

A Reply to Marianna Papastephanou's Review of Time and the Rhythms of Emancipatory Education

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As we all know it, writing and reading takes time. In the contemporary social and academic context, often shaped by a destabilizing sense of acceleration and urgency, protecting the moments required for such 'time-consuming' activities is not something that can be taken for granted anymore. The way we commit to a specific task expresses as much about the meaning it may carry that what we say or write about it. I am therefore particularly grateful that Marianna Papastephanou accepted to read so carefully *Time and the Rhythms of Emancipatory Education*. The relevance of her comments and questions make me feel that she really understood what I have tried to accomplish in this monograph. As an embedded watermark, the time 'encapsulated' in the writing of her text also reveals something about the topicality of this theme for researchers in education. Among the numerous comments and questions formulated by Papastephanou, I have chosen to focus on four issues that appear to me as particularly crucial to explore: the importance of the concept of rhythm in education; the ambivalences and the rhythmicity of emancipatory education; the fluctuating nature of the relationships between individual and collective changes; and the recursive dimension of rhythmanalysis as a time to 'negotiate' the rhythms we live through.

The Importance of the Concept of Rhythm in Education

As summarized by Papastephanou, I claim in this book that the concept of rhythm is particularly valuable to explore how to theorize the experience of time and the relationship between time and education. I believe indeed that «this concept plays... a critical role in the understanding of the complexity of temporal phenomena, and that the evolution of its

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use reveals specific dimensions of the social imaginary of time» (Alhadeff-Jones 2017, p. 63). Thus, privileging a rhythmological perspective to question one's experience of time constitutes a strategic move that requires to be explained and contextualized, considering the wide range of use of the term 'rhythm' throughout the history of ideas. Referring to the nuances that appear through the pre-Socratic use of this notion (e.g., in the poetry of Archilochus and Aeschylus), Papastephanou rightly points out the importance to nuance the way it has been interpreted and the necessity to explore the heterogeneous meanings attached to it—beyond philosophy—starting with Greek culture and history. For the reader who would like to comprehend more in depth how the idea of rhythm emerged in the pre-Socratic traditions, and unfolded through Ancient Greek filiations, I can only refer here to the work of scholars such as Benveniste (1966), Sauvanet (1999) or Michon (2017), whose contributions informed my project, but only appear through limited references in my book. As summarized by Sauvanet (1999, p. 6, my translation) «... the Greek *rhuthmos*, in its remarkable semantic plasticity, could restitutes what sometime escapes to rationality: neither a pure essence (too 'fluid' for that), nor a pure phenomenon (too 'formal'), but a *mixed* reality...» The reason why Papastephanou's comment is so crucial is because, beyond the strictly linguistic and philosophical dimensions inherent to a reflection around this concept, referring to its meanings reveals ambiguities that are critical for us to enrich our understanding of educational phenomena, including their ethical dimensions: «...the meaning of *rhuthmos* resonates with the meaning of *ethos*: from the first 'subjective' poet Archiloque (~ 712–648), until Marcus Aurelius (121–170)... the concept of rhythm is inseparable from an ethics, understood from its Greek meaning as a *greater well-being in time*» (Sauvanet 1999, p. 7, my translation). Thus, investigating the rhythms of education is in itself a call for transdisciplinary research, that requires tolerance for theoretical ambiguity, and the recognition of the inquiry's ethical dimensions. In congruence with Edgar Morin's (e.g., 1990/2008) views on science, philosophy and the arts, it may participate to the unfolding of a much needed 'paradigm of complexity' in the academia and beyond.

The Ambivalences and the Rhythmicity of Emancipatory Education

As discussed by Biesta (2010), emancipatory education is full of contradictions. Considering some of them as a starting point for my reflection, I argue that the adoption of a dialogical conception of the relationship between autonomy and dependence (Morin 1980) is critical to overcome apparent paradoxes among the aim of emancipatory education, the status of the subjects involved (e.g., experiences of equality and inequality), and the educational method implemented (e.g., activities based on trust or suspicion). The idea and the ideals of emancipation have to be conceived with caution, especially considering the failure of political utopias that have shown throughout the recent history that «subjectification (*assujettissements*) is henceforth grounded in principles of emancipation, rather than principles of enslavement (*asservissement*)» (Morin 1980, p. 447, my translation). Emancipation and enslavement always appear through their dialogical relationship. The understanding of their complexity requires the adoption of a principle of thought that goes beyond dualistic oppositions and binary logic.

