

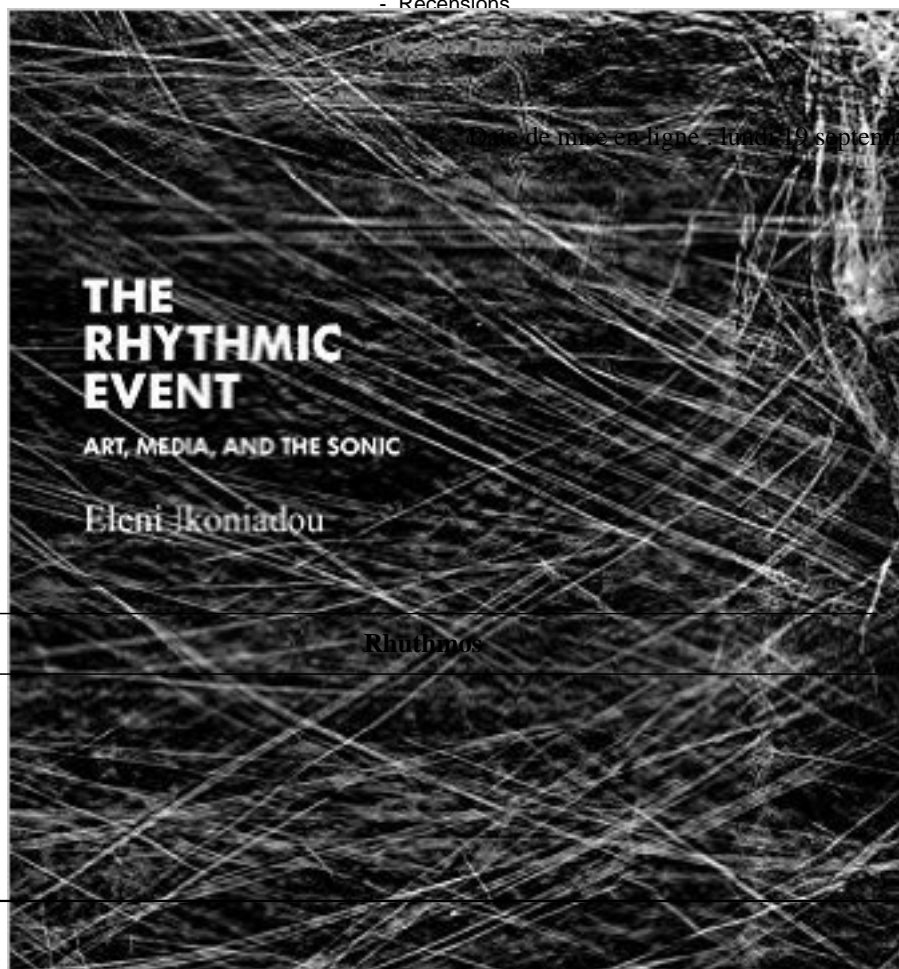
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# Eleni IKONIADOU, The Rhythmic Event. Art, Media, and the Sonic

- Lectures  
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Eleni IKONIADOU, *The Rhythmic Event. Art, Media, and the Sonic*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2014, 117 pages.

A much-needed contribution to the field of media philosophy, sound and digital studies, this book is petit and extremely dense. Part of Brian Massumi and Erin Manning's *Technologies of Lived Abstraction* series with MIT Press, Ikoniadou's latest work shows the extent to which research in the area of affective digital technology and art is steadily progressing.

Ikoniadou's interest focuses on the notions of rhythm and event and understands them as central for the development of a new non-anthropocentric rhythmanalysis of digital sonic art that helps exploring "the inconceivable, the unnameable, and the unknowable forces of time" (84). The aim of the work is to provide a fresh perspective to a speculative philosophy of media that focuses on the creative unpredictability of the event. The originality with which this goal is successfully achieved provides plenty of food for thought for further scholarship.

Ikoniadou's work goes a long way toward opening up the notion of rhythm and disentangling it from a tradition of thought that understands it in connection with structure and meter. Rather than being comparable with Platonic form, or Heraclitean flow, rhythm becomes here a "tremulous undulation" (13). The rhythmic and vibrational ontology (see Goodman 2009) here proposed also reminds of debates raised in Modernity and highlights an historical and theoretical continuum that is hinted to in relation to the work of Friedrich Nietzsche, but that could focus more on a non-strictly philosophical heritage (see Bode 2014 and Laban 2014).

