

Rhythm as Aesthetic Commonplace (Part 3)

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Sommaire

- [Early Renaissance Pictorial](#)
- [From Primitive to Modern \(...\)](#)

[Previous chapter](#)

Early Renaissance Pictorial Rhythm (Rintelen - 1912)

Friedrich Rintelen (1881-1926) was a German art historian who spent most of his short career in Basel - Switzerland. In 1912, he published a book on *Giotto und die Giotto-Apokryphen - Giotto and the Giotto Apocrypha*.

In his preface, as it was then customary, Rintelen distanced himself from the old historicist art history and its more or less hidden Hegelian agenda. He rejected the studies which “dissolved the character of individual phenomena in general ‘developmental’ terms [*in allgemeinen, entwicklungsgeschichtlichen Begriffen*].” But the alternative he sought to develop was less clear. He vaguely declared that, for his part, he would seek “to subject the given matter to a few essential viewpoints in order to shed maximum light on its particularity and significance” (p. 1). Among these “essential viewpoints” there was rhythm. However, due to his rejection of historicism, Rintelen could not grant it the same historical significance as Riegl, but he surprisingly never mentioned Schmarsow’s psychological emphasis on experience and movement either. In addition, he stayed aloof from the formalist trend that was emerging in art history in the 1910s at the hands of Wölfflin. Rintelen ended up using the concept of rhythm in a very shallow way. Unless I am mistaken, he nowhere felt compelled to define the concept he massively used.

This could be naturally explained by some theoretical shortcoming peculiar to him or by a claim for sheer empiricism, but since he had been trained as a philosopher and never mentioned empiricism, one may rather think that the term rhythm seemed to him to have gained a common accepted meaning and that it was therefore not necessary to lose time in elaborating it further. We have seen how mistaken such stand was but it tells us a lot: in the 1910s rhythm had become such a commonplace term that an academic could afford to write and publish a book in which it was frequently used, without discussing it properly at least in the introduction or even in a footnote. Consequently, since Rintelen did not grant the reader with an explicit definition, we will have to follow him in his sinuous descriptive path.

Although he did not care for theoretical subtleties, Rintelen was concerned by large and important questions. One of his major aims, which was exposed in the first section of his book devoted to Giotto’s early works in Padua and Florence (ca. 1295-1305), was to determine what elements in Giotto’s work (1267-1337) enabled it to become the very first achievement of the Early Renaissance

in Western art. Most remarkably, his first answer was: rhythm. The “rhythm of the surface arrangement” was, he claimed, “essential” to Giotto’s particular way to distribute the elements of a scene, to “enliven them” and to express through mere painting the highest “idealities.” In addition to the vague notion of “surface arrangement,” the term rhythm here referred to music and poetry as the following mentions of “the melody in the relationship of the bodies to one another “ and “the melodious sound of strong and transparent narrative” indicated.

The essence [of Giotto’s artistry] lies rather in the free way in which Giotto inserts the scenes into the picture surface and enlivens them, in which he raises the scenes to meaningfulness, their obvious sense to ideality, through the rhythm of the surface arrangement [*durch den Rhythmus der Anordnung in der Fläche*]. The fact that the rhythmic design of the surface [*die rhythmische Gestaltung der Fläche*] seems to be an end in itself, and that the melody in the relationship of the bodies to one another is identical with the melodious sound of strong and transparent narrative, produces the special magic which belongs to Giotto’s pictures alone or is, at least, outstandingly peculiar to them. (*Giotto and the Giotto Apocrypha*, 1912, p. 12, my trans.)

A few lines below, in a chapter entitled “The Image and the Narrative,” Rintelen elaborated further the meaning he gave to the term rhythm but this time he referred it to architecture and to what was not yet called narratology. In Giotto’s work, the intelligibility of the rhythm, i.e. the clarity of the arrangement of the painted surfaces, matched that of the sacred story represented in the picture. In a way reminiscent of Augustin (see vol. 1, chap. 9), visual artistic rhythm were reflections of higher divine rhythms transmitted through the Word.

