

Extrait du Rhuthmos

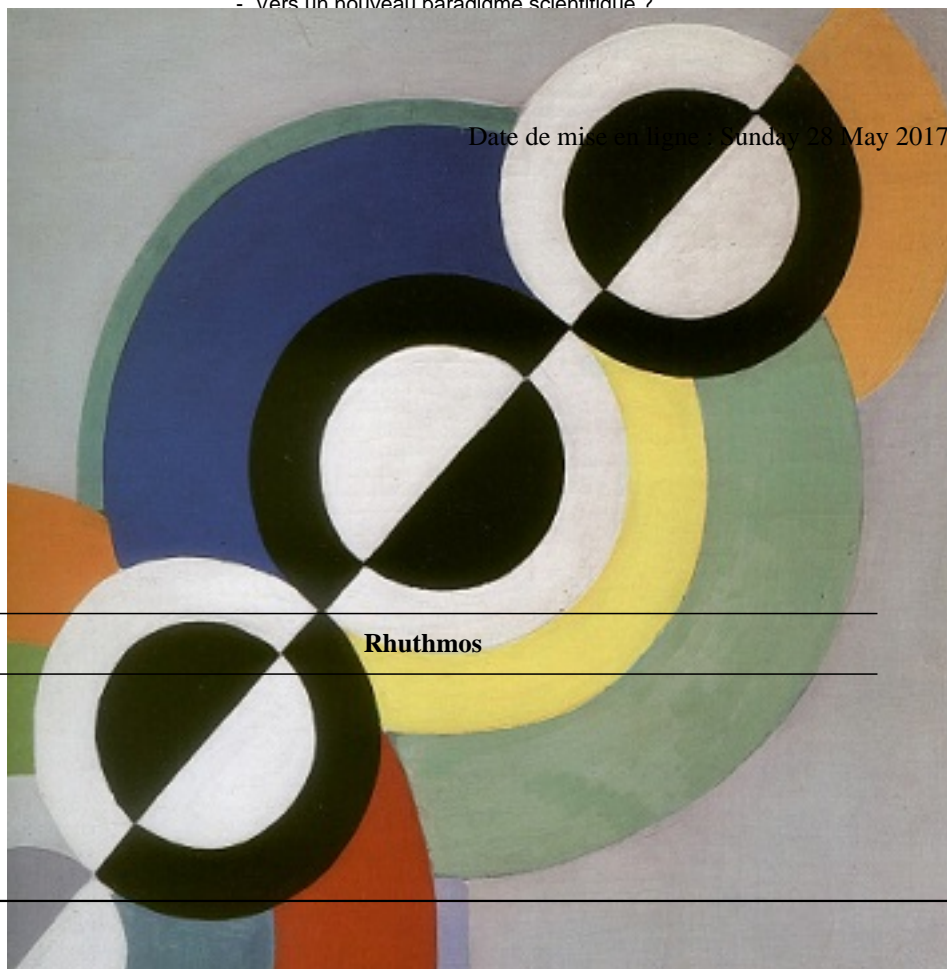
<http://www.rhuthmos.eu/spip.php?article1995>

Rhythm From Art to Philosophie - Nietzsche - Conclusion

- Recherches

- Vers un nouveau paradigme scientifique ?

Date de mise en ligne : Sunday 28 May 2017



Rhuthmos

[Previous chapter](#)

*

No need to say that Nietzsche's contribution to rhythmology is one of the most developed in the 19th century but also one of the most obscure and ill-known. I guess that there is still much more to discover in his posthumous writings, fragments and letters, even in his published texts, nevertheless, our survey has clearly shown a certain number of significant points.

1. Contrary to Hegel or other previous Idealist philosophers of the 19th century, but also to Heidegger and a great number of his followers in the 20th century, who developed only abstract and second hand reflections on rhythm, Nietzsche reflects, on the one hand, from his knowledge and practice of art, writing and music, and on the other hand, from his scientific study of ancient literatures and languages. His philosophical work is rooted in empirical observation.

2. Some recent commentators have argued, on this basis, that Nietzsche's *Democritea* and *Greek rhythmic* contain what he could not say in *The Birth of Tragedy*, because of his juvenile and metaphysical admiration for Wagner and Schopenhauer, and that these notes show his real thought hidden behind the mask, a kind of early Nietzschean *larvatus prodeō*. But, even if these studies have been massively and wrongly disregarded by most specialists, we should not exaggerate their consistency. As a matter of fact, Nietzsche never published his numerous notes on pre-Socratics and Greek rhythm, instead he published *The Birth*. From that mere fact we may conclude that he was satisfied with the latter and dissatisfied with the former.

3. One reason for that, in my opinion, is that in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche succeeded despite some shortcomings concerning language and poetry that we noticed in producing a consistent theory of *rhuthmos*, something he came close to in his speculations on pre-Socratics only in the *Time Atomistic* dated from 1873, without yet being able to develop it in full form, and in his notes on Greek rhythmic only in the last letter to Carl Fuchs dated from 1888, which was *de facto* limited in size and in any case not meant to be published. The divergence and temporal discontinuities between each of the three orientations of his initial project obviously impeded a common publication.

