ibid.: 89).

The geographical and social isolation of Wapping from the rest of the borough meant that its inhabitants organised their daily routines which were distinct to their way of living. Wapping was a small place with its amenities and neighbourhoods in close proximity. One side of Wapping was bounded by the river Thames and the other by the St Katharine and London Docks. A chain of deep water enclosures was formed which separated it from the 'mainland'. Passage to 'the other side', as it was commonly referred to, was via bridges which opened to allow ships into, across and out of the water basins. The Highway, then as now an inner city motorway (along with the commercial development and empty docks) marked the northern boundary of Wapping, forming as much of a barrier between Wapping and the rest of Tower Hamlets as the docks themselves. A strong white working class community had grown up within this isolated area and they lived in a mix of local council, Greater London Council (GLC) and private rented accommodation. The closure of the Docks brought an influx of working class tenants onto the GLC estates from other parts of London. The close-knit community in Wapping was delineated not only by its geographical position but also by the high degrees of social interaction, networks of relationships, shared sentiments and attachment. The necessity to travel out of Wapping in order to get anything beyond daily essentials, and the frustration and fatigue of walking long distances was integral to the experience of its residents. When the docks closed there were two church primary schools but other essential facilities such as supermarkets, secondary schools, a doctor's surgery, and a pharmacy were non-existent in Wapping. To the elderly people who could not walk a long way to get out of the area, Wapping had the air of a prison.⁴ Once

children reached secondary school, they needed to cross The Highway to get to school everyday – either elsewhere in the borough, or for those going to grammar or Catholic secondary schools, to the other side of London. With no traffic lights, only one zebra crossing and no pelican crossing this was a dangerous daily exercise. Women mostly walked to the local shops and only a bus ride could get them to the nearest shopping centres and supermarkets in the Borough of Hackney. There was no service to Watney Street market which was the most used shopping centre (A Local Plan for Wapping 1976: 14). The inconvenience of getting to places outside of Wapping was exacerbated by the lack of public transportation and the very low level of car ownership. There was only one bus No. 67 operating in the area which passed through Wapping on a circular route from Stamford Hill. It did not run on Sundays which meant that old people who relied on bus service to go to one of the markets or to visit younger friends or relatives living outside the area were confined by the lack of convenient transport. Walking is the mode of movement that connected people and places in Wapping, creating a pace of life peculiar to the community. Based on experience and necessity, their scheduling of the day may be configured or confined by the temporal-spatial network that structured their modes of mobility which overtime may form a persistent cadence that interconnects the activity of the community. Compared to travelling on the bus to reach a single destiny, the reliance on walking to get to places initiate a different kind of rhythm. It is more likely that the woman who walks to do local shopping would also drop by her neighbours for a chat or have other things planned on the route. Few walks in Wapping would be uninterrupted, as people would invariably meet, greet and conduct conversations.

Walking as a mode of mobility created a symbiotic relationship of a range of social encounters. Bodily adaptations to the specificity of material agents (both the facilitators and hindrance of walking), such as the cobbled streets, the high prison-like walls that delineated the docks, the basins, warehouses, bridges and bollards, steps and so on, structured preferred routes, sensual anticipations and sequence of movements; enacting a rhythmic assemblage that marked out a Wapping community. The objects on the street which appeared to be a random collection of things to the outsider were rhythmic wayfinders to the children who went a long way to attend and return from schools. They would have to gauge the time sufficient to cross The Highway by learning to listen to the traffic, a skill if failed to grasp could lead to fatal accidents. The final local plan drafted by the Borough's council indicated that pedestrian routes were virtually non-existent. The Highway, with its swiftly flowing traffic caused numerous road casualties, flagging the need of any plan for Wapping to improve footpaths throughout the area and to provide access to open space along the river banks which had been denied for generations.(A Local Plan for Wapping 1976: 15).

The discontent with both the local and central government's negligence over the community's need spawned numerous local action groups throughout the