Giotto’s stories are architectures [*Giottos Erzählungen sind Architekturen*]. Every single moment is precisely evaluated and distinctly arranged [*in Scharfer Sonderung eingeordnet*] in the picture in such a way that its representational meaning determines the type and extent of its rhythmic function. Everything is put in the most precise relation and the transparency of the plot [*Handlung*] in Giotto’s pictures is essentially the result of the concise rhythmization of the surfaces. A flexible play of forces, a web of unambiguous relationships, that’s Giotto’s narrative [*das ist Giottos Erzählung*]. (*Giotto and the Giotto Apocrypha*, 1912, p. 13, my trans.)

Another model which influenced Giotto’s particular way to “rhythmize” the painted surface, Rintelen noticed, was the rhythm of the religious theatrical performances called in Italy the *sacre rappresentazioni* – sacred representations. Commenting on the “Presentation of Mary at the Temple,” which was realized in the Arena Chapel in Padua between 1303 and 1305, Rintelen noticed the probable influence of those performances. But he also suggested that the rhythm of the religious service itself could have exerted also some influence on him. Although he unfortunately did not elaborate further, Rintelen introduced here an innovative concern for performativity into the rhythmic issue which met with one of the research program sketched by Pinder at the end of his own study: the relation between the Romanesque architecture and the movements of the crowd in the church.

It has been shown that the religious painting of the 15th century has been influenced in its rhythmic feeling [*rhythmisches Gefühl*] by the spiritual theater [*von der geistlichen Schaubühne*],

and it is believed that the *sacre rappresentazioni* had already had a significant effect on Giotto. In our picture, however, the inner harmony of the rhythm of the composition with the rhythm of the service [*des Gottesdienstes*] itself is too striking for us not to ask how much the young art owed to the Western rite with its free gestural language, its sharp articulation and division, his plastic determination of movements, and his interest in the clear disposition of the masses. (*Giotto and the Giotto Apocrypha*, 1912, p. 60, my trans.)

In the second section of the book, devoted to Giotto's later work in Florence, Rintelen commented on "The Ascension of St John the Evangelist," painted *a secco* in the Peruzzi chapel of the Basilica di Santa Croce – Basilica of the Holy Cross, in Florence and dated ca. 1318-1322. This time, Rintelen paid more attention to the arrangement of the surfaces itself. Using a formalist approach, he pointed out the main structural lines that organized the picture, especially the oblique line of the saint ascending from his grave toward Jesus and the apostles flying in the sky and the vertical lines of the columns of the basilica in which the scene was set, which accentuated the movement of the former. The rhythm was here the result of the relationships and potential conflicts between structural lines.

The Ascension of John is the richest of all the pictures in the cycle; it is at the same time Giotto's most popular fresco. [...] The scene takes place in a basilica extending on the whole surface of the picture and configured in a wholly arbitrary way according to the needs of the composition. [...] The oblique line, which goes from the crypt to the dense celestial flock through the figure of the saint and gives lightness to the large floating figure, undergoes through the strong framing lines of the architecture an increase of its strength which is crucial for the further development of the rhythm of the picture [*die weitere Entwicklung der Rhythmik des Bildes*]. First of all, there are the two columns, which are far apart from each other, and immediately direct the eye toward the figure, bringing the oblique line to its full effect. Equally important is the connection on the left of these columns with the one which, behind the crypt, helps to carry the arch closing the section of the central nave. The saint does not just float out of the broad, clearly visible opening of the floor, but he climbs at the same time out of the vaulted church hall between the columns. (*Giotto and the Giotto Apocrypha*, 1912, p. 151-152, my trans.)

In the last section of the book, Rintelen dealt with what he called the "Apocrypha," that is, the late works whose authorship was not completely ascertained and some of which had been made entirely or partly by assistants. Among those late works, there was the "Stefaneschi Triptych," now in the Vatican Museum, painted in 1320 for Cardinal Giacomo Gaetano Stefaneschi. This painting shows St Peter enthroned with saints on the front, and on the reverse, Christ enthroned, with scenes of the martyrdom of Saints Peter and Paul on the side panels. In this instance, Rintelen came back to the comparison with architecture but in a new sense. The rhythm was only a miniature reproduction of an "architectural rhythm." The painting was treated as a small facade of a building.

