

Georg Witte

## **“Drumming preparation”: poetics and politics of rhythm in the Soviet avant-garde**

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### **Rhythm is historical *future tense***

Osip Mandelstam’s essay “Government and Rhythm” from 1920 was probably written in connection with a plan by NARKOMPROS (the People’s Commissariat of Education) to establish an institute of rhythmic education. The author – who certainly cannot be said to have been particularly enthusiastic about collectivism – elevates rhythm to the status of a driving force in the revolution:

“The new society is held together by solidarity and rhythm. Solidarity means concord of goals. Concord of action is also essential. Concord of action in itself is already rhythm. The revolution was victorious because of its rhythm. Rhythm descended onto its head like a fiery tongue. It must be secured forever. Solidarity and rhythm are the quantity and quality of social energy. The masses have solidarity. Only the collective can have rhythm. And is not that conception of the masses, that purely quantitative measurement of social energy, already obsolete? Is it not merely a vestige from the lost paradise of ballot counters?”<sup>1</sup>

Mandelstam conceives of rhythm as a means to access to the seemingly lost humanistic heritage. The epoch of revolution – although it is “anti-philological” – restores man himself to us: “man in space and time, rhythmical, expressive man”.<sup>2</sup>

Two aspects deserve particular attention:

1) The inflaming element, the spiritual and physical energy of a *rhythmic force*, on the one hand, and the organising and shape-forming principle of a *rhythmic order*, on the other – they both meet in an ideal synthesis. We could also say: in rhythm, Mandelstam reconciles the Dionysian with the Apollonian element. Rhythm is more than an effect of mere psycho-physiological resonance, more than a generator of

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<sup>1</sup> Mandelstam: Government and Rhythm, 109f.

<sup>2</sup> Mandelstam: Government and Rhythm, 109f.

ecstatic collective bodies, “twitching masses” (“zuckende Masse”, Elias Canetti), mobs that get excited stamping their feet on the ground together.<sup>3</sup> It lends form and structure to amorphous masses.

2) However emphatic his rhetoric, Mandelstam refuses to grant this effect of rhythm its manifestation in the present. He describes it as a *potential*, as an effect to be anticipated, still to be brought about. According to one hypothesis of this paper, the whole semantic basis of the rhythm discourse of time should be analysed with regard to a *forward-pointing* vector – much more than has been done so far. Rhythm *paves the way*. It does not immediately translate into action as regards the dimension of historical agency, but creates a potential of revolutionary action. It paves the way for the creation of a revolutionary collective subject. After the revolution, it paves the way for a new quality in the configuration of the socialist collective. Mandelstam:

“If rhythmic education is to become nationally accepted, a miracle must occur that transforms the abstract system into the people’s flesh. Where yesterday there was only a blue-print, tomorrow the dancers’ costumes will flash colorfully and song will resound. School precedes life. School sculpts life in its own image and likeness. The rhythm of the academic year will be determined by accents that fall on the holidays of the school Olympic games: rhythm will be the instigator and organizer of those games. On such holidays we shall see a new, rhythmically educated generation freely proclaiming its will, its joys and sorrows.”<sup>4</sup>

The point to be made, here, is nothing less than the significance of “universal, rhythmical acts [...] for the creation of future history”.<sup>5</sup> Rhythm is *historical future tense*.

Mandelstam, however, conceives of rhythm as historical future tense in an even more radical sense: Not only does rhythm prepare the people for their history-making action; the people themselves have to prepare *for* rhythm. With this final turn of his essay, Mandelstam subverts a utilitarian reduction of rhythmical education to “hygiene”, “gymnastics”, “physical education”, “psychology”, and “labor”.<sup>6</sup> To regain

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<sup>3</sup> Canetti: *Masse und Macht*, 28ff.

<sup>4</sup> Mandelstam: *Government and Rhythm*, 110.

<sup>5</sup> Mandelstam: *Government and Rhythm*, 110.