Considering emancipation as a rhythmic process suggests one to conceive it as an ever-flowing and fluctuating phenomenon, rather than a static state that would be reached (or lost), through a particular experience of rupture for instance. It also requires one to analyze the specificities of the rhythms experienced individually and collectively at a specific

moment of history (e.g., social or technological acceleration), to grasp what may be at stake in the evolution of the discourses, embodied activities, and social interactions, that determine one's own experience of autonomy and dependence. Whenever emancipation is conceived through time—not only the time of history, but also the time of the everyday life—what may appear at first as contradictory aspects of one's experience reveals itself through the flux of life, as evolving features that display the pulse of daily activities and states of mind, and the ebb and flow of existence. Conceiving the dyad autonomy-dependence as always fluctuating, organized around antagonistic forces and principles, is therefore facilitated by an explicit reference to the concept of rhythm.

Furthermore, focusing on the rhythms of emancipation should bring us to question the qualities of the emancipatory process, at least as much as the nature of the states that are supposed to be reached or aimed at. Thus, «idiorythmy» —the quest and assertion of one's own particular (*idios*) rhythm—may constitute an ideal worth fantasizing about (Barthes 2012/2002). As other ideals, the way it may calibrate a movement of emancipation remains nevertheless problematic. What remains central is to question how such interpretations evolve through time and influence one's actions. The ways we act and interpret our experiences express patterns that tend to be repeated and display therefore some form of rhythmicity. It is through the emergence and the repetition of specific patterns that people may emancipate themselves; it is also by breaking through patterns that people may increase their agency (in the book, I take the example of 'transgression' as a specific pattern of emancipation, to discuss this duality). What appears critical is to develop a language to interpret and evaluate the discursive, embodied and social qualities that characterize the movement through which patterns of emancipation evolve. Inspired by Sauvanet's (2000) reflections, I believe that the rhythms of emancipation display three features: (a) patterns, that may be (b) periodically repeated, and that constitute (c) a movement, whose historicity is fundamentally made of discontinuities and ruptures. As Papastephanou clarified it well, such a position does not pertain that rupture or transgression have value per se and that emancipation should be reduced to this specific feature of the rhythmicity of life. It all depends on the qualities of the rhythms experienced and the way they are lived, interpreted and negotiated, individually and collectively.

The Fluctuating Nature of the Relationships Between Individual and Collective Changes

As an ongoing movement, a process of emancipation is built through always evolving interactions, as much as it may be identified through the features attributed to an individual or a collectivity at a specific time of their life (i.e., being or not being emancipated). Such a movement is neither constant, nor totally erratic:

«The dialogic between emancipation and alienation, autonomy and dependence, must therefore be conceived neither as fully ordered nor as fully disordered. It is constituted by evolving forms organized through time—"forms in movement" that we can conceive, based on the etymology of the term... as the expressions of a *rhuthmos* (Michon 2005, 2007)» (Alhadeff-Jones 2017, p. 146).

Conceiving emancipation as the expression of a *rhuthmos* leads to another consequence: it enables one to change the focus of interpretation, when considering the relationships between individuality and collectivity. Rather than considering individuals or collectivities

primarily through the stability of their attributes, a rhythmological perspective reveals the possibility to identify them as emergences whose features and interactions fluctuate. Rather than considering the existence of ‘beings’ as a prior condition to study their interrelations, the movement of their corporeal and discursive activities can be conceived as the primary locus of analysis to understand how they are formed or transformed (Michon 2005).