The altarpiece was an ensemble of subtle architectural rhythms such as we seldom encounter in the *Trecento*, which is, however, very rich in beautiful picture frames. The panels, which are almost equally high and also differ only slightly in width, run at sharp angles at about two-thirds of the height. These spikes are richly ornamented with gothic crockets, and at the same time light pinnacles rise with them on the posts delimiting the individual panels. (*Giotto and the Giotto Apocrypha*, 1912, p. 215-216, my trans.)

As we can see from the evidence gathered in this section, Rintelen's approach to rhythm was not very clear. He mistakenly considered that the concept was sufficiently stable and, without even recognizing the problem, he gave it many different meanings varying according to his descriptive needs. Yet, we must admit that this rather confusing way of doing research enabled him to introduce, besides its most formalist uses, some innovating pragmatic concerns.

From Primitive to Modern Artistic Rhythm (Ziegler - 1912)

In 1912, the same year as Rintelen—who was exactly of the same age as him and, as a matter of fact, as Brinckmann—the philosopher Leopold Ziegler (1881-1958) published in Leipzig an essay entitled *Florentinische Introduction zu einer Philosophie der Architektur und der bildenden Künste - Florentine Introduction to a Philosophy of Architecture and Visual Arts*. His aim was openly philosophical: he sought to rebuild aesthetic categories, in clear opposition to the neo-Kantian philosophy, dominant at that time, from a viewpoint inspired both by a survey of the Florentine artistic productions during the Renaissance and the latest progress in psychology, sociology, and psychoanalysis, without forgetting a most probable influence from Nietzsche.

Ziegler used the concept of rhythm much less often than Rintelen—with surprisingly very few uses concerning architecture (p. 19, 24, 28, 60) and only one concerning poetry (p. 87). But he devoted ten full pages to discuss it in an elaborate way.

In music and painting, rhythm was, on initial examination, the form given to the medium, be it time or surface, to “infill” it in order to produce some effects on the observer.

The effect of the arts on the observer seems to be in some proportion to the expense of artistic means by the producer. This assumption is convincingly verified by the developmental history of music. If I tentatively called the perfect fresco a continuous infilling of the surface [*eine durchgehende Erfüllung der Fläche*], music might perhaps be described as a rhythmically acoustic infilling of time [*eine rhythmische akustische Erfüllung der Zeit*]. (*Florentine Introduction to a Philosophy of Architecture and the Visual Arts*, 1912, p. 170-171, my trans.)

Musical rhythm, which Ziegler defined as “homophonic intervals in successive time measures [*homophone Klangstufen in wechselnden Zeitmaßen*]” (p. 171), had developed through a long history beginning with the “primitive peoples [*Naturvölker*].” Capitalizing both on evolutionism, which was still widespread at the beginning of the 20th century, and more specifically on Bücher's recent work—without though mentioning him—(see below next chapter), Ziegler argued that acoustic rhythm originally, that is naturally, were entirely “devoid of tones” and directly and exclusively triggered “motor processes, be they dancing, marching or working.”

This more or less abstract rhythm [that is devoid of tones, PM], which is confirmed by connoisseurs of the primitive peoples, triggers a remarkable physiological relaxation in the listener, which does not have much in common with aesthetic pleasures in the present sense: the first effect of the music is entirely motor. The primitive man transforms the acoustically perceived rhythms into motor processes, be they dancing, marching or working. The acoustic apperception has not yet separated from the motor mechanism of the body as an independent, self-contained

perceptual sphere. (*Florentine Introduction to a Philosophy of Architecture and the Visual Arts*, 1912, p. 171, my trans.)

The physiopsychological substratum of mankind explained why, according to him, the “primitive people” felt rhythm only as a succession of motor stimuli and were devoid of any aesthetic “imagination”—but not, he surreptitiously noticed, of “passion” and “eroticism.”