<sup>6</sup> Mandelstam: *Government and Rhythm*, 110.

the original syncretism – a “synthesis of work and play”<sup>7</sup> of which rhythm was born – would be possible only in future:

“Our body, our labor and our science are not yet ready to accept rhythm unreservedly. We must still prepare for its acceptance. But at least let rhythm occupy that intermediate, independent position which is suitable for a social force that has just awakened from prolonged lethargy and that has not yet realized all its possibilities.”<sup>8</sup>

### **“The rhythmic drum”: progressive-regressive**

The notion of rhythmic “preparation” does not only refer to the macro-dimension of historical action; it also becomes a topos of the aesthetics of effect. This relates first of all to the micro-dimension of the individual aesthetic event, the mental and physical effects produced by the reception of works of art. In “The rhythmic drum” (written in the late 1930s), Sergei Eisenstein describes rhythm as the “original phenomenon” of the cinema.<sup>9</sup> He regards it as the quintessence of the rhythmic foundation of any artistic practice. What is more, he defines rhythm as that “organic” element which makes all forms of life resound in unison.<sup>10</sup>

To Eisenstein, the “rhythmic drum” of the cinema is a means of “working on” the audience for them to reach a mental state of liminality.<sup>11</sup> The state of liminality consists of that “sensuous thinking” the highest intensity of which is achieved in magical and ritual practices.<sup>12</sup> Support for this thesis is provided in a lengthy digression relating to rhythmically organised meditation practices as well as voodoo cultures and other rhythmic ecstasy techniques (such as those shown by the “dansantes” in Mexico, the “whirling dervishes” of Northern Africa, the shamans of Siberia, in the contemporary “dancings” in Harlem and the mass ecstasies of religious worshippers).<sup>13</sup> The underlying principle, according to Eisenstein, is the fundamental rhythmicity of our organic and homeostatic processes: heartbeat, breathing, gut peristalsis, cell division. (Eisenstein refers to a chapter about vegetative rhythms in

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<sup>7</sup> Mandelstam: *Government and Rhythm*, 110.

<sup>8</sup> Mandelstam: *Government and Rhythm*, 110-111.

<sup>9</sup> Eisenstein: *Die rhythmische Trommel*, 241.

<sup>10</sup> Eisenstein: *Die rhythmische Trommel*, 241.

<sup>11</sup> Eisenstein: *Die rhythmische Trommel*, 236.

<sup>12</sup> Eisenstein: *Die rhythmische Trommel*, 236.

<sup>13</sup> Eisenstein: *Die rhythmische Trommel*, 237.

Ernst Kretschmer's "Medizinische Psychologie" from 1922.) A pertinent note states that the "final goal" is to become one with the rhythm.<sup>14</sup> This inclination is reflected by the great interest that Eisenstein, Man Ray, Bunuel, and other avant-garde artists showed for the microscope-film documentations of the rhythms created by organic and amphibian movement (Jean Painlevé).

The audience – exposed as it is to the fundamental technical rhythm of cinematic production, a "drum" of 24 frames per second – is "prepared" (to use Eisenstein's frequent expression) for the "activation" of "sensuous thinking" and the desensitisation of those layers of consciousness that are phylo- and ontogenetically younger (i.e., layers of logical and conceptual thinking).<sup>15</sup> Eisenstein highlights the "regressive" and "archaic" character of this kind of thinking. He emphasises its syncretistic qualities, referring to the contemporary ethnological concepts of "primitive" thinking (Lévy-Bruhl, Cushing, Frazer, Tylor, and others), on the one hand, and to the psychoanalytic regression theories, on the other. It is the kind of thinking in which "everything links up with everything".<sup>16</sup>

Yet, Eisenstein is particularly interested in the dialectics of regression and progression, and he believes that, here, rhythm is of special relevance. In the context of reception psychology, this already concerns the premiss of what we today would call a 'fictional licence' – a licence that concedes the more highly developed consciousness, *knowing about* and *consciously accepting* the effect produced by filmic immersion. We have, here, a precondition for the regressing effect of rhythm:

"On the one hand, what comes into play, here, is, of course, an internal 'agreement' that those aspects which are contingent upon art should be regarded as reality *within certain limits*.

The not unknown case of Natasha Rostova in the theatre (Tolstoy's 'War and Peace') shows that, without this 'agreement', the theatre cannot exert such influence. Without the 'abduction' process from the 'concreteness' of the green-painted canvas to other modes of perception, this canvas cannot pretend to represent a landscape.

Yet, far more than mere habituation does the process of 'working on' someone play an immediate role, the process of working on a man who is 'bound' to join in the circle of sensuous thinking. This is where he no longer notices the difference between subject and object, where his ability to perceive the whole through one part of it (*pars*

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<sup>14</sup> Eisenstein: Die rhythmische Trommel, 238.

<sup>15</sup> Eisenstein: Die rhythmische Trommel, 236.