From an immanent ontological stance deriving from her radical empiricistic approach, Ikoniadou develops a concept of the event and of 'futurity' defined as 'pure becoming', in antithesis to ways of understanding the future under the light of probability, and therefore predictability. The author maintains that futurity can provide us with a horizon of freedom and hope in relation to current state of affairs in neo-liberal societies. Contrary to what she identifies as a common critique to abstract materialism, the claim of the book is that exchanging probability with futurity can impact on the way we look art as much as current socio-economic issues.

Sonic art is successfully presented in the book as an exemplary milieu where the unpredictable aspects of the rhythmic event may be evanescently and pre-consciously felt. Besides aiming to disentangle sound studies from music studies, the focus on the digital proposes, importantly, to revise theories that depict it as necessarily discreet versus a putative continuous analogue tight theoretically to (a restricted view of) the Bergsonian *duree*. Moreover, the digital also provides the author with a common denominator to explore other non-strictly sound-related examples of interactive media art.

The reader is taken on a compelling tour encompassing thought-experiments, the vibratory life of cells, the affection of media environments, the digital agencies of 'hertzian architectures', dream-like states of altered perception, digital moving-images both in their capacity to upset the notion of time and in their ability to surprise us in their making.

These examples are assembled following a meta-methodology taken from the work of Felix Guattari and entailing "the production of transversal assemblages between heterogeneous fields" with the aim of "construct[ing] a middle-space" (10). In this sense we might say that the author is also sketching out the outline of a rhythmic methodology in itself.

The book is divided in five chapters with introduction and conclusion embracing three sections dedicated to the architecture of the rhythmic event : 'virtual digitality' (27), 'hypersonic sensation' (45) and 'rhythmic time' (67). This harmonious layout works well as a structure from or underneath which the vibratory and turbulent content develops and emerges in several sonic-digital interludes.

Much of the ground covered by the author in the introduction focuses on tracing the heritage of her theoretical approach and defining core themes and concepts. Ikoniadou is furthering her earlier and recent work on rhythm (2012 and 2014) by drawing from the affect- and virtual-related theories of Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari and Brian Massumi. She introduces also the work of Michel Serres, art critic Susanne Langer and some unexpected sources related to the early work of Friedrich Nietzsche, together with more usual mentioning of Henri Bergson's, Gaston Bachelard's and Henri Lefebvre's works on rhythmanalysis.

The challenge that Ikoniadou proposes is to think of rhythm as 'discrete continuity', as a 'centre of indetermination between actual and virtual' (82), and in this sense she maintains that

it is worth thinking of rhythm topologically, as the generative gap that synthetises and connects through immediacy instead of merely unifying instants (37).

Topology can be defined as 'the study of geometrical properties and spatial relations unaffected by the continuous change of shape' (OED) such that it allows change to arise without interruption. This has brought Steven Connor to define it as 'geometry plus time' and 'geometry given body by motion' (2004 : 108). In this regard, the task at hand is to further the parallel made between rhythm and the topological in relation to a more sensuous spatiality. Ikoniadou invites us to uncover the transformative trait of the rhythmic event in other art forms, so we might ask how would the concept of rhythm as rhythmicity or discrete continuum, help in unpacking other aspects of a philosophy of media ? What would a non-digital or not-only-digital and non-human spatialisation of rhythmicity look like and, most importantly, how would it feel and, even, smell like ?

As a counterpart to rethinking the digital, something at the hearth of Ikoniadou's contribution, it seems that to further a speculative philosophy of media we need to look for ways of understanding the impact of rhythmicity ecologically in the interplay of materiality and temporality. The challenge is that of conceiving the enmeshment of rhythm and spatialised matter in analogue yet not anthropocentric and determined terms : as more-than-one (see Manning 2007).

This thought-provoking book unlocks the potential of rhythm and opens up new avenues to exploring both the materiality of the digital and the slippery, shifting dynamics of vibrational bodies.

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