In terms of music history, there is a period in which the acoustic perception still acts exclusively on the motor centre and does not yet possess any significance as an aesthetic process of imagination. The rhythm, which is picked up by the ear, strives to transform immediately into a rhythm of the movements, whose fierceness and passion one may suspect, when one contemplates the deeper connection of dance and eroticism. (*Florentine Introduction to a Philosophy of Architecture and the Visual Arts*, 1912, p. 171-172, my trans.)

The situation changed from the Middle Ages due to the successive development of polyphony and harmony. The rhythm began to lose its lack of tonality and separate from its physiological basis.

With the increasing enrichment of the means of representation the effect of the music changes considerably. The polyphonic music in the Middle Ages as well as the harmonic music in the Modern Age invent a great variety of auditory stimuli that limit the dominant power of the abstract rhythm as much as they dampen the motor effect on the human body. (*Florentine Introduction to a Philosophy of Architecture and the Visual Arts*, 1912, p. 172, my trans.)

At the hands of Western musicians, the rhythm lost its primitive minimalism and repetitiveness and became “a new and incredibly rich organization,” a “cosmos of sounds.” This resulted in a cultural process by means of which—like in Freud’s most recent theory of culture—the “physiological excitation” did not completely disappear but was to a large extent “sublimated.”

The affinity relationships of the sounds to each other, be it by temporal succession as in polyphonic melodies, or simultaneous chords as in harmonic consonance, or modulation in different keys, or liquidation of dissonant intervals, or distinction between the timbres of the various instruments: all this transformed the formerly poor infilling of time through [abstract] rhythms into a new and incredibly rich organization. [...] A cosmos of sounds emerges, which, however, is no longer translated into motor expressions, but is acknowledged as a perception complex endowed with its own value. The physiological excitation does not disappear even in the cultured person [*beim kultivierten Menschen*], as the physical changes, acceleration of the blood circulation and the breath, etc., related with musical pleasure [sufficiently] prove. But the effect is entirely sublimated [*unendlich sublimiert*] with the development of the artistic means. (*Florentine Introduction to a Philosophy of Architecture and the Visual Arts*, 1912, p. 172, my trans.)

Developing an argument close to the Freudian theory of repression, Ziegler explained that, when

hearing a musical rhythm, modern man “prohibits himself to let these movements run and play except inwardly, or ‘virtually.’” He even noticed the pleasure that the latter could possibly find in this process.

The excitations, which nevertheless are unavoidable, are spiritualized and severed from their physiological concomitants as far as the latter are of motor nature. The civilized man [*der kultivierte Mensch*] dances, runs, loves, mourns with the sound perception of the music. But he prohibits himself to let these movements run and play except inwardly, or ‘virtually,’ according to the possibility. What the primitive man [*der Naturmensch*] emits too quickly in a motor discharge, the modern listener retains in himself, stacks in the container of his ideas, enjoying them as a mental possession. This transformation of motor processes [*motorischer Prozess*] into emotional processes [*Gefühlsvorgänge*] is one of the most remarkable human developments. (*Florentine Introduction to a Philosophy of Architecture and the Visual Arts*, 1912, p. 173, my trans.)

As for Freud, this sublimation process of the bodily energy was the basis of all art but, unlike Freud, Ziegler concluded that primitive music was no art at all. Since he did not care to mention tattooing, painting, architecture, nor sculpture, which had yet already in the previous decade attracted Riegl’s or Freud’s attention, not to mention artists such as Vlaminck, Derain, Braque, Picasso or Matisse, he declared that only the Western civilized—or repressed—man could produce real art.

For as long as the music innervated just the physiological movement centers of the body, it was not art at all. It only became art when the acoustic perception complex built through the rhythmic and tonal filling of time developed into an independent realm of its own kind and created in humans a musical organ that appreciates, enjoys and loves the sound sensation only for its own sake. (*Florentine Introduction to a Philosophy of Architecture and the Visual Arts*, 1912, p. 174, my trans.)

