

Extrait du Rhuthmos

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Birth of a Rhythmological Conflict (1800-1830)

- Recherches

- Vers un nouveau paradigme scientifique ?
- Sur le concept de rythme - Nouvel article

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Rhuthmos

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Janina Wellmann's analyses are extremely valuable because they provide us with new historical evidence that can only improve our understanding of a very obscure past. But the general interpretations she proposes are quite questionable. The idea that after 1800 a "Rhythm Episteme" has dominated the field of knowledge erases the very acute conflict that broke out in the early years of the 19th century between poetic and artistic rhythmologies, inspired by a common neo-Heraclitusean viewpoint, and biological, metric or philosophical rhythmologies, that quickly established their domination and spread their neo-Platonic models. In Germany from 1800-1805 until the mid-1850s, the reflection on rhythm, with a few exceptions, was no longer irrigated by the experience of the artists and subjected to metric theories, Idealist philosophies and natural sciences.

A Rhythm Episteme? (1800-1830)

Partly inspired by Foucault, whose rhythmic analysis of military exercises in *Discipline and Punish* she rightfully extends in chapter VII - while strangely downplaying and depoliticizing his contribution (for another approach see Michon, 2007) - Wellmann also wants to update *The Order of Things* and offers to see 1800 as the tipping point when the Modern "Episteme" would have emerged, while no longer being the "Episteme of History", as Foucault put it, but that of "Rhythm".

Such a statement has the advantage of drawing attention to the importance attached to the question of the organization of becoming in scientific, artistic and philosophical discussions of the epoch. It also subtly returns the reflection on rhythm developed by Foucault in the 1970s against his own structuralism of the 1960s by challenging the famous passage of the "era of classification and tabulation" to "the era of history" which, as we have seen with Diderot, starts at least in the 1760s. Finally, it places the concepts produced by the new life sciences in a broader historical context, a move that the history of science specialists rarely make and that explains some of the harsh criticisms that Wellmann's book received (Levit, 2012).

But Wellmann's claim also has two great flaws. The first pertains to her quite imprecise conception of rhythm. While reading her study, one sometimes feels she is not far from the complex idea of *rhuthmos* that was elaborated in the 18th century. Especially when she deals with literature, she rightly notes the intertwining of language and thought, sounds and concepts, for example in Hölderlin's theory of rhythm:

Language, sound and thought must be brought together, on their own each one of these aspects is incomplete. Hölderlin put thinking under the conditions of the sounds of language at the center of his reflections. (Wellmann, 2010, p. 44)

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Simultaneously, she introduces concepts such as "system" and "interaction" (*Wechselwirkung*) that are essential features in the new conception of rhythm. For Moritz :

The peculiarity of rhythm pertains to its *dual* structure: on the one hand, each individual element of the rhythm makes a complete, self-contained entity. Where the mind evaluates, hierarchizes and prioritizes, the sensation constitutes in return equality. On the other hand, the individual member becomes meaningful only in relation to all other rhythmic series. (Wellmann, 2010, p. 58)

But because she holds the flatly historicist and empiricist view that the historian must not start from a definite concept of rhythm but from the concept(s) of the period he or she studies (Wellmann, 2010, p. 31) and because she unfortunately knows very little about the research on rhythm that has been going on in poetics, sociology, philosophy and history in France since the 1970s - Foucault is scarcely quoted, Barthes and Lefebvre don't show up at all, Deleuze and Meschonnic are disposed of in a few lines, Sauvanet's and my own research are ignored - most of the time she uses a quite confusing definition of rhythm where metric and "rhythmic" elements are placed on the same level:

The core elements of rhythm - such as repetition, variation, regularity, period, modification, change, relation - are also the key elements that characterized the new Episteme of organic development around 1800. (Wellmann, 2010, p. 31)

Worse: as it often happens, the empiricist claim hides an unconscious bias. Far from being completely opened to the data, she looks, in her first three chapters and in the chapter dedicated to Goethe, at poetry, art and language mainly from the life science perspective and projects on them a rather poor biological concept of rhythm that finally comes down, as one sees in the last part of the book, to series, periods and cycles. For Reil and subsequently for Pander and Baer she notes:

The organism is changing continuously. Cycles, periods and time proportions, day and night, seasons and disposition of vitality are descriptions for the rhythmic structure of the temporal change, to which the organism is subjected. (Wellmann, 2010, p. 182)

In Pander's and Baer's works, with which modern embryology began after 1800, we find, as in Herold's, the series as the image form, paradigmatic until today for the reference structure of images and canonical for the representation of development. (Wellmann, 2010, p. 307)

One then understands why, on the one hand, her survey of literature, art theory and poetics of the end of the 18th century flattens, with a few exceptions, the difference between life science and arts, nature and culture, the rhythmic features of the latter being reduced to those of the former. Klopstock's, Moritz's and Schlegel's contributions are completely misunderstood by overplaying the equivalence of biological and poetic categories they indeed sometimes refer to:

Klopstock is interesting as a transitional figure because on the one hand he still recorded and continued to expand classic rhythm theories, but on the other hand he partly developed a physiological idea of rhythm. This new turn is even clearer by Friedrich Hölderlin, both in his theory of "exchange of sounds" and in his reflections on the good and wrong paths of "arts and education drives". Even Karl Philipp Moritz's concept of autonomy of artistic productions followed the rhythmic order of nature. Moritz exemplified its autonomy aesthetics with the language which, precisely because it is rhythmic, becomes poetry and therefore work of art. Just as the rhythmic movement is the law of development of poetic language, so the rhythmic movement in the organic world is the law of development of the new emerging life. A few years later August Wilhelm Schlegel formulated an anthropological theory of rhythm, in which the poetry was not understood as an expression of human artistic skill, but on the contrary of that of the basic physiological nature of man. The arts remained according to Schlegel, in their most elaborate form as well, attached to the physiology of the body, and rhythm was their fundamental ordering structure. (Wellmann, 2010, p. 34)

This misleading approach explains, on the other hand, why she sees Novalis and Schelling as perfect examples of the artistic rhythm theories of the time :

In Novalis' universal poetry too was rhythm that order, after which Nature was perpetually reshuffled, but also Man integrated the segmented knowledge of disciplines into an ever-changing image of the world. [...] Schelling is important for my argument because in his system rhythm has the key function to convey the spheres of art and nature mutually together: with rhythm art is provided with a concept that nature presents as it is in its very nature. Conversely with rhythm nature is provided with a means to alienate itself into the forms of art. (Wellmann, 2010, p. 34)

Handicapped by her gross empiricism and her lack of knowledge concerning modern research on rhythm, Janina Wellmann has no means to discern the real meaning of the emerging biological conception of rhythm that she wrongly considers as generalizable and when she comes to literature and art, she misses the most productive ideas of the epoch - those of Moritz, Goethe, Schiller, Schlegel, Hölderlin - while paradoxically overvaluing those of Novalis and Schelling which are wrongly aligned with their predecessors and will eventually support the cosmic or technical views of rhythm.

This leads us to the second problem raised by Janina Wellmann's analyses: her endorsement of the a-rhythmic or even anti-rhythmic notion of "episteme." First, the latter loses its meaning once it has been separate from its twin concept, the "epistemic break", which certainly was never explained by Foucault, but that gave to it its rigor and theoretical sharpness. Second, there is a tension between the concept and its use, which only gives a more modern look to what was called in the days of historicist conceptions of history, "the spirit of an era", but still induces, paradoxically, seeking a tipping point between two periods between which numerous continuities have been rightfully shown (e.g. Wellmann, 2010, p. 373). Finally and most importantly, the resumption of this notion favors the erasure of the theoretical conflicts specific to each of these periods, not of course the scientific controversies that Janina Wellmann very accurately reflects but these more secretive theoretical conflicts that divide the future.

For, if it is clear that embryology, as it develops in the 18th century, is not unrelated to a key point made in the *Rêve de d'Alembert*, where Diderot, precisely, takes the egg as a paradigmatic example of a forming process, that is to say, a process which makes shapes appear without having to assume any already existing or eternal form, the serial, cyclic and periodic definition of rhythm Janina Wellmann adopts is opposite to the holistic and interactional conception assumed by Diderot in his reflection on hieroglyph, manner and role (see previous chap. and Michon, 2015), and not least to the subsequent German Romanticism contributions (see previous chap. and Couturier-Heinrich, 2004).

