

Rhythm as Aristotelian Form of Psychological Process (Part 3)

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Psychology of Poetic Rhythm - On Uttered Language (Meumann - 1894)

The third chapter of Meumann's essay was entitled "*Der Rhythmus des gesprochenen Verses*– The Rhythm of the Uttered Verse." This should be highlighted because it shows a perspective that differentiates Meumann from most of his contemporaries: he not only quite beneficially parted from his master Wundt, who had given the primacy to music at the expense of poetry, but it also showed an interest in language not only as *written* but also as *uttered speech*. This had naturally something to do with his physiopsychological viewpoint which regards rhythm as the organization of sound impressions by the consciousness: before being heard and processed by the brain, the words must be uttered, as the notes be composed and played before being listened to. But this had also a larger implication: in this instance, Meumann partly retrieved, by his own means, Humboldt's idea of the cycle of the language between two subjects (Trabant, 1999, p. 38).

He humorously observed that "while music theory had greatly neglected the scientific treatment of musical rhythm, the number of smaller and larger works dealing with the rhythmic-metrical relations of poetry amounted to a few hundred" (p. 76). Whereas he had to deal in his previous survey only with a couple of theorists of music, he noticed that the most recent bibliography published by the Austrian literary historian and Germanist Jacob Minor (1855-1912), in his *New High German Metric* (1893) was 18 pages long.

Considering the debate raging over this issue since the 1850s, it is worth noting that Meumann's first concern was to criticize the definition of the term "rhythm" in most 19th-century metric theories, which took it—thus, not unlike the music theories—as synonymous with "regularity of measure." But, as for the best poets of his time or for Nietzsche, the metric point of view entailed, according to him, sheer confusion between rhythm and meter.

Instead, faithful to his psychological perspective, he proposed to use the term *rhythm* to signify "the whole sum of *rhythmic processes [which occur] in the subject [while] hearing the uttered verse,*" and, as he had done in the previous section on music, the term *metric* to denote the technical notation devices and the "system of symbols" that allows the poet or the specialist to note his

intention or his findings and the actor or the reader to properly perform his act or reading.

The expressions “*verse rhythm*,” “*rhythm of poetry*” first require a justification, since in metric one usually speaks of “*rhythm*” in a certain sense, namely, when it comes to “*regularity of measure*” [*Taktgleichheit*] in the verse. This restriction is unjustified. By *rhythm of the verse* I mean the whole sum of *rhythmic processes* [which occur] in the subject [while] hearing the uttered verse, and this phenomenon [that occurs] in the hearer is primarily the object of the psycho-aesthetic research, in the poetic rhythm as much as in the musical one. On the other hand, in every rhythmic domains there is a metrical viewpoint [that must be taken into account]; it shows when the rhythmic phenomena are indicated, in the interest of a [performance] technique of verse, music, or sound-beat (drums, drumbeat), by a system of symbols, and are synthetically brought from units and rules of their combination, into absolute or relative measures. (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, p. 76-77, my trans.)

Following the method he had already used for the study of simple sound and music rhythm, Meumann proposed to describe, first, “the specificity of the poetic rhythm” due to “the particular rhythmizomenon,” the uttered language, it is applied on, then to examine “the rhythmic processes in the hearer,” i.e. the temporal facts, “the study of the speaker,” and finally “the separation of the rhythmic and metric point of view.”

We will 1. have to ask about the specificity of the poetic rhythm compared to the musical one, and with regard to that of simple sound impressions, and these have to be understood from the particular rhythmizomenon [i.e. uttered language, speech]. Then, we will have to analyze 2. the rhythmic processes in the hearer, [or] the observer who listens to the uttered verse, and then go to the elements of the rhythms, the laws of their interaction, the rhythmic forms that emerge from them, and their combinations into larger constructions. Then, 3. we will be able to seek out the causes of the rhythm we are listening to in the study of the speaker who utters verse, who, at the same time, is himself liable to multiple, independent interests. His statements give us an insight into the objective performances of the speaker. These constitute a complicated case of motor rhythm formation. Finally, 4. the separation of the rhythmic and metric point of view will be of particular importance for poetic rhythms because of the uncertainty prevailing on this point. (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, pp. 78-79, my trans.)