1970s and 1980s. They included the Wapping Parents Action Group (WPAG), the Isle of Dogs Action Group (IDAG) and later the East End Dockland Action Group (EEDAG), the Limehouse Action Group, the Spitalfield Action Group. These formations were part of a long established local campaigning tradition. Angered by the LDDC's apparent ignorance and contempt to the needs of ordinary working people, they provided a focus for resisting to the policies and practices of LDDC (Foster 1999). In a letter addressing to all Tower Hamlets councillors, the Joint Docklands Action Group urged a rejection of the LDDC's document 'The Future for Wapping'. The plan received strong opposition since it pre-empted the authority for the Tower Hamlets Council and it undermined the democratic rights of the residents to be involved in devising and implementing local plans. Furthermore, it did not meet the needs or reflect the views of Tower Hamlets residents. A letter was sent to all the Tower Hamlets councillors in 1983 which clearly stated the Joint Docklands Action Group's attitudes toward rejecting the LDDC's document 'The Future for Wapping'. There was a demand to have control over the planning of Wapping in the hands of its inhabitants – 'another way of looking at the future of Wapping through the eyes of those who already live here' (WPAG's commentary in response to LDDC's Future Plan for Wapping). When big ideas were conceived by the LDDC to gentrify the area, there was scant regard to the trickle-down effect on how the local community would operate. Protests had already begun to hit the headlines when the new Docklands Partnership Scheme declared that new roads could attract industry back to East London. The shape of things to come was that 'if there are to be bigger and better roads to keep traffic flowing across and around London, the latest proposals suggest that TH [Tower Hamlets] will have to bear the brunt of them' (Jempson's article A-E shape of things to come 6th Jan 1978).

The Wapping Parents Action Group (WPAG) pinpointed what had been left out in the grand vision envisaged by LDDC – the daily conduct of an ordinary Wapping resident,

We need safer zebra or pelican crossings. There should be traffic lights at every junction with roads into Wapping. Speed restrictions and double-parking bans must be enforced...In other parts of London which have been 'gentrified', complex traffic restrictions have been introduced, from 'sleeping police-men' to road closures and one-way systems, and bollards. While time and money are always spent on protecting and assisting the motorists almost nothing is done for pedestrians. An urgent study is needed to make sure that Wapping will become a safe place for those without car.

On public transport the LDDC has little to say, on the horrors of the Highway there is nothing, but plenty of thought has been given to the parking problems of the future (WPAG questionnaire commentary).

The women of Wapping had always been at the forefront of battling against adverse changes to the area. Prior to the East-West Road Campaign, waves of protests organised by the parents in Wapping were triggered by the accidents of

two nine-year-old girls run over by police cars. Young women and mothers organised a sit-down protest which diverted traffic from Wapping Lane to draw attention to the issue. The strategy of road blockade was later appropriated in several campaigns that advocated pedestrian security and access to walking space (Interview with Mike Jempson). For instance, on 13th June 1978, traffic halted for the pram-pushing and banner-waving mums (one of the banners says 'we want traffic lights') whose presence formed a blockade on the Highway and brought rush-hour traffic to a standstill. The first reaction against the proposal of East-West road was led by WPAG in 1981.⁵

The East-West Road Campaign was a protest against re-routing a road that would have sliced the community in half. It was designed to cut through Wapping from East to West and to provide two-way bus services, access for private cars and for industrial and tourist traffic. A report (Mike Jempson, undated) on the meeting with Tower Hamlets Director of Development and architects revealed the incentive to have some form of East-West road connection cutting across Wapping. The requirement of an East-West access to Wapping was aimed for commercial and industrial development. Cutting through the heart of Wapping's communities, the impact of building the East-West Road was to be felt by the majority of the residents. According to an unpublished record, the proposed effects of the road being built was that

the road runs between both parks in Wapping (the widening of the road Green Bank will require a loss of a strip of park to accommodate a new pavement), between all the schools, and alongside numerous listed buildings, as well as through the middle of two major existing housing areas, beside St. Patrick's Church and right through the existing site of Norfolk Newlay Eggs (Wapping Plan, undated).

According to the results of a questionnaire that consulted Wappingites for their opinions on the potential changes to the area, including the proposed East-West Road, remarks by a few residents showed their disbelief in any benefits coming from new roads such as the East-West Road. Given the route of the planned East-West Road, the alignment of corners and junctions would involve the road coming very close to existing houses, shops and amenities (Mike Jempson, undated report). As one resident expressed in the questionnaire – 'roads are my main concern. The Highway must be the worst road in the East End. The new road will come right past my door' (Wapping Items 1983). Major objections to the proposal included noise and pollution that may disturb existing residential areas and the fact that the East-West Road would run alongside two school playgrounds which may endanger the safety of children crossing roads (Wapping Items 1983). In the letter written by members of the 'No East-West Road Group' (a broader coalition set up by WPAG) to the Environment Minister Peter Shore, they pointed out that the route of the road involves a costly alteration to a new all-weather football pitch and adversely affect the surrounding buildings (East London Advertiser, 6th

Jan 1978).