Contrary to the analysis of poetic, pictorial or theatrical rhythms, which always presupposes a duration whose intensity certainly varies but remains continuous, the serializing of images studied in chap. VII representing the successive moments of weapons handling, army maneuvering, court dancing, artifacts crafting or embryo evolution, shows a duration structured by a series of "strong times" (observed phases) and "weak times" (unobserved interphases), whose frequency is determined at least in the case of the embryo in a strictly metric way (the number of days, hours, etc.).

This new imaging technology was by Herold the image series. In the serial representation for the first time appeared the change itself. Development constituted itself no longer in a single image, but in the relation of images. The change of the organic was no longer one impossible to watch but one that could only be brought to appear by investing a series of images: it was taking place in the images as well as between them. Now the sequence of images, the alternation of interspaces and representations, fullness and emptiness, represented and not represented, constituted development. (Wellmann, 2010, p. 306)

One will compare the complexity of Diderot's analysis of pictorial image in the *Salons*, his very ornate description of the circuits of pleasure and truth, with these forms of teaching or truth extraction subjected to absolute control by the power of the gaze and a drastic reduction of meaning complexity.

Moreover, while artistic rhythms convert the powers that come from bodies and groups in innovative and shareable forces, so that they produce something new, some history, some *trans-subject*, biological rhythms simply structure the expression of vital forces with no other consequences than the reproduction of the species (*vis essentialis corporis* in Wolff). These are only operating rhythms that have no explosive character.

Finally, while poetic, artistic and theatrical rhythms will remain in the 19th and 20th centuries liberating or at least transformative powers, the serializing methods increasingly used by life sciences are ways to standardize scientific description and to grasp in an analytical manner the becoming. They will quickly get into consonance with the industrial revolution, the development of technique and capitalism, and offer new ways to penetrate, control and master human bodies ([Nick Hopwood](#), [Simon Schaffer](#), [Jim Secord](#), 2010). There is actually nothing in common between these opposite rhythmological conceptions, except the gross net thrown on one and the other by the analyst.

The Rise of Metrology, Cyclology, and Periodology

In his *Manual of Metrics* (1799) and his *Elementa doctrinae metricae* (1816) Hermann established for a very long time the primacy of "meter" in poetic rhythm theory - and some nowadays are still maintaining this tradition alive. His conception of meter was "rationally" deduced and had no relation with what was actually observed in real texts. The dynamic and holistic approach that was developed from Diderot to Hölderlin was abandoned and replaced by an analytic, dualistic and linear procedure that multiplied at least in academic circles until now.

Schelling in his *Philosophy of Art* (1802-1805) and Hegel in his *Lectures on Fine Art* (1818-1929), though in different ways, put poetic and musical rhythms on the same level and reduced them either to "period" and "cycle" or to "meter" or both. Schelling was probably more opened than Hegel to the artistic innovations of his time. He took into account part of the progresses made in poetics in the 18th century. But he plunged them into the dark waters of a Naturalistic Idealism equating the circulation of heavenly bodies and the flows of music and poetry. Effects on rhythm theory of Hegel's kind of Dialectic Idealism was not better. When it was not taken as a sheer metaphor for dialectic succession and used to refer to art and language, rhythm was projected into a lost paradise. Modern languages were considered devoid of any rhythmic qualities, modern poetry was partly rejected for lack of rhythm and last but not least rhythm reduced, like in Hermann's view, to its metric definition.

Finally, Reil (1759-1813), the founder of the *Archiv für die Physiologie* (1795), Kielmeyer, Luca, Rudolphi, Döllinger (1770-1841) and his students Pander (1794-1865) and Baer (1792-1876), all of them used the notions of development and physiological rhythm while giving them a meaning close to "series", "periods" and "cycles". During the 19th century, the supple definition they elaborated spread in many natural sciences but also in economy where Clément Juglar - who was both a physician and an economist - soon used the very same concept to develop a theory of business cycles in his 1856-1864 book *Des Crises commerciales et de leur retour périodique en France, en Angleterre et aux États-Unis*.