4. Furthermore, there are reasons to believe that, apart from the sheer size of the project, the impossibility to make theory of art, ontology, and poetics fuse together in a single perspective was the expression of deeper problems that Nietzsche did not manage to resolve and that we must be aware of. I would like to suggest in this regard a double hypothesis.

One wonders if the first reason why he never achieved the "philosophy of rhythm" he was aiming at, was not the weight of the part of the post-Aristotle Greek tradition itself upon which he relied to contest the modern metric but which did not enable him not to really get back to the pre-Socratics and to firmly establish the alternative *rhuthmology* he was hoping for. As we have seen, the texts on Heraclitus, the *Democritea* and the *Notebooks on Rhythmic* point all towards a conception of rhythm based on *rhuthmos*. But, Aristoxenus, the main *Rhythmiker* that Nietzsche opposes to the following *Metriker*, was a keen disciple of Aristotle, whose conception of rhythm was framed equally by the Platonic model of rhythm and the Aristotelian hylomorphic concept of individuation that both hampered any *rhuthmic* conception of becoming (see vol. 1, chap. 3).

In addition, Aristotle himself was responsible for the original split between poetics, which he genially founded, and atomism, which he simultaneously so unfortunately rejected. In this regard, it was probably impossible to come back to the pre-Socratic *rhuthmology*, without having first brought to light these conflicting orientations in Aristotle's work, his strong dependence upon Plato during his youth, as well as his later more mature and innovative contributions.

There was and there still is no access to alternative rhythmologies to the Platonic model without a comprehensive critique of Aristotle's thought.

5. Although he never achieved his project of "philosophy of rhythm," his notes as well as his published essays provide us with a bunch of illuminating analyses and theoretical propositions. I won't repeat here all results that can be found in each section of this chapter. I will mention only two remarkable achievements among others: the elaboration of an unfinished yet promising *rhuthmic* ontology inspired by the study of the pre-Socratic philosophers, especially Heraclitus and Democritus, and the *historical anthropology of rhythm* that his philological research on Greek rhythmic drove him to substitute to his former metaphysics of art dominated by melody and harmony. In short, if Nietzsche did not entirely succeed in combining the *Democritean naturalistic* and the *Aristotelian poetic paradigms*, he faced the problem with enough rigor and obstinacy to open a lot of new paths that certainly still remain nowadays to be explored.

6. The fruitfulness of Nietzsche's *rhuthmic* strategy appears quite paradoxically through a very small fragment with which he finishes his *Rhythmic Researches*. This text resonates simultaneously with parts of his own reflection on art as model of endless process of creation and destruction exposed in *The Birth of Tragedy*, his meditation on being as artistic process and work exposed in the sections on Heraclitus in *The Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, and his speculation on time elaborated in his *Time Atomistic*.

The rhythm is an attempt at *individuation*. For rhythm to exist, there must be multiplicity and becoming. Here the quest for beauty reveals itself as the motive for individuation. Rhythm is the form of becoming, in general the *form of the phenomenal world*. (*Rhythmische Untersuchungen*, KGAll3, p. 338, my trans.)

Based on his use of the term "individuation," it has been said that Nietzsche one more time exposed in this passage his Aristoxenian conception of rhythm. But I think something different is here emerging. Nietzsche comes maybe closest to a *rhuthmology* that would be consistent with his other essays. Rhythm is not any longer considered in an Aristotelian manner as a form, an *eîdos*, a final cause, applied to the matter of time, itself considered as only passive potentiality. It now *includes* and *entails* "multiplicity and becoming." It is the "form of becoming" itself, the form of the "phenomenal" flow, i.e. properly a "way of flowing." The hylomorphic scheme is superseded. Rhythm is in itself "an attempt at individuation" which has through "the search for beauty" a poetic stake, i.e. a human and historical end. Rhythm takes, finally, the figure of a *rhuthmos* in the sense that was rediscovered by poets and writers from Diderot to Hölderlin. It can be traced back as well to Spinoza and Leibniz (Michon, 2015a, p. 27-29).

7. Due to lack of space, I could not specifically study Nietzsche's late doctrines of "will to power" and "eternal return," but we may now say a few words about them. Our investigation has shown that they certainly cannot be correctly assessed if we do not reconnect them to Nietzsche's former studies, on the one hand on pre-Socratics, especially on Democritus, and on the other hand, on rhythm and language. If we do so, the logical inconsistencies pointed out by Heidegger partly fade away and ironically Heidegger's own contradictions appear more bluntly. Furthermore, such studies reveal that Nietzsche's project, while he pointed towards a renewed ontology, had at the same time a historical-anthropological background that has been completely suppressed in his study by Heidegger, who was building a purely ontological war machine against "anthropology" and "Modernity."

Nietzsche's critique of meta-physics does not only presuppose, as Kant's or Heidegger's, to look back to purely subjective or purely ontological conditions. His peculiar way to address this issue is made possible because, unlike Kant, he seriously takes language, languages, art, and works of art, into account, but he does not endow them either with the mystical and cosmic status they have for Heidegger. As we have seen by digging deeper into his earlier

Rhythm From Art to Philosophie - Nietzsche - Conclusion

texts, language and art remain for him rooted in the human and historical sphere. This stand explains why, contrary to most of his critics, they open onto non-Platonic esthetics and ethics of rhythm.

to be followed