The WPAG further uncovered the hidden incentives of LDDC. Its transport planning was to carve Wapping up into a series of valuable and less valuable land. The report produced by LDDC showed that the traditional North-South Routes into Wapping would largely give way to the new East-West Road with feeder-roads branching off it (LDDC 1983). At the time of the proposal, Wapping High Street was the only East-West connection road at the time. It was then a cobbled road parallel with the river, with no shops, houses or workplaces. The use of the new road would spare the Wapping High Street for exclusive riverside development. The result of having a motorway driving through the centre of the council estate while pedestrianising Wapping High Street was that all the land to the south of the new road will be immensely valuable; making it an attractive site for offices and expensive riverside homes. A public consultation was unlikely to be conducted as the Council was granting itself permission. Such was the cause which precipitated the East-West Road campaign. 'All that will stop it is to create sufficient public outcry to embarrass the Council into changes or get the Minister to "call it in" and make the decision himself' (Wapping Plan, undated). In 1981, a series of campaigns (the first one started in May) were organised by the Association of Wapping Residents – a loosely knit group fronted by 'old Wappingites' (some of whom appeared less concerned about the interests of the relative newcomers). They followed the tactics originally used by the WPAG who also backed the campaign. On several occasions they blocked The Highway at inconvenient times (including rush hours) so that traffic was redirected down the planned route of East-West Road. The disrupted traffic flow demonstrated the opposition to the plan by simulating and magnifying the effects of having busy traffic in the heart of Wapping's estates.

Early one morning, led by many of Wapping's elderly residents, people marched in an unending stream across a pedestrian crossing on the Highway, the main through-way for heavy vehicles north of the Thames to the east of Tower Bridge. Highly organised and using walkie-talkies to co-ordinate events, demonstrators successfully blocked the road for several hours, forcing heavy traffic down through streets along the designated path of the new trunk road. Traffic soon came to a halt, and was held there long enough to give the press the opportunity to document events and the community to tell their side of the story, which had hitherto failed to be taken into account (cSpace, accessed 10th March 2012).

The East-West road proposal was abandoned as a result of the campaign which only marked the beginning of a whole series of protests in the Docklands over the next ten years. The East-West Road campaign took place in a social climate of radical transformations of the Docklands. Organised by the Wapping residents who were in defence of their common interests and shared experience, some concerted resistance were undertaken to combat the profit-orientated proposals put forward by governmental bodies and private enterprise. They relied primarily on walking as the mode of mobility to conduct their daily routines hence they

were acutely aware of the potential rhythmic fragmentation of their community if the inner city motorway was to be built. The tactic of using bodily presence to disrupt the traffic rhythms was effectively undertaken because the residents were most familiar with the temporal-spatial organisation of the area. The intricacy of social relationships were orchestrated in the choreography of bodily movement which would be drastically affected in the face of a ruthless surgery to the make-up of the community. With the decline of the local industry in the docks and global money moving in, the Conservative flagship project pioneered by LDDC foresaw a 'systematic centralisation of power and erosion of local autonomy' (Bianchini & Schwengel 1991: 224). The rhythms of macro-strategic capital mobilisation overshadowed that of the local as it was caught in the gap of regional decline and selective regeneration, favouring those with consuming power. By reactivating the pedestrian experience in Wapping in the prism of rhythmanalysis, it is plausible to draw out relations of forces which shows 'how national and global rhythms increasingly pulse through place' (Edensor 2010: 3). The method of rhythmanalysis eschews the compartmentalised and static view of social transformation. The assemblage of rhythms, those of bodily rhythms and institutional rhythms and their ongoing negotiation propose a way of cultural analysis that looks at the concrete lived experience.

Conclusion

Walking is an intermittent movement as bodily rhythms are enacted to connect the singular body to the world. With the alternating foot pressing the ground, his or her bodily rhythms attune to the world as one latches onto the environment. A pedestrian is woven to the urban landscape through visual, auditory perception, olfactory and haptic engagement as well as other nuanced sensations such as speed, warmth, humidity (and other nameless sensory faculty) which constitute a rhythm of walking that may be beyond conscious reflection. The attempt to conduct a rhythmanalysis of a singular body in motion does not preclude the concatenation of rhythms which compose and are composed by a particular bodily rhythm. Instead, an osmotic relationship that characterised the temporal-spatial unfoldings is proposed here. The generative capacity of material affordances is integral to the formation of walking rhythms. Pavements, road crossing, traffic lights, stations and motorways are no longer stationary backdrop of a place but they actively structure one's preference of routeways and other habitual patterns of engaging with the surroundings.