All these theories reaffirmed the primacy of science, technique and philosophy upon poetics and theory of language, concept upon affect, signified upon signifier, enunciated upon enunciation, period, meter and cycle upon rhythm. As for philosophy, inasmuch as they put all arts on the same level and aligned their various performances either with the Cosmos or the Spirit operations, both Schelling and Hegel "de-specified" what on the contrary had been carefully

differentiated, while reducing the rhythm again to its formal arithmetic, metric and linear aspect. The *rhuthmology* of singular ways of flowing promoted in 18th century France and Germany was then completely obliterated - at least for a few decades - by what we could call a *metrology*, a *cyclology* or a *periodology*, sometimes favoring a binary, sometimes a ternary schema, but always relying on a traditional Platonic paradigm. This reversal was naturally not without ethical and political consequences.

The Last *Rhuthmologist* of the 18th Century (Humboldt - 1800-1835)

In Germany, Wilhelm von Humboldt was the only one important thinker who maintained and developed the achievements of the previous *rhuthmology* during the first decades of the 19th century.

In his introduction to his English translation of *On Language. The Diversity of Human Language-Structure and its Influence on the Mental Development of Mankind* (1836), Hans Aarsleff rightly emphasizes the importance of the aesthetic concerns in Humboldt's lifelong inquiry on language:

[For Humboldt] the fundamental nature of language was an aesthetic problem, accessible only to the artist. (Aarsleff, 1988, p. xvii)

Indeed, contrary to the approaches we have previously examined, his research resumed and extended in many aspects the poetic reflections initiated by his friends Schiller and Goethe, and his contemporaries Schlegel and Hölderlin.

Aarsleff also convincingly shows - while maybe downplaying too much Leibniz's, Herder's and Hamann's influences - Humboldt's debt to the 18th century French philosophers - mainly Condillac and Diderot - against a quite common but no less wrong assertion that the latter, as Cassirer claimed,

treated language exclusively as an instrument of cognition; found its origin in need and agreement for the single purpose of communication; saw the workings of ordinary language in terms of the ideal model of a perfect philosophical language; relied on a doctrine that made perception a passive and autonomous supplier of ready-made unproblematic ideas to which words merely needed to be added to produce a safe nomenclature for communication; left no room for diversities of languages except in the trivial outward forms of the sounds we call words; based their thought on the rationalist principles of universal grammars; and banished feeling, imagination, and creativity from all processes of language. All this items in this catalogue were well known when Cassirer wrote them up again, and every one of them is false. (Aarsleff, 1988, p. xxxiii-xxxiv)

As one may already know, Humboldt affirms that we must not think of language as made of separate elements, *signs*, or even of national *languages* that are only by-products, but as a perpetual human activity (*Thatigkeit*) by which human beings endeavor to think, express their feelings, give orders, thank each other, etc.:

Language is the formative organ of *thought*. *Intellectual activity*, entirely mental, entirely internal, and to some extent passing without trace, becomes, through *sound*, externalized in speech and perceptible to the senses. (*On Language*, 1836, trans. H. Aarsleff, p. 54)

Aarsleff rightly underlines this point:

Language is not like a tool-box, but a creative power - or in Humboldt's famous words, it is not *ergon* but *energeia* [...] This theory does not have room for the copy-theory of knowledge; language is not merely designative; it is not representation but expression. Language is constituent of thought and for that reason it must stand at the center of any viable epistemology. (Aarsleff, 1988, p. xix)

From this follow three other crucial philosophical assertions. As for Condillac and Diderot (Michon, 2015), *language and thought are inseparable*.

Thought and language are therefore one and inseparable from each other. (*On Language*, 1836, trans. H. Aarsleff, p. 54)

Aarsleff:

Humboldt's entire view of the nature of language is founded on the conviction that thinking and speaking, thought and language form so close a union that we must think of them as being identical, in spite of the fact that we can separate them artificially. Owing to this identity, access to one of the two will open nearly equal access to the other. All Humboldt's work on language is devoted to exploration of the possibilities that lie in this identity. (Aarsleff, 1988, p. xviii)

Therefore, philosophy cannot go on with its enquiry into human thinking without also inquiring carefully into the extraordinary *variety of human languages and literatures*.