<sup>16</sup> Eisenstein: Die rhythmische Trommel, 239.

*pro toto*) becomes more pronounced, where the colours begin to sing for him and the sounds seem to assume a shape (synaesthesia), where the suggestive word causes him to respond as if the fact denoted by the word had actually happened (hypnotic behaviour), where ... etc.

The means by which such a process of working on someone can be accomplished might be referred to as 'rhythmic drum'.<sup>17</sup>

Rhythm causes an alternating change between mental regression and progression. The early phylo- and ontogenetic stages of semiogenesis are revitalised as rhythmic "workings" to bring about the cognitive feat of figurative speaking and figurative understanding. "Sensuous thinking", then, exceeds conceptual logic rather than regressing behind it. According to Eisenstein, the *intellectual montage* repeats the basic effect of rhythm "at a higher level". The audience "would swallow" even the most staggering montage experiments due to the increased intensity of the "mental drum".<sup>18</sup>

"Yet, each montage-like 'poetic expression' calls for the corresponding 'drumming' preparation ['barabannaya' podgotovka] through an intensified rhythm. Otherwise, the montage-like poetic expression will sound just silly and embarrassing – like a particularly figurative phrase in the context of a speech that is presented in colloquial language rather than with pathos.

For instance, the marble lion's 'leaping up' on the stairs of Odessa ('Battleship Potemkin') can only be emotionally convincing, because it is preceded by a drumming rhythm which has become increasingly intense with the emotionally heated plot and which turns the attention of the spectator into a state of sensuous thinking, i.e., a state in which it is perfectly natural to speak in metaphors and to accept them as real fact without taking exception to the absurdity of a marble lion leaping up!"<sup>19</sup>

### **"Moving" rhythm: conditioning or activation?**

Rhythm depends on movement and effects on movement. Eisenstein emphasizes, on the one hand, the 'immaterial' effect that the cinema ("that least physical and tactile form of art")<sup>20</sup> has on the conscious mind on a level with practices of immediate physical excitation, in particular, the ecstasies of dancing. To him and other avant-garde artists, the actual substratum of rhythm is movement, and the key medium of

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<sup>17</sup> Eisenstein: Die rhythmische Trommel, 236.

<sup>18</sup> Eisenstein: Die rhythmische Trommel, 240.

<sup>19</sup> Eisenstein: Die rhythmische Trommel, 243.

<sup>20</sup> Eisenstein: Die rhythmische Trommel, 244.

movement is the body's motor activity and kinetics. This has to be understood in the larger context of a rhythm boom in the early twentieth century and in the period after the revolution, which shows in the dance and sport movements, the Dalcroze movement, rhythmic gymnastics, and the "rhythmist" studios.<sup>21</sup>

Theoreticians of literature, music, and film are interested in how perception is psycho-physiologically dependent on rhythms of bodily movement. Kinaesthesia becomes the "sixth sense" of the avant-garde.<sup>22</sup> In the case of the film, the kinaesthetic effect is reinforced by the bodily movement depicted in the actual cinematic image. However, also the verse theoretician Osip Brik defines rhythm as the "specific shaping of motor-activity processes".<sup>23</sup> Research in poetic declamation at the "Institute of the living word" ("Institut zhivogo slova") deals with the connection between "dynamic" emotional values (tension/solution) and ideas of movement triggered by the rhythm of verse.<sup>24</sup> Sergei Bernstein refers to the poem's "movement image" ("obraz dvizheniya").<sup>25</sup> Sofya Vysheslavtseva examines the correlation between motor muscle innervations and verse-rhythmic impulses.<sup>26</sup> That motor associations are triggered in the process of declaiming and listening to poetry is psycho-physiologically explained by an acoustic-motor neuronal resonance system.<sup>27</sup> Verse theoretician Andrei Bely is interested in similar phenomena.<sup>28</sup> Also music-psychological research at the "State Academy of the Sciences of Art"/GAKhN (Belyaeva-Ėkzempljarska)<sup>29</sup> and empirical-psychological narratology look at such connections between bodily movement and the perception of artistic rhythm (cf. Sergei Vygotsky on connections between breathing rhythms and compositional rhythms, regarding the structure of a narrative plot)<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Sirotkina: Svobodnoe dvizhenie.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Sirotkina: Shestoe chuvstvo avangarda.

<sup>23</sup> Brik: Ritm i sintaksis, 162.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Sirotkina (ed.): Zhivoe slovo.