Following the thread of what Norbert Elias eventually called the “civilizing process,” Ziegler argued that the sublimation had actually undergone a second moment. If the first had detached the complex of sounds specific to Western music from “the motor response of the body to auditory stimuli,” the second, in turn, had severed the “psychological state,” the “dark layer of the so-called emotions,” or the “musical mood,” from the complex of sounds itself. Ziegler thus traced a long but continuous metamorphosis bridging the most primitive motor rhythm to the modern alternation of emotional states or moods.

The still unexplained vibrations of musical pleasure, which take place in the dark layer of the so-called emotions [*Gefühle*], are to some extent detached from the tonal complex of sensations and strengthened into a psychological state, the musical mood [*Stimmung*]. Just as the independent representation of a sonic whole slowly broke away from the motor response of the body to the auditory stimuli, so the corresponding effect of the sounds is now separated from their acoustic perception, that is, from their actual musical significance. This wave of emotional moods [*diese Woge von gefühlserregten Stimmungen*] must be understood as the ultimate spiritualization of the formerly motor rhythm of unison music, which bounces on the listener of polyphonic sound masses, floods him without resistance, and [carry him] into an aimless and stormy infinity.

Rhythmic motor body movement; objectively perceived sound consonance; succession of emotional state [*gefühlsmäßiger Zustandswechsel*]: these are the three turning points in the history of musical effects. (*Florentine Introduction to a Philosophy of Architecture and the Visual Arts*, 1912, p. 175, my trans.)

After this long reflection on musical rhythm, Ziegler abruptly shifted the discussion to rhythm in painting. “Primitive” Italian murals, he argued, were analogous to “primitive” music: both were based on repetitive sequences of distinct elements lacking any kind of integrated interactions; furthermore, both had direct motor effects on the people exposed to them.

The possible application of this analogy to the developmental history of painting comes to mind immediately. Just as originally in music a temporal rhythm was associated with empty and poor sound sequences, the spatial rhythm of Primitive painting also embraces optically poor and unattractive surfaces. One could also detect a parallel between the effect of these rhythmically ornamental wall-fillings and the corresponding effect of homophonic music on the motor dance movements of the peoples it excited. (*Florentine Introduction to a Philosophy of Architecture and the Visual Arts*, 1912, p. 176, my trans.)

Concerning the sequences of distinct elements, Ziegler found in the Primitive paintings of the *Trecento*—yet with the noticeable exception of Giotto—an analogous kind of rhythm composed of discrete signs constituting a “hardened and puppet-like sign language.”

If we look at the art works of the Primitives from the *Trecento*, the rhythm of these pictures is supported, if not primarily conditioned, by a number of typical movements of the arms, hands and heads, by remarkably precise, yet stiff and awkward, gestures. Mural paintings such as those found in the Cappella degli Spagnoli of the Santa Maria Novella [in Florence] and in San Miniato, or the altarpiece painted by Orcagna in the Cappella Strozzi [in the same church in Florence], to leave Giotto aside for a moment, are characterized by a sign language [*Gebärdensprache*] whose power of penetration and influence derives from its hardened and puppet-like conventionality. Should one contemplate this effect retroactively, one may realize that certain motor impulses are most probably decisive for the observer. (*Florentine Introduction to a Philosophy of Architecture and the Visual Arts*, 1912, p. 176, my trans.)

Concerning the motor effects on the people exposed to them, Ziegler cited Bergson who in *Matière et Mémoire – Matter and Memory* (published in 1896) claimed that, in reading, the words were recognized and discerned from one another through a series of “possible movements” of the body. The same most probably occurs, he argued, in looking at a painting. “The viewer repeats for himself and in himself the gesture that he sees on the painted surface.”