Concerning the first point, the existing metric literature did not help much, Meumann noticed, because of its massive use of the musical concept of measure/bar/beat [*Takt*] and of its general neglect of “the psychological analysis of the rhythmic impression” (p. 78).

First question. What are the specificities of the poetic rhythm which differentiate it from the rhythm in the other rhythmic domains? One searches in vain satisfactory answer to this question in the literature. Usually, the metrists [*Metrikern*] determine the “essence of rhythm” according to the scheme of the musical “bars” [*Takte*], and then, in general, it is given as a special feature of the verse, in which the time factors play no part or a minor one. (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, p. 77-78, my trans.)

Instead, Meumann underlined some of the specificities of the linguistic material when observed through its performance and perception. He first argued, in a banal way, that language has “far more complicated acoustic structures” than simple sound or even music notes.

From this follows this new list of the verse rhythm constituents: 1. The rhythmized sensation elements are far more complicated acoustic structures [*Lautgebilde*] than those of the rhythmic domains examined earlier. (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, p. 79, my trans.)

But Meumann added to this a much more interesting analysis of the effect of the language on the attention. Whereas sounds and even notes easily captivate the latter through their specific rhythm, the language has an opposite effect: it frees the attention from “regularity of measure” and repetition.

4. The rhythmizomenon [the uttered language] entails a constant distraction of *attention* from the rhythm as such. In the simple *sound rhythm* the rhythm as such dominates our consciousness, the neutral nature of sound impressions does not capture our interest. With notes, the melody and harmonization become preferentially the focus of attention. The more the rhythm withdraws, the more the latter occupy us internally. For this very reason, the rhythm can be handled more freely in this case, and the “regularity of measure” [*Taktgleichheit*] can be followed less strictly. In this respect, all higher music forms a transitional stage to poetic-rhythmic relations. In poetry, in place of the indefinite associations such as the ones music provokes in us, some apperceptive idea associations, or systems of thought develop. Thus, sometimes the rhythmic relations withdraw so completely that the one who declaims [*der Declamirende*] can render the rhythm in the freest way without us missing anything in the artistic effect of the reading. *This change in the direction of attention ensures the freedom of the rhythm in declamation [des declamirten Rhythmus] in contrast with the general rhythmic principle of regularity.* (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, p. 80, my trans.)

If we look closer to this passage we see that Meumann’s presentation was not completely clear because after having alleged that in uttering poetry the “rhythm as such” almost totally withdraws, he claimed that this withdrawal allows “to render the rhythm in the freest way.” But this little inconsistency could be reduced by tracing it back to the evolutionist paradigm, customary in his time, which drove his line of argument, as well as the structure of his essay going through sound, then music and finishing with poetry before, finally, presenting the result of his experiments. The rhythm is universal but not constantly the same: in ordinary sounds, it is binary, exclusively based on accentuation and repetition; in music, it becomes more complex since it also involves, on top of the previous kind of rhythm, that resulting from the melodic and harmonic organization, the change in duration, the pauses; in poetry, on top of the two previous ones, due to the use of language, a third layer seems to be added which is based on the rhythm of the ideas through which the consciousness organizes the sound flow of the uttered language and which ensures a certain freedom from the two previous rhythm layers.

Meumann even envisaged that, thanks to this freedom, the rhythm could produce “a certain side effect” and get “a relatively independent meaning beside that of the verse.” In this particular

instance, he was—unfortunately without knowing it—very close to previous poetic elaborations by Diderot, Schiller and Schlegel concerning its similarity with hieroglyph or painting (see vol. 2, chap. 3 and 4).

Therefore, the general tendency, which is inherent to the *emergence* of rhythm in poetry, is this: a certain side effect should be obtained with the rhythm (verse painting [*Versmalerei*]), the rhythm should have a relatively independent meaning beside that of the verse. (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, p. 80-81, my trans.)

Although he ignored that this point had already been fruitfully discussed during the last decades of the 18th century, he was also close to the idea that a particular suspension of time occurs in the poem (see vol. 2, p. 82 *sq.* and 105 *sq.*).