<sup>25</sup> Bernstein: Ėsteticheskie predposylki deklamatsii, 364.

<sup>26</sup> Vysheslavtseva: O motornykh impul'sakh stikha.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. the contemporary German studies (Edith Hülse et al.) on correlations between dance and phonation movements (cf. Rieger: Die Individualität der Medien, 97f; Rieger: Die Ästhetik des Menschen, pass.).

<sup>28</sup> Bely: Ritm kak dialektika; Bely: Glossolaliya.

<sup>29</sup> Belyaeva-Ėkzempljarskaja: Vospriyatie melodicheskogo dvizheniya; Belyaeva-Ėkzempljarskaja: O psikhologii vospriyatija muzyki.

<sup>30</sup> Vygotsky: Psikhologiya iskusstva.

The dimension of rhythm relating to the aesthetics of effect, however, is not confined to the singular perception of works of art. In a more fundamental way, it is about a political potential of rhythm: about its mobilising potential, its influence on the movements and constellations of bodies, on orders of perception, on the organisation and distribution of speech.

The “moving” effect of rhythm is twofold. As a “drum”, rhythm excites, makes enthusiastic, synchronises individual bodies with the movement of collective bodies. It generates a field of interaction for kinetic resonance. However, on its own, this picture would be incomplete. Rhythm is powerful not just because of its exciting effect, but at least equally because of its organising impact. Rhythm gives measure, regularity, routine to the movement of social configurations and its individual members. It is an instrument of discipline or, more emphatically (as in the above-quoted text by Mandelstam), of structuring amorphous masses to become a collective deployed.

Already the early writings of Sergei Eisenstein on film theory are illuminating in this respect. In “The Montage of Film Attractions” (1924), Eisenstein likens the process of “working on” the audience through the film to a “series of blows”.<sup>31</sup> It is not the individual blow but the rhythmic “series of shocks” that produces the “general projected emotional effect”.<sup>32</sup> Here, Eisenstein, it is true, still thinks in the narrow, manipulative terms of physiologically conditioning the audience, which is due to the strong influence of reflex psychology. Yet, it is precisely this reflex-psychological reasoning that leads Eisenstein, in his reflection of the potential effect of rhythm in the cinema, to emphasise more the movement-regulating, “training” effect rather than the affectively exciting effect. The “breakdown of movement” into its “primary component elements” should enable the production of imitation primitives for the audience. Actors and audience are trained by a “system of shocks, rises, falls, spins, pirouettes”.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, the film’s ability to infect the audience through motor activity and association

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<sup>31</sup> Eisenstein: *The Montage of Film Attractions*, 39.

<sup>32</sup> Eisenstein: *The Montage of Film Attractions*, 46.

<sup>33</sup> Eisenstein: *The Montage of Film Attractions*, 50.

implies both effects from the start: affect excitation and disciplining. Eisenstein explicitly links this to training systems of the labour movement.<sup>34</sup> Already the concept of “expressive movement” – which has been discussed in detail by Eisenstein, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Nikolai Evreinov, and many other theatre and film theoreticians of the time – is characterised by the combination of both aspects. “Expressive movement” to Eisenstein is both the purposefully structured movement (of the worker, the athlete, etc.) and the movement characterised by conflict between an emotionally instinctive intention to move and “conscious volitional retardation”.<sup>35</sup>

Only if we take this double effect into account can we understand Eisenstein’s radical rethinking of mimesis – from a mimesis of depiction to a mimesis of movement. On the one hand, when comparing the refinement of the ability to imitate brought about by the cinema with dancing rituals from the Stone Age, he says that this mimetic training of instinctive movements is designed to create a maximum emotional effect with the audience. At the same time, however, he points out that these events have a training effect which educates the kinetic reflexes.

Apart from the rhythmic effect on the *bodies* of the revolution, a similar double determination is also discussed in connection with the *language* of the revolution. In 1924, the “LEF” (Levyj front of the arts) magazine published a special issue in which several prominent representatives of Russian Formalism come to grips with the rhetoric of Lenin. These analyses point up how Lenin’s rhetoric differs from an enthralling rhetoric aiming at affective mobilisation. Boris Kazansky identifies repetition as the key effect-producing factor in Lenin’s speech. The repetition does not strike at the spectator “as with the first stick that comes along”, but creates a “geometric style”:

“[...] direct like a graphic making the most economic use of its means, like a drawing without colour, without a shade that would blur and obscure the clear lines. Lenin does not address feeling, nor the imagination. [...] Lenin turns to the decision of the will that is necessary to follow a certain path.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Eisenstein, *Montage der Filmattraktionen*, 51.