The study of languages in all their diversity will provide both the best and the most plentiful kinds of evidence for understanding and knowledge of the processes of mind, which by their nature, whether pertaining to feeling or reason, remain hidden beyond hope of direct inspection. (Aarsleff, 1988, p. xviii)

This diversity mainly pertains to differences between the means used to "*articulate*" both *sounds and ideas*.

Two principles come to light: the *sound-form* and the *use* made of it to designate objects and connect thoughts. The latter is based on the requirements that *thinking* imposes on language, from which the *general laws* of language arise; and this part, in its original tendency, is therefore the same in all men [...] The sound-form, on the other hand, is the truly constitutive and guiding principle of the diversity of languages. [...] Now from these two principles, together with the inwardness of their mutual interpenetration, there proceeds the *individual form* of each language. (*On Language*, 1836, trans. H. Aarsleff, p. 54)

[The language] true definition can therefore only be a genetic one. For it is the ever-repeated *mental labor* of making the *articulated* sound capable of expressing *thought*. (*On Language*, 1836, trans. H. Aarsleff, p. 110)

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With these four assertions, the primacy of activity, the intertwining flows of language and thought, the endless variety of forms of human expression and the central role of articulation, Humboldt decidedly inserts his theory in the neo-Heraclitusean movement that has been developing in France and Germany in the second half of the 18th century and he brilliantly revives it. He is a plain *rhuthmologist*. To this tradition clearly belongs Humboldt's very famous statement emphasizing the paradoxical nature of language, both "transitory" and "enduring", apparently being a "product" but actually an "activity":

Language, regarded in its real nature, is an enduring thing, and at every moment a transitory one. Even its maintenance by writing is always just an incomplete, mummy-like (mumienartig) preservation, only needed again in attempting thereby to picture the living utterance. In itself it is no product (Ergon), but an activity (Energie). (On Language, 1836, trans. H. Aarsleff, p. 49)

Now what about rhythm more specifically? It appears in Humboldt's late theory of language in a place close, although a bit different as we shall see, to the one occupied by the "hieroglyph" and later the "harmony" in Diderot's theory of poetry (Michon, 2005).

Aarsleff rightly recalls Humboldt's readings, during his first stay in France (1797-1801), of Condillac and especially Diderot, from whom he borrowed the concepts of "hieroglyph" and "tableau" to account for the paradoxical conjunction of "successivity" and "simultaneity" in language:

[For Diderot] poetry cannot escape the successivity that is now in the nature of the language it must use, but it must all the same strive for simultaneity and synthesis. When the poet is successful, the creation is like a hieroglyph or like the painter's instantaneous "tableau". [...] These conceptions also formed the core of Humboldt's conception of language; when he wrote in German he used the word "Bild" for what he in French called "tableau". (Aarsleff, 1988, p. liii)

Just as a piece of poetry, each language must be observed as a "hieroglyph", i.e. a "tableau" of the people's soul in motion, and composes with the other languages an ensemble of "hieroglyphs" which "interact", "multiply" and "undergo continued formation".

In the fragments Humboldt observed that a language is not the copy of a people's ideas, but the "total energy of the people, embodied, as if by miracle, in certain sounds". Different languages are not so many nomenclatures for the same thing, but present different views of it. "They are hieroglyphs in which each individual [whether a person or a people] imprints its imagination and the world." And since "the world and the imagination links one formation to another by analogy, these hieroglyphs interact in further creation, multiply, and undergo continued formation." [...] Humboldt repeated this argument about the hieroglyphs in closely similar formulations in 1812 and 1821, and he made the same point even when he did not use the word hieroglyph. (*Fragments*, 1801, quoted and commented by Aarsleff, 1988, p. xlix-l)

But there is more. As Diderot, Humboldt does not use the term rhythm to refer to the metric organization of verse.

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The rhythm ensures that the language sound production organization fits "the dark ebb and flow of feeling and psyche before it spills into words". Rhythm "by means of sounds" captures the "soul at its deepest."