The body designs in itself a motor scheme of the word, it reproduces it, it sketches it to understand it. Is it unreasonable to assume that a similar process occurs in front of the acting figures of a painting? The first and indispensable effect of this art would be entirely comparable to the motor rhythm which forced people to dance, to march while listening to an homophonic

music. The viewer repeats for himself and in himself the gesture that he sees on the painted surface. His pleasure consists in an intimate sketching of the same movements, which he visually perceives. He does not imitate them in reality, but in his phantasy [*Phantasie*], his imagination [*Einbildungskraft*], and his representation [*Vorstellung*]. (*Florentine Introduction to a Philosophy of Architecture and the Visual Arts*, 1912, p. 178, my trans.)

As in music, rhythm in painting had naturally evolved in the direction of an increased sublimation, that is of a repression of the bodily movements and a development of alternating emotions. The painter who had been instrumental in this shift was, as expected, Giotto (1267-1337).

A higher state is soon reached when painting frees itself from its ornamental purpose and the conventional and rigid rhythm of its figures. If one asks oneself the question of what makes Giotto and the other artists of the *Trecento* so different, one must cite as a decisive point the greater fluidity [*die grössere Flüssigkeit*] in the distribution of pictorial elements. In Giotto's work, the figure covers the surface in an unexpected new sense: no longer by repetition, by hard juxtaposition or succession, but by a freer interplay of union and dispersion. A picture of Giotto is not composed as a hierarchy in which everyone takes a place imposed by an architectural and ornamental principle devoid of any painterly aspect. It is, for example, a loose group [*eine gelockerte Gruppe*] in which people come together and separate, according to the requirement of the scene, which the artist wants to make spatially visible and understandable. (*Florentine Introduction to a Philosophy of Architecture and the Visual Arts*, 1912, p. 179-180, my trans.)

The impulse given by Giotto was developed by Masaccio (1401-1428) at the beginning of the 15th century. Rhythm in painting was not any more based on sheer ornamental repetition of similar elements on the surface but—and this probably was Ziegler's most original idea—on the distribution of the figures in space which he compared, to make himself more easily understood, with rhythm in harmonic music. The new cosmos of forms was a pictorial equivalent of the "cosmos of sounds" that was simultaneously developing.

Especially in the frescoes of Masaccio, a century after Giotto, Florentine painting witnessed a development that almost led to the antithesis of decorative surface art. [...] For the first time, space itself participates as an element in the painting. The figures are not arranged on the surface to decorate a surface and to introduce a primitive rhythm into it. Rather, they move in the sensual medium of spatiality [*Räumlichkeit*], which in turn overcomes and obliterates the surface. (*Florentine Introduction to a Philosophy of Architecture and the Visual Arts*, 1912, p. 181, my trans.)

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In the 19th century, the spread of rhythm into Germanic art history and aesthetics, which had already begun in the first half of the century, took a considerable momentum during the 1880s and 1890s. This growth resulted, at the beginning of the 1900s, in two opposite phenomena.

1. First, it generated a fierce debate between two conflicting views. Apart from the academic and political stakes concerning the domination of a discipline which had arrived at maturity—Leipzig and Berlin Universities vs. Vienna University, Germany vs. Austria-Hungary—the question was how to describe a concept that had become crucial in its development. Was this concept to be defined along a formalist or an experiential line? Was it to be a part of a larger developmental history or only a tool enabling an empiricist analysis of the history of art? From which other disciplines art history and aesthetics should borrow their rhythmomological models? Was it only from the latest natural sciences or did music and poetics still have an important role to play? Was rhythm a mere sub-concept of a linear metrics or was it to be expanded beyond metrics toward the concepts of system, organism, complex whole? Last but not least, providing that the latter description was accepted, how was it possible to articulate the concepts of system, organism, complex whole, with the primacy given to movement and temporality?

2. The second phenomenon was the popularization of the concept of rhythm. The evidence gathered in this chapter shows that the latter occurred mostly in its Leipziger-Berliner form but also that the anti-metric intuitions that had illuminated the pioneering works of Schmarsow, Wölfflin, or Meumann, rapidly disappeared. The problem was not even mentioned in most of 1900s studies which used the concept of rhythm as if it was already stabilized. Most of them did not bother to theorize about the issue and contended themselves with borrowing, with more or less talent, concepts and views from their predecessors. Some studies, such as Rintelen's, even advocated a confusing kind of empiricism which actually resulted in a sheer eclecticism.