<sup>35</sup> Eisenstein, *Montage der Filmattraktionen*, 52.

<sup>36</sup> Kasansky: *Rech’ Lenina*, 118.



Yet, at the same time, emphasis is placed on intensities and energetic “discharges” as effects of this speech. Lev Yakubinsky looks at the “lexical discharges” in the context of the serial effect brought about by rhythm.<sup>37</sup> Boris Eichenbaum refers to “periodical hammer blows”<sup>38</sup> – another genuinely rhythmic quality.

The training of rhythmic movement becomes a stage for the politics of rhythm in industrial modernism. “Taylorisation” (USA), “psychotechnics” (Germany), and “scientific work organisation” (Soviet Union) are aiming for the optimization and automatisisation of movement by means of rhythmic habituation – whether it is the movement of actors, of workers, of soldiers, or of children. Rhythm is power: it structures the orders of perception and movement.

A politics of rhythm would not be properly understood, however, if it were regarded as a one-way street of impacting a person’s mind and body. Rhythm is political inasmuch as it brings about activation. Its ‘impacts’ cannot be divided from the empowerment of the rhythmic subjects, with which these impacts are bound up. Rhythm as activation: that implies a difference between *one’s own* and *foreign* rhythms, the redistribution of forces between individual and collective agents. Rhythmic activation has a transgressive moment. It results in shifts and variants, transfers and rejections of routines. It subverts orders of speech, of images, of movement. Rhythmic practice is explosive. It is an enabling condition of wild speech and action.

Rhythmic activation is, at the same time, an enabling condition of self-observation of the rhythmically ‘forming’ subject. It creates modes of flexibility, it enables the rhythmic subject not only to vary given patterns, but to play through alternative scripts. Here, the rhythmically organised work training at the Soviet Central Institute of Labour headed by Aleksey Gastev is significant. The optimisation of the work processes in terms of rhythmic movement, the “resonance” of body and mind of the “new man of speed” aligned as it should be with the rhythms of technology, the “soaking up of the logic of the movements of the workbench like a sponge” – all this is

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<sup>37</sup> Yakubinsky: O snizhenii vysokogo stilya u Lenina, 75.

<sup>38</sup> Eichenbaum: Osnovnye stilevye tendentsii v rechi Lenina. 64.

closely linked with the self-observation of the training people.<sup>39</sup> These should – at any moment – relate to their work place as to a “research workshop”.<sup>40</sup> Rhythmic work organisation is based on timing and schematisable routines only to a certain degree, it calls for an integration of situational attention, quickness of response, self-observing control, on the one hand, with the ability to anticipate and the designing of “new combinations”, on the other. To Gastev, the new man is first of all a “man of opportunities”.<sup>41</sup>

### **Interruption: preparation of the form**

The future, preparing element of rhythm has an additional aspect: the dynamics of the reception of rhythmic series immanent in structure itself. Apart from the aspect of aesthetic effect discussed above, this concerns the cognitive aspect of form building. The issue is most discriminately reflected in the verse poetics of the Russian formalists.

This discussion has to be seen in the context of a competition between models of rhythm: *flow models* and *interruption models*. The vitalistic thinking of the time postulates an “organic” and “natural” rhythm of a flowing quality. Ludwig Klages and others support this idea by etymologically tracing rhythm back to Greek “rheein”/ “flow”. As a “steadiness undivided by boundaries” (“unzergrenzte Stetigkeit”) or a “polarised steadiness” (“polarisierte Stetigkeit”), and depicted as a sequence of waves, rhythm, here, stands firmly *against* the “structured series” of rule and measure.<sup>42</sup> Rhythm – as a domain of “unconscious experience” – is set up dualistically against measure and metre as a domain of attentive awareness of “interruption”.<sup>43</sup> But flow

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<sup>39</sup> Gastev: *Trudovye ustanovki*, 283.

<sup>40</sup> Gastev: *Trudovye ustanivki*, 283.

<sup>41</sup> Gastev: *Trudovye ustanovki*, 282. - cf. in this context Nikolai Bernštejn's research on physiology of movement as well as the „activity theory“ (A. Leontiev) in the broader context of the so-called cultural history school of Soviet psychology. - Cf. also the studies „The mass Ornament“ (Siegfried Kracauer) and „Girl culture“ (Fritz Giese).