[Rhythm] represents the dark ebb and flow of feeling and psyche before it spills into words, or when their sound has faded before him. [...] It grows in a freely desired fullness, binds itself to form ever new creations, it is a pure form that no material makes heavier, and reveals itself by means of sounds, that is to say, that which seizes the soul at its deepest because it is the closest to the inner feeling. (*Übersetzungen - Agamemnon*, 1816, quoted by C. Couturier-Heinrich, 2004, p. 166)

But Humboldt does not give always the same extension to the concept. Sometimes he puts "rhythm" on the same level as "euphony". The former and the latter appear as criteria which guide language production as a "synthetic procedure" where meaning and sound, signified and signifier are unseparable, as it can be observed firstly in poetry.

The *combination* of the *sound-form* with the *inner laws of language* constitutes the perfection of languages [...] From the first elements onward, the production of language is a *synthetic* procedure, and that in the truest sense of the word, where synthesis creates something that does not lie, *per se*, in any of the conjoined parts. [...] By those very inner stirrings of mind that prepare for language-production, it will be guided on the contrary, towards *euphony* and *rhythm*, will find in both a counterpoise to the mere tinkling of syllables, and discover by means of them a new path, upon which, if the thought do but breathe a soul into the sound, the latter, from its own nature will again return an inspiring principle to thought. The firm combination of the two main linguistic constituents is primarily expressed in the sensuous and imaginative life that thereby blossom in language. (*On Language*, 1836, trans. H. Aarsleff, p. 88)

The "rhythmical and musical form" of speech are presented as two different aspects of the "linkages of sounds" corresponding to accentuation and echoes.

Through the rhythmical and musical form whose linkages are peculiar to sound, language enhances the impression of beauty in nature, transposing it into another sphere, but acts, even independently of this, through the mere cadence of speech upon the temper of the soul. (*On Language*, 1836, trans. H. Aarsleff, p. 60)

Further down, Humboldt refers both to "rhythm" and "melody" to emphasize that there never is a separation between concepts, thoughts, on the one hand, and sounds, words, sentences, on the other. In speech those are tightly linked together or better intertwined by "the sound-formation, artistically treated in its melody and rhythm, [which] reciprocally arouses in the soul a closer union of the ordering power of understanding with pictorially creative fantasy."

Yet both of them, inner linguistic sense and sound, so far as it accedes to the former's demands, are in cooperation, and the treatment of *sound-unity* thereby becomes a symbol of the particular *conceptual unity* desired. The latter, thus embodied in sound, is diffused as a mental principle over speech, and the sound-formation, artistically treated in its melody and rhythm, reciprocally arouses in the soul a closer union of the ordering power of understanding with pictorially creative fantasy; [...] The means of designating word-unity in speech are, the *pause*, *change of letters*, and *accent*. (*On Language*, 1836, trans. H. Aarsleff, p. 110-111)

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The "urge towards rhythmical proportion" with "delight in euphony" guide in most human languages the forming of polysyllabic words.

Just as Chinese resists the polysyllabic character [...] so other languages have the opposite tendency. Through delight in euphony and the urge towards rhythmical proportions, they proceed towards the forming of larger word-wholes. (*On Language*, 1836, trans. H. Aarsleff, p. 266)

In Chinese however or in languages close to it, where words are mainly monosyllabic, the rhythm as organization of the accents in words almost disappears - except in a few cases - and we must assume that only the "musical" element of "euphony" remains as the "ordering power".

Precisely those languages that are less happy in the fusion of syllables into unity, string a larger number of them unrhythmically together, where the completed urge to unity conjoins fewer in harmonious way. (*On Language*, 1836, trans. H. Aarsleff, p. 267)

But Humboldt also uses rhythm in a broader sense - closer to Diderot's definition - which seems this time to include euphony. "Relationship pleasing to utterance and ear" is produced by forming "rhythmical segments" and treating them "as auditory wholes." Since it organizes the flow of speech, rhythm is actually essential to *the whole dynamic synthesis through articulation of "linguistic sense" and "sound"*. Humboldt sees it acting already both in the "ordered regularity" of the former and in the "rhythmical segments" of the latter.