3. Despite these shortcomings, the concept of rhythm remained extremely popular among art historians until the late 1920s. In 1918, Herman Sörgel (1885-1952) popularized Wölfflin's *Prolegomena* and Schmarsow's *Grundbegriffe* among architects and soon scholars of the Bauhaus with his *Einführung in die Architektur-Ästhetik. Prolegomena zu einer Theorie der Baukunst - Introduction to Architectural Aesthetics. Prolegomena to a Theory of Architecture*. In 1919, Willy Drost (1892-1964), published a 116-page long PhD thesis: *Die Lehre vom Rhythmus in der heutigen Ästhetik der bildenden Künste - The Theory of Rhythm in Today's Aesthetics of the Visual Arts*. In 1924, Hans Kauffmann (1896-1983) published a noteworthy study on *Albrecht Dürers rhythmische Kunst* which focused on the issue of rhythm in painting that had been left aside until then except in non-academic studies as those of Julius Meier-Graefe (1867-1935). In 1926, Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968) found necessary to answer him in a 60-page long critical review entitled "Albrecht Dürers rhythmische Kunst." Still in 1929, Dagobert Frey (1883-1962) published *Gotik und Renaissance als Grundlagen der modernen Weltanschauung - Gothic and Renaissance as Foundations of the Modern World View* in which he made extensive use of the concept of rhythm.

4. According to Georg Vasold, this success seems to have faded away in the 1930s mostly due the spread of the formalist concerns which originated in the pre-war works of Riegl and Wölfflin.

The subsequent disappearance of the rhythm from the discipline [the art history] is linked to the triumphal march of formalist writing in the history of art such as Wölfflin practices it. When Heinrich Wölfflin published his study *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe* in 1915, he gave the discipline a direction which was very different from that followed by Riegl and Schmarsow. Wölfflin leads research into a field in which the body has no place and where any view for the understanding of modern art is lacking. His book, which is canonical for German-language research and which is still among the compulsory readings in a large number of universities,

presents ten concepts for naming and understanding the manifestations of visual art, notably those of the Renaissance and the Baroque. The rhythm that had played an important role in his early writings was no longer part of it. (Vasold, “Optique ou haptique : le rythme dans les études sur l’art au début du 20e siècle”, 2010, p. 54-55, my trans.)

5. This sudden turn should attract our attention. Indeed, the concept of rhythm based on corporal experience, mobile vision, and time, that had been developed in Leipzig and had become dominant in the 1910s, did not disappear due to a return of the concept based on optic perception, distant sight, and space elaborated in Vienna, nor even by a revisit of the older definitions as criterion or category of art history. All of them disappeared altogether to the benefit of entirely different paradigms which emphasized either the classification of forms as in Heinrich Wölfflin’s mature work, or the iconology developed from the 1920s by Aby Warburg (1866-1929), Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968), and Ernst Gombrich (1909-2001).

This paradigm shift from *rhythm* to *form* and *symbol*, which seems to have occurred in the 1930s, should be one day studied for its own sake because it may tell us a lot about the weaknesses of the early 20th century aesthetic concept of rhythm but also about its potential for the 21st century. Pending further analysis and evaluation, one obvious weakness was that, whether under its Leipziger or Viennese guise, the concept which spread during the Belle Époque remained based on the principle of a sequence of alternating elements. On both sides, it only stretched to the maximum the Platonic metric definition of rhythm as “order of movement” (*Laws*, 664a-665a – see vol. 1, p. 29-30). By contrast, the potential that could be retrieved today lays in the anti-Platonic dimension that appeared and grew, hidden within this frame—more on the Leipziger than on the Viennese side, as a matter of fact—from the simultaneous emphasis on the concepts of system, organism, complex whole, on the one hand, and movement, modulation, and way of flowing, on the other hand.

[Next chapter](#)