<sup>42</sup> Klages: *Vom Wesen des Rhythmus*, 17.

<sup>43</sup> Klages: *Vom Wesen des Rhythmus*, 44. - Emile Benveniste (*Der Begriff des “Rhythmus”*) shows that this etymological derivation is wrong and reconstructs the meaning of the Old Greek *ritmos* as “distinctive form”. *Ritmos*, according to Benveniste, was originally a “technical term” for the distinction of bodies. Rhythm, to follow Benveniste's main argument, is a “distinctive form” and “proportional figure“ (367, 369), not a wave. Benveniste elaborates the differentiation of the concept of form in pre-Socratic philosophy (*schema, morphe, eidos, rithmos*) and determines *rithmos* (as opposed to *schema*) as “the form at the

models can also conflict with vitalistic models that „resubstantialise“ the paradigm of energetics. This applies, for instance, to ‚fluidal‘ interpretations of Humboldt’s linguistic-philosophical concept of „energeia“ (cf. Andrei Bely on language as an „eternally flowing, creating activity“/вечно текущая, создающая деятельность;<sup>44</sup> here flows an activity, not a mythical original substance – that’s a noteworthy difference).

Interruption models, by contrast, regard rhythm as artificial sequencing. The Russian verse theoretician Osip Brik refers to *intensity* and *interruption* as the two central parameters of rhythm.<sup>45</sup> It is this fundamental double determination that produces the intrinsic tension of any rhythm: these two parameters – intensity and interruption – constantly produce shifting patterns of congruence and incongruence. Even if just one single rhythmic series is isolated in an experiment – let alone the real overlap of several such series in our body and speech movements – do we process ever new “combinations of intensity and interruption”.<sup>46</sup>

Rhythm as interruption relates to the problem of *attention to form* from an aesthetic-theory and psychology angle. Here, too, we should point up a dynamics of preparation. Rhythm is a *potential form* – or should we better say: a *form of potentiality* – not only in terms of the above-sketched transaesthetic activation, but also in terms of its ability to make form possible. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht condensed this into a formula of rhythm as the “successful realisation of form under the (complicating) condition of temporality”.<sup>47</sup> In rhythm, one might say, a fundamental tension is acted out that is constitutive of aesthetic experience: a tension between effects of relief governed by the economy of perception and action (concerning cognitive and motor relief and the smooth running of processes), on the one hand, and effects of the cognitively “complicating” attention to form (including the pleasure derived from such an experience of form), on the other. In rhythm, two effects coincide that are often

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moment in which it is assumed by what is movable, moving, liquid " (370f). This form is an "improvised, momentary, changeable form" (371). *Rithmos* indicates "dispositions" or forms "without firmness or natural necessity, results of an ever-changing arrangement" (371).

<sup>44</sup> Belyj, *Magija slov*, 232.

<sup>45</sup> Brik: *Ritm i sintaksis*, 168.

<sup>46</sup> Brik: *Ritm i sintaksis*, 170.

<sup>47</sup> Gumbrecht: *Rhythmus und Sinn*, 717.

considered antagonistic from an aesthetic-theory point of view: automation and defamiliarisation.<sup>48</sup>

In empirical-psychological and formalistic rhythm research, three key factors of rhythmically induced attention to form can be identified. First, there are the *sensations of contrast*: they constitute the fundamental condition for the identification of rhythmic units (high vs. low significance, strong vs. weak intensity of an element). In this context, the theses of Gestalt psychology relating to “contradiction” as a temporal Gestalt quality are of particular interest.<sup>49</sup> Second, the *multiple determination* of verse rhythm concentrates and increases the attention to the form-building processes: “two rhythms are in some manner running at once” (Gerard Manley Hopkins).<sup>50</sup> Differences of tempo, sequence shifts (“sdvigi”) and other asynchronies between the – far more than two – different rhythmic series are characteristic of this cognitive event of attention to form.

Third – and this is most important to our argumentation – a preparatory attitude is also of utmost significance if rhythm is viewed from a form-receptive angle. It is the attitude of *expectation*. This aspect of creating rhythmic tension between expectation and realisation is described in detail by Yuri Tynyanov in “The Problem of Verse Language” (1924). The metrical organisation of verse rhythm thrives on the tension between “preparation” by dint of individual metrical units (“progressive element”) and “execution” as the combination of units into larger groups (“regressive element”).<sup>51</sup> A dialectic between the forces of regression and progression is, thus, also effective from within the structure of verse.