As noted by Papastephanou, such considerations play a critical role when considering the tensions between individual changes and social transformations. The intuition I developed as I wrote this book (an intuition that would require now further development) is that a rhythmic conception of emancipatory education is congruent with a social theory such as Archer’s (1979) morphogenetic theory, according to which the nature of the timing between decisions made at the level of individuals, on the one hand, and the windows of opportunity provided by changes occurring at the level of culture and social structures, on the other hand, constitutes a critical aspect of social transformations. From a rhythmic perspective, what becomes critical, for those aiming at social change through educational praxis, may thus appear through the capacity to identify the ‘opportune time’—the *kairos*—a moment characterized by the synchronization between different rhythms, through which individual agency may effectively influence collective changes. Those considerations raise questions about the ways one develops the capacity to discriminate, interpret, examine, argue and judge what may be the ‘right’ timing to alter and transform both individual and collective experiences of temporal constraints (Alhadeff-Jones 2017, p. 215).

The Recursive Dimension of Rhythmanalysis as a Time to ‘Negotiate’ the Rhythms we Live Through

Such considerations bring me to consider one last question raised by Papastephanou: «...what temporality may lie within negotiation?» According to her stimulating analysis: «...both ethics and politics of time involve much more than negotiation and should go beyond it...to ‘negotiate’ has an etymology, a temporal axis and a history that make it an ethically and politically ambiguous concept rather than a panacea.» By referring to the etymology of the term («a specific temporal negation, a suspension of free time, for the sake of reaching a decision and of speeding up a process of agreement»), Papastephanou stresses the ambiguity inherent to any reference to this notion, especially from a temporal perspective.

In my opinion, questioning the time involved in the way we experience and decide how to proceed, when facing heterogeneous, complementary, antagonistic and contradictory rhythms, is critical to foster emancipatory education. This is the reason why I am concluding my book with considerations around the idea of rhythmanalysis. Rhythmanalysis constitutes a critical project for at least two reasons. First, as suggested by Bachelard (1950), it provides us with a frame to conceive the work required to critically reflect on, and regulate, the rhythms of one’s life, to find balance and claim one’s own ‘idiorhythm’ (Barthes 2012/2002). Rhythmanalysis also involves social critique and collective change, as suggested by Lefebvre (2004/1992). Its second aim is therefore to identify, among others temporal constraints, social ‘arrhythmia’ —the lack of rhythm—and transform the way it impacts social and cultural life.

As I conceive it, rhythmanalysis is part of a larger educational process: through it, people have to learn to discriminate, interpret, examine, and argue about the value of the rhythms they live through. They also have to learn to judge and eventually challenge the

legitimacy of such rhythms (or lack of rhythms). Papastephanou's comment point out the fact that when conceived as a 'negotiation', such a process is in itself inscribed in a temporality that should not be taken for granted. As I understand this aspect, the way individuals or collectivities may negotiate the rhythms of their own existence displays in itself a rhythmicity that requires to be critically assessed, especially as it reveals organizational and institutional constraints. Taking this recursive dimension as a matter of reflection is close to what psychoanalysts or socialanalysts do when they work on transference and counter-transference in their praxis. Rhythmanalysis involves therefore a recursive dimension that requires one to consider the rhythms that are, or have been, experienced, in order to envision alternative experiences of time (including what Papastephanou refers to as «counterfactuality or conditionals»).

At the end of her review, Papastephanou questions what may be the *à venir/avenir* for such reflections around time, rhythms and emancipatory education. The future will tell whether the *kairos* of this publication was right to reinforce the development of a research agenda, and beyond, a movement, to collectively reimagine the way we relate to time, from an educational perspective and within the educational praxis. At a time when the rhetoric of 'slow education' or 'accelerated learning' is spreading out, it may be more critical than ever to reinforce those intuitions around the aim of rhythmanalysis to better ground epistemologically, theoretically and practically, the conflicting and nuanced aspects inherent to the experience of time in education. From what I have been observing those past years, I can see a momentum building up around the value of a rhythmological approach in human sciences. My hope is that a community of researchers and practitioners may emerge in the field of education to sustain such a collective effort.

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