My interest in a rhythmanalysis of walking is evoked by the film *Fergus Walking*. The film belongs to the 1970s structural film tradition which fundamentally reflects on the material conditions of film practices and the relationship between viewers, the film apparatus and the world of things. There is no plot or narrative to *Fergus Walking*. The duration of the film is the equivalent

to that of the shooting practice. As a viewer, we are denied any identification with Fergus. The street he walked down (Bromley Street) took on a life of its own with the ‘inanimate’ things coming to the foreground clamouring for attention. The editing technique used by the film maker William Raban presents us a complex rhythmic relations between things – street signs, house doors and windows, cars passing by and so on. Raban did not set out to conduct a historical study of the East End of London (although it is tempting to infer from the images of impoverished urban landscape). However, what the film does to the viewer is to sensitise them to a phenomenological understanding of walking, of uncovering the interrelationships amongst people and things by de-familiarising us to the process of watching someone (from a fixed stand point) walking past. The ‘redeeming power’ of the film medium lies in its capturing and restoring of what was neglected and unwilled. The viewer is left in a state of puzzlement that can not be resolved without actively questioning how the uncanny effects of disjointed temporal-spatial relations come into being. The once inanimate objects (walls, street signs, house doors) are foregrounded and they become rhythmic clues to our perception of Fergus’ walking experience. With a keen interest in the materiality of film, a notion Gidal refers to as ‘not to a purely physical, mechanical, or substantive concept, but to an effect of spatial and temporal ordering’ (Rodowick 1988: 131). The asceticism of structural film making, its refusal to use films as tools of representing reality, and its preference for showing the world as it is, render such form of artistic practice an apposite means of conducting a phenomenological inquiry and rhythmanalysis. It is rather the means of sensitising the viewer to the temporal-spatial relationships of Fergus’ movement and the world of things he was walking with. From the bodily rhythms to those that incessantly interact with them, the centrifugal attention of viewers (to which the film activates) is apt for a political examination of walking practices.

The struggle of the Wapping community was caused by the lack of transport infrastructure which restricted the mobility of the residents. The reliance on walking to get to places were also teemed with inconvenience and safety problems. The rhythms of walking bleed into those of the other daily activities conducted by the local residents. Decisions about the time and place to do one’s shopping or meeting relatives for instance were delimited by the poor facilities and transport networks in Wapping; setting up a pattern of social interaction and rhythmicity inherent to the community of Wapping. Their trajectories of intersection and separation generate meeting points in places. Edensor elucidated a phenomenological approach to the understanding of social rhythms when he noted that ‘shops, bars, cafes, garages and so forth are meeting points at which individual path congregate, providing geographies of communality and continuity within which social activities are co-ordinated and synchronised’ (Edensor 2010: 8). Problems arise when the flow of rhythmic interrelations were broken down and being replaced by those fragmented, syncopated and even inhibited rhythms.

The East-West Road campaign took place in a climate of radical transformation of the Docklands' physical landscape. I argue that the Conservatism flagship project pioneered by LDDC can be seen as a series of rhythmic interventions in the community of Wapping. Rhythmanalysis channels our attention to bodily movements such as walking and the method raised the question of how the re-negotiations of the interrelationships of pedestrians and the surrounding material agents signified a volatile period of historical change. By exploring the mundane practice of walking, one inevitably shifts back and forth between bundles of rhythms which infiltrate and resist each other. The rhythmanalytic attention to the interaction and orchestration of the array of temporal-spatial relationships portrays social transformation on the level of lived experience.

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Notes

- ¹ Ingold distinguishes being as 'occupying' the world and 'inhabiting' the world. By 'inhabiting', he emphasised the embeddedness of being in the world; its ever evolving coexistence. He negates the view of seeing the world as a stage, a 'surface' to which the actors perform against.
- ² Apart from the London Film Makers' Cooperative, there were parallel movements of structural film making in New York and in other European centres.
- ³ For further information on the LFMC's social relations of production, the ethics of their work and reception, see Gidal 1980: 151-71.
- ⁴ A pensioner recorded his experience of living in Wapping in the 1970s in the form of a diary.
- ⁵ Formed in 1972, the local group was established as a united reaction against the running down of a 'West Indian' child by a speeding police car in Wapping Lane. Led by mostly women who were active in organising weekly meetings to initiate improvements of local facilities and qualities of life in Wapping (WPAG background info see single sheet). It was also about defending the rights of its residents in the face of unjust decisions. The Wapping Parents Action Group was later transformed to the History of Wapping Trust.

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Online Resources

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- Lux: [http://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/william_raban/essay\(1\).html](http://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/william_raban/essay(1).html) (accessed 19th January 2012)

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