Since all thought consists in separating and combining, the linguistic sense's requirement, to depict all the different kinds of conceptual unity symbolically in speech, must automatically be roused, and show up in language in proportion to its alertness and ordered regularity. The sound, on the other hand, seeks to bring its various juxtaposed modifications into a relationship pleasing to utterance and ear. Often it thereby smoothes out difficulties merely, or follows organically established customs. But it goes further, forms rhythmical segments, and treats them as auditory wholes. (*On Language*, 1836, trans. H. Aarsleff, p. 110)

The "musical element" found in language - which now includes both accentuation and echoes - is the same than that found in poetry and *vice versa*. Thus its "beauty" is the "touchstone of its inner and universal perfection":

Concepts are conveyed in language by tones, and the concord of all mental powers is therefore coupled with a *musical element*, which on entering into language, does not abandon, but merely modifies, its nature. The *artistic beauty* of language is not therefore loaned to it as casual adornment, but is, on the contrary, an essentially necessary consequence of the rest of its nature, an infallible touchstone of its inner and universal perfection. (*On Language*, 1836, trans. H. Aarsleff, p. 91)

This does not mean though that all metric feature disappear from language theory. As in Schlegel the metric of

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accentuation is only treated as a part of a larger rhythm concept, which means not reduced to verse. While discussing "the shaping of the whole word", i.e. the distribution of accents in it, Humboldt notes that there is a kind of

"law of compensation", whereby a strengthening or weakening that occurs in one part of the word gives rise to an opposite change in another part, to restore the balance. In this latter formation here, the qualitative character of the letters is disregarded. The sense of language stresses only the more immaterial quantitative element, and treats the word in quasi-metrical fashion, as a rhythmic series. (*On Language*, 1836, trans. H. Aarsleff, p. 123)

Further down, Humboldt analyzes in the same fashion the phenomenon of emphasis:

More than any other part of language, emphasis is subject to the dual influence of the meaningfulness of speech and the metrical composition of sounds. Originally, and in its true shape, it undoubtedly proceeds from the former. But the more the taste of a nation is directed also to rhythmical and musical beauty, the more influence upon emphasis is also accorded to this requirement. (*On Language*, 1836, trans. H. Aarsleff, p. 126)

Nevertheless these uses of the term rhythm as meter are not only quite rare, but they are integrated into a larger definition which is actually quite close to Diderot's and the German Romantics'.

Since Humboldt claimed the primacy of language as an activity (*Thätigkeit*) supported by the body, rejected the semiotic model which transforms language into a tool-box or a mere series of "mummy-like" artifacts (*Sprachen*), and developed the concepts of interaction (*Wechselwirkung*), interactive system and organization of the flow of speech through articulation, he not only opposed frontally the use of rhythm developing in life sciences based on series, periods and alternation, or that elaborated in metric by Hermann while reducing it to linearity and meter, but he also radically rejected the Schellingian and Hegelian Idealist models which reduced rhythm to cycles, periods or meters, and asserted the primacy of Nature or Spirit over Language and Man while rejecting modernity. His conception of rhythm, based on what we could call a "radically historical anthropology", had nothing to do with any of this three kinds of theory.

Unfortunately Humboldt was quite isolated in his lifetime (1767-1835) [1] and eventually the reception of his work was increasingly difficult. Either Technique or Idealism penetrated aesthetics, poetics, metrics, and even linguistic. Artistic experience was not taken into account anymore. As soon as 1850, his thought was dismembered between philosophy of history, theory of worldviews and study of languages and his contribution to rhythmology completely forgotten. It is only during the second half of the 20th century that his contribution reemerged thanks to various scholars (see Meschonnic, 1975; Aarsleff, 1988; Trabant, 1992). Anyway due to this rapid disappearance and the domination of metrics, Idealist philosophy and science, the *rhuthmos* was ignored for at least to decades until it was re-discovered during the 1850s by artists who first of all wanted to get rid of the traditional constraints in their arts.

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[1] With the probably ignored and still today unnoticed exception of Wordsworth (1770-1850). Aarsleff compares him to Humboldt and underlines his attention to rhythm: "Wordsworth also said that 'language and the human mind act and react on each other', and it was precisely the reason that the right choice of diction became the poet's first problem". (Aarsleff, 1988, p. xxviii). About Wordsworth and rhythm, see the third part of the beautiful book by F. Gaillet-de-Chezelles, *Wordsworth et la marche: parcours poétique et esthétique*, Grenoble, Ellug, 2007.