Rhetoric research similarly recognises the tension between propulsion and repulsion as a fundamental dynamism of the rhythm of oration. Boris Kazansky describes in his

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<sup>48</sup> It is no coincidence, that Nietzsche quotes in his early fragment „Über den Rhythmus“ (1875) a programmatic in this regard passage in Schopenhauer („Welt als Wille und Vorstellung“). Rhythm becomes a „binder“ of our attention and results in a blind „tuning“ into the presented, whereby it contains „a certain emphatic and independent from reason power of persuasion“ (quoted from Nietzsche: Über den Rhythmus, 474). - Cf. regarding the ‚relieving‘ function of rhythm also Karl Bücher’s influential study „Arbeit und Rhythmus“ (1896).

<sup>49</sup> Ehrenfels: Über Gestaltqualitäten, 276f.

<sup>50</sup> Hopkins: Author’s Preface, quoted in: Jakobson: Linguistics and Poetics, 366.

<sup>51</sup> Tynyanov: Problema stichotvornogo jazyka, 40. – Roman Jakobson, in his seminal essay „Linguistics and Poetics“, conceives of verse rhythm as a structure of “enchained probabilities” (

above-mentioned contribution to Lenin's rhetoric a dynamism of repetition that is "propelling" and "pushing forward" as well as "stopping". He refers to a genuine dynamics of rhythm: the "dam" that rhythmic preparation builds through "expectation", the "shifting of the main emphasis to the end", and, on the other hand, the possibility of stopping the movement, of forming "stationary water swirls" functioning as "funnels" that "suck in and swallow" attention.<sup>52</sup>

## Pulse

Yet, a reception-aesthetic point of view alone would not be able to capture rhythm as a form of potentiality, as a perceptive and actional moment of experiencing potentiality. Expectation of form is certainly a decisive moment. It can be understood in two different ways, though. The expectation can be based on the presupposition of a sequential structure that in respect of its status *as form* has already been secured or established (regardless of the degree of invariability or variability of this structure). Reception-aesthetic approaches are not always free from such a reduced perspective of expectation. In the worst case, they lead to schematic models that distinguish merely between variants and invariants ("metrical" system as invariant plus enlivening "rhythmic" variants by means of performance and agogics).

From this formative expectation, a transformative expectation has to be distinguished. Given such a perspective, rhythm is a force *before* the form. It is more of an event than a form, or, more precisely: as an event, it is the condition of becoming form. This aspect has to do with the distinction between movement and the result of a movement. As Osip Brik writes very much to the point in "Rhythm and Syntax":

"When someone crosses a swamp, leaving footprints, then the sequence of these footprints does not constitute rhythm, however regular it may be. Only the process of walking is rhythmical, and the corresponding footprints are mere data that can be used to assess this process. A statement that the footprints are rhythmically distributed cannot be scientifically justified."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Kazansky: Rech' Lenina, 124.

<sup>53</sup> Brik: Ritm i sintaksis, 164. - Cf. Ehrenfels' („Über Gestaltqualitäten“) on the „striding man“ (270f): there is only *one* step which is in the present: „Where we think we see movement, our memory is already at play.“ (271). - Cf. Brüstle / Ghattas / Risi / Schouten: Rhythmus als Prozess.

Similar thoughts we find already in Gestalt psychology. Christian von Ehrenfels writes in his fundamental 1890 essay, where he famously argues for the existence of “Zeitgestalten”:

“We are able to sense, i.e. to see in the strict sense of the word, only the present, only a singular position of legs. Where we believe to see movement, our memory is already at play.”<sup>54</sup>

It is in the “pulse” that this transformative movement materialises. Osip Brik remarks on the pulse of rhythm in verse: “The rhythmic movement exists prior to the verse”.<sup>55</sup> Here, he stipulates the primacy of an underlying rhythmic formula with which the verses get in tune, so to speak, and whose sequence of words may as well be rhythmised differently if the “pulse” is different. The ubiquitous comparison with dance makes this clear: it would make no sense to try to explain the “material result” of the rhythmic pulse of a dance as a combination of certain regulated movements; there would only be a “primary rhythmic formula that is used to bring about the various kinetic results”.<sup>56</sup> Metricised verse, the regulated dance figure – these are nothing but “materialisations” of the rhythmic pulse.<sup>57</sup>