Now, if any factor must be affected by the attention change, it certainly is *time perception*. Concerning the latter, Lotze has, quite correctly, sustained “the paradox” that time plays *no role at all* in rhythm. It seems that the commitment to the meaning of the verse suspends time perception. The psychology of the sense of time confirms this fact. [...] The computing of the attention [*Aufmerksamkeitsberechnung*] in the artistic performance thus allows a relatively great freedom of the verse rhythm from the principle of the temporal regularity of the principal accents [*von dem Princip der Zeitgleichheit der Hauptbetonungen*]. (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, p. 81, my trans.)

Finally, Meumann also shared—though for sheer psychological reasons—the increasing rebuff of regular beat, metric feet or measures in poetry, by poets such as Baudelaire, Hopkins and Mallarmé. Since both our imagination and attention repulse any strict regularity in the processing of our ideas, which puts “the meaningful and the less meaningful” on the same level, we are “reluctant to regular scanning” which results in abusively emphasizing “logically insignificant [speech elements] in the same way as meaningful ones.”

But there probably is 6. an associative factor that virtually forbids the rigorous rhythmization of our thoughts and sentences. We require of any artistic shaping of a substance that it respects the nature of the latter. Curved chair legs made of marble are just as distasteful as larger statues made of porcelain, because the material is contrary to such formations. Similarly, it is quite contrary to the nature of our imaginative and attentional movements that a completely regular alternation [*völlig regelmäßiger Wechsel*] between the meaningful and the less meaningful takes place. That is the reason why we are reluctant to regular scanning [*regelmäßige Scandiren*] which, in an abusive manner, constantly, emphasizes logically insignificant [speech elements] in the same way as meaningful ones. (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, p. 81-82, my trans.)

Reducing the rhythmic system of accents to a strictly regular sequence produced not only boredom but also confusion and finally repulsion.

That is why any strict regularity in verse rhythm as well as any monotony in accented times, repulses us. Under regularity I understand the same recurrence of all rhythmic elements, as for example, the *number of rises and falls [Hebungen und Senkungen]* of a rhythmic whole [*eines rhythmischen Ganzen*]. From this, it follows that a certain irregularity [*eine gewisse Regellosigkeit*] is inherent to the poetic rhythm and absolutely demanded by the rhythmic material of poetry. (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, p. 82, my trans.)

We see that Meumann reached considerable results which show the fruitfulness of his Aristotelian empiricist perspective. But, there was also another side in his approach of the linguistic *rhythmizomenon* which is less useful to us.

He abusively generalized the German case and claimed that the incorporated accentuation of the words always provides a basis for the rhythmization of poetry. Worse, following this first claim, he declared that writing poetry was mostly about *choosing* “words,” “the manner in which they are put together,” and their “position in the rhythmic whole.”

2. The words have a firm accentuation already in prose-language, so that poetry works with a material which is already rhythmized; hence, the rhythmic impression will have to be constituted essentially by the peculiar *choice* of words, the *manner in which they are put together*, and the *position of words* in the rhythmic whole. (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, p. 79, my trans.)

Apparently, this assertion was reminiscent of some suggestions by Hölderlin, Poe, or later Valéry: composing poetry was a craft that had to be performed with utmost care. But the rhythm was not, as for these poets as for Baudelaire, Hopkins or Mallarmé, the organization of the *signifier flow* which allows a poetic *transsubject* to *unwillingly* emerge (on Hölderlin, see vol. 2, p. 108 *sq.*; on Baudelaire, Hopkins, and Mallarmé, vol. 2, chap. 8), but on the contrary, that of the *flow of ideas* running in the *clearest consciousness*. “The course of thoughts itself” became “the object of rhythmization” by means of “sections of meaning” made “salient to the ear” as, he claimed, in Goethe’s poetry.

But 3. the course of “thoughts” itself becomes object of rhythmization. This is manifested by the strong prevalence of the smaller rhythmic sections determined by the meaning, which constantly break through the metrical structure of the verse feet [*den metrischen Aufbau der Versfüsse*], tear down the verses, and moreover can concatenate the verse end and the beginning (of the next verse). Frequently, the whole rhythm is determined in its character by these *sections of meaning* [Sinnabschnitten], all those rhythmic groups (and in this sense rhythmic “units”) made salient to the ear, a kind of rhythmic treatment which is especially characteristic of Goethe’s poetry. (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, p. 79, my trans.)

Meumann explicitly claimed, putting his whole theory under the primacy of consciousness and will, that rhythm did not result from “the rhythmization of our words and sentences” but from “a rhythmic change of ideas” or “a rhythmic flow of the attention acts.”

A rhythmic sound sequence [*rhythmische Lautfolge*] cannot just be the result of the rhythmization of our words and sentences, but a rhythmic change of ideas [*rhythmischer Vorstellungswechsel*], a rhythmic flow of the attention acts [*rhythmischer Fluss der Aufmerksamkeitsacte*] must be initiated, and this can only be expressed in the fact that *word groups* (syllable groups) form the rhythmic units. (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, p. 80, my trans.)

Thus, in clear contradiction with his deep concern for the utterance and hearing of words, and although he had developed noticeable ideas concerning the role of melody, harmony, and pause in the formation of musical rhythm, he envisaged the poetic rhythm as primarily determined by the organization of logical sequences backed by a hierarchized system of accents, leaving on the side, among other phenomena, echoes, alliterations, assonances and the myriad of sound interactions that weave together the poetic material (for an alternative view see, vol. 2, chap. 8).

While in music or in the domain of sound sensations we have to deal with *sensations* or combinations of them, the objects of the rhythmization in poetry are *the words arranged* [geordnet] *in sentences according to the logical contexts*. It follows from this formulation of the *rhythmizomenon* that I do not consider words and syllables *per se* as the object of rhythm formation in the verse. I rather would like to emphasize, from the outset, that the *logical* element, the movement of ideas [*Vorstellungsbewegung*] participates in the rhythm. (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, p. 79, my trans.)

While he had first seemed willing to join the long list of philosophers and artists who had, since Diderot, heralded the poetic primacy of the signifier in rhythm (see vol. 2, chap. 3,4, 7, 8), he thus abruptly and quite disappointingly reintroduced the rule of the signified and its semiotic dualism.

From the logical nature of the rhythmic group of the verse, it follows, however, that the subordination of the logically insignificant [speech elements] to the more significant [ones] is expressed also in the rhythmization. This is done by marking, for the ear of the hearer, the logical group (see p. 79) by a system of graded accents, which join together in the rhythmic group under the dominance of a main accent. This subordination of the accents of a group is one of the most obvious manifestations of the poetic rhythm. (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, p. 82, my trans.)

This limitation was probably due to Meumann's mistaken assimilation between meaning and meaningfulness. Contrary to many poets of his time and also to some previous language theorists (particularly Humboldt, see vol. 2, p. 156 sq.), he thought, quite inappropriately, that stress- and emphasis-marks were the only counterparts of the signified within the domain of the signifier.

[In the speaker], the accentuation [*Betonung*] is also the expression of an increased inner activity, a heightened attention, a livelier sympathy of the feeling. As a result, the group formation, which is carried out through the various accentuation degrees [*Betonungsstufen*], becomes identical to the logical syllable-word-idea group [*mit der logischen Silben-Wort-Vorstellungsgruppe*] [...] and, conversely, in the hearer, the perception of the various accentuation degrees will produce the

corresponding oscillation [*Auf- und Abschwellung*] of the meaning of the ideas, of the attentional tension, and of the feeling of sympathy. (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, p. 84, my trans.)

Meumann was actually imbued with some of the most ancient rhetorical ideas. In Antiquity, Cicero, in his *De oratore*, had indeed already argued for an arrangement of the words, the sentences and the whole speech, based on the logical organization of meaning. He suggested that the orator must find a non-metrical way to give his speech “rhythmic cadence, roundness, and finish, like verse,” and that this specific effect was to be produced by “tying the thoughts with words in such a manner as to enclose them in a rhythm” (*De oratore*, 3.44.175-176) (for more details see vol. 1, p. 230 sq.).

It is not the job of psychological research to do this in detail; but to establish the *principle* of the effect of the accentuation change: in verse the logically more significant is stressed. [...]: the accentuation is the result of the changing attentional energy, and especially the accentuation on the verse is an *expressive movement* of the vivid tension of the attention, of the vivid sympathy of the interest. (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, p. 84-85, my trans.)

Psychology of Poetic Rhythm - On Speaker's and Hearer's Consciousness (Meumann - 1894)

After having thoroughly analyzed the specificities of the linguistic *rhythmizomenon* and their effects on the poetic rhythm, Meumann turned to the “time factor,” i.e. the rhythm observed, this time, from the perspective of the hearer's and speaker's consciousness (p. 87).

Once again, he noticeably began by putting the older metric aside. In truth, the latter did already take into account what was called “quantities” but this was utterly unsatisfactory. Instead of the traditional count equating a short syllable with one time and a long one with two, he proposed a very detailed observation of *the real performance of the speaker* including the duration, which had been already touched upon by Brücke, the speed of succession, and the repetition of time proportions.

The second factor to be considered in poetry rhythmic is temporal. Very unfortunate is the choice of the name “quantity [*Quantität*]” for all time elements of the rhythm in the current metric. [...] Rather, we have to ask: what role do the *duration*, the *speed of the succession*, and the *repetition* of analogous proportions play in verse rhythm? (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, p. 86, my trans.)

The duration and speed factor was itself to be subdivided into three categories: duration of the speech syllables proper, duration of the time-lengths between accents, and pauses.

The *duration* comes into consideration in three ways: 1. In the different duration of the speech syllables [*Sprechsilben*]; 2. in the absolute and relative length of the *time-stretches* [*Zeitstrecken*]

which a), in the uttered verse [*gesprochenen Verse*], extend between the principal accents that mark the rhythmic progress. Here is the main question: is, through the emphasis on these major accents, the time progress regularly marked as in music (provided that the regularity of the measure [*Taktgleichheit*] is not disturbed by a particular phrasing [*phrasirendes Spiel*])? Or does this principle not exist for the rhythm of uttered verse? In what extent is it observed? In addition, b) it cannot be dismissed that the same duration of the rhythmic *group* guarantees us the impression of regularity in verse rhythm. The duration comes 3. into consideration as the length of the “*pauses*,” i.e. the duration of the “empty” intervals between syllables, words, line ends, stanzas, and, above all, between the rhythmic groups of words formed in free declamation. (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, p. 86-87, my trans.)

The results of this study were quite remarkable. Contrary to Brücke who had claimed that the saying “the accent makes [the syllable] long” was wrong (see above, chap. 1), Meumann underlined the fact that “the stressed syllable always requires a longer utterance time.” But the contradiction was perhaps only apparent since Brücke compared accentuated short and unaccented long syllables and Meuman, as Lotze, probably the duration of the same syllable, short or long, when accentuated in a word or unaccented in another word.

Examinations of the speaker and hearer have to go in parallel. [...] 1. I can confirm with some certainty the assumption already made by Lotze that the stressed syllable always requires a longer utterance time. (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, p. 87, my trans.)

Meumann also noticed that, conversely, the longer syllables attract more attention and, therefore, may be used “for introducing subjective emphasis.”

The syllable duration, however, 2. must come into consideration, as long as that the longer syllable always has a greater sound effect for the ear, and is therefore suitable for attracting attention and for introducing subjective emphasis. (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, p. 87, my trans.)

The poetic rhythm could also be implemented through the use of successive syllables endowed with different [time-]lengths.

The different [time-]lengths of successive syllables also have [3.], as such, a rhythmizing effect, in that the time-factor is independently active as a rhythm-forming element. (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, p. 87, my trans.)

Concerning now the second point of the duration dimension, the speed of succession, i.e. the time-lengths between the “main accents” or “ictuses,” Brücke had shown that, in traditional poetry declamation, they were almost constant, but Meumann added that “in the free artistic declamation” the regularity of the measure could sometimes “be completely surrendered.”

Subsequently, the duration, in terms of equality of the temporal intervals between the main accents [*Hauptbetonungen*], had rhythmic significance for the verse (the so-called “regularity of measure”). It is indubitable, though, that in the free artistic declamation the measure regularity of the verse [*die Taktgleichheit des Verses*] is sometimes preserved, and sometimes can be completely surrendered, without us missing anything in the aesthetic impression. (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, p. 87, my trans