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Beyond rhythmanalysis : towards a territoriology of rhythms and melodies in everyday spatial activities



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This paper has already been published in City, Territory and Architecture (2018) 5:4.

Abstract : The recent, rich scholarship on rhythms, following in the wake of Lefebvre's book *Éléments de rythmanalyse* (1992), proves that rhythmanalysis is an important sensitising notion and research technique. Despite its increasing recognition, however, rhythmanalysis has not yet become a proper science as its proponents had hoped. In this article, we argue that rhythmanalysis could benefit from being further developed and integrated into a wider science of territories. What research must attain is, we suggest, not simply a recording, description or analysis of rhythms ; instead, the goal is to capture the life of rhythms as they enter territorial formations. A neo-vitalistic conception, in other words, could enrich the standard social-scientific understanding of the relation between rhythms and territories. More specifically, we submit that the notion of rhythm could be explored not only in terms of the recurrent patterns of association it defines, but also with essential reference to the intensive situations and moments it generates and, in the end, territorialises.

Keywords : Social rhythms, Rhythmanalysis, Synchronisation, Science of territories, Territorial intensities

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Despite the increasing recognition of the importance of rhythms in social and urban studies, rhythmanalysis has not yet become a proper science or a discipline in a specific sense, as its proponents had hoped.¹ Since the slim but important contribution on rhythmanalysis by Henri Lefebvre was published in 1992, shortly after its author's death—and especially since its translation into English in 2004 curated by Stuart Elden (Lefebvre 1992, 2004)—we have seen a wide variety of different studies in rhythmanalysis, often with an empirical focus (e.g., McCormack 2002, 2014 ; Highmore 2005 ; Cronin 2006 ; Edensor and Holloway 2008 ; Middleton 2009 ; Edensor 2010, 2012 ; Prior 2011 ; Lin 2012 ; Simpson 2012 ; Schwanen et al. 2012 ; Smith and Hetherington 2013a, b ; Wunderlich 2013 ; Goh 2014 ; Yeo and Heng 2014 ; Mulícek et al. 2015 ; Paiva 2016 ; Reid-Musson 2017). This scholarship proves that rhythmanalysis is extremely important and helpful as a sensitising attitude and a research technique in the social and spatial sciences. It is even safe to grant that rhythmanalysis has become an acknowledged method of inquiry soon to be admitted in methodology textbooks. In this piece, however, we argue that social scientific scholarship should now also move beyond rhythmanalysis. Clearly, this does not mean to throw away the many important insights contained in the rhythmanalytical understanding of social timespaces. Instead, we suggest, a benefit could come from further developing and integrating such insights into an enlarged science of territories and territorial formations.

Rhythmanalysis, we suggest, is an essential component for general territoriology (Kärrholm 2007 ; Brighenti 2010 ; Brighenti and Kärrholm forthcoming). Our proposal is to incorporate the notion of rhythm inside a theoretical framework that enables us to embark in the integral study of processes of social formation and territorialisation at large. Just as rhythms are spatialised times and, simultaneously, temporalised spaces, so territories are no less temporal than spatial (Brighenti and Kärrholm 2016). Territories are constituted through rhythms, but concurrently rhythms themselves—as they explicate themselves socially, biologically or ecologically—cannot but become territorialised. Following an insight from Deleuze and Guattari (1980), the life of territories can be said to be not only rhythmic, but also melodic. From this perspective, rhythms remain essential, but they are far from exhausting the phenomenon of territorialisation as a whole. In this case, territories could be seen as refrains of rhythms and melodies joint together ; but just as refrains cannot exist without some melody and rhythm, so lived rhythms are in turn always impregnated with melodies and refrains (cf. McCormack 2002 ; Grosz 2008). [...]