Pulse theory, however, must not be confused with organicistic notions of an elementary rhythmic flow that wafts and billows through the world and through our bodies. On the contrary, it clearly sides with a cultural-technical concept of rhythm as an artificial achievement. At the beginning of his study, Brik introduces a methodologically strict distinction when he points out the difference between rhythm as the “intended/conditional forming of motor processes” (“oformlenie uslovnoe”) and the “natural sequence” (“estestvennoe cheredovanie”) of astronomical, biological, and mechanical movements.<sup>58</sup> The “pulse” is regarded from a more technical point of view as something like an unconscious urging. We are not dealing with a drive theory of rhythm.

The pulse, most importantly, is based on an energy of *transfer* – a transfer from social rhythms to artistic rhythms and vice versa. That is true, in particular, of

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<sup>54</sup> Ehrenfels: Über Gestaltqualitäten, 270f.

<sup>55</sup> Brik: Ritm i sintaksis, 164.

<sup>56</sup> Brik: Ritm i sintaksis, 167.

<sup>57</sup> Brik: Ritm i sintaksis, 171.

<sup>58</sup> Brik: Ritm i sintaksis, 163.

revolutionary situations in which new political orders, new regimes of movement, and new forms of art are implemented. We will demonstrate this with an example from Andrei Bely's verse theory.

Rhythm as a "transformative" force constitutes the key idea of Andrei Bely's verse theory, particularly, in his late essay "Rhythm as Dialectics" (1929). Bely polemicises against a static verse theory focused on metre that looks at "line atoms, verse foot atoms, syllable atoms" in isolation, beyond their "organised wholeness" ("tsel'nost' organizacii").<sup>59</sup>

Lines of verse, according to Bely, are rhythmically induced generic processes. Bely repeatedly refers to rhythm and metre as different "phases" of verse-formation: formations of "species" from "genera" (here regarded in the biological understanding of *genus* and *species*). In terms of biological evolution – the earlier stage being the more open, more fluid one (compared by Bely to the relation between cartilage and bone). The genesis of poetry "as form" is a movement from "pre-poetry" ("do-poeziya").<sup>60</sup> Rhythm is the "intonation in us that precedes the choice of words and lines".<sup>61</sup> Here, too, then a dynamics of preparation is dominant. Rhythm prepares metre. Yet, Bely does not conceive of this preparation teleologically: "Intonation, or rhythm, often knows nothing of metre, just as the genus does not know the species before the latter has become stable in its specialness".<sup>62</sup> The constant alternating change between intonation and verse is the very core of this "transformative" process. Its venue, if we may use this term, is not the single line of verse but the escalation and de-escalation of the differences between successive lines. Bely's statistical calculations, therefore, focus on the emergence of tensions and modifications in the process of line accumulation as the decisive rhythm-generating quantity. What is calculated is the changing ratio of "correspondences" and "contrasts" between subsequent line patterns.

Most importantly, however, this generic process of preparation must not be considered inherent in the system. The "pulse" and "rhythmic intonation" (Bely uses

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<sup>59</sup> Bely: Ritm kak dialektika, 18f.

<sup>60</sup> Bely: Ritm kak dialektika, 21.

<sup>61</sup> Bely: Ritm kak dialektika, 22f.

<sup>62</sup> Bely: Ritm kak dialektika, 39.

the two expressions almost synonymously) are transfers not only at the moment of their transformation into metrical verse. They are transfers also on the other side: on the side that touches upon the rhythms of life and speech *before* literature. A “social order” materialises in rhythm as transfer. Artistic “inspiration” and enthusiasm of the process of creation are nothing but the “acceptance of the social order intonated in the sound”, its “mandate” and “directive”.<sup>63</sup> They transfer this order to the poetic image. The poet is a medium of intonation: thanks to his more wide-ranging and acute hearing, he becomes the “megaphone” of the “napev” (the melodious intonation) and condenses into the “wave of the sound that hits him from life's meeting”.<sup>64</sup> Bely has a rich repertory of technical-media images for this model of transfer. He refers to the emblematic poet of the revolution, Mayakovsky. That poet is said to receive rhythmic pulses like a telegrapher receiving telegrams.

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<sup>63</sup> Bely: *Ritm kak dialektika*, 29f.

<sup>64</sup> Bely: *Ritm kak dialektika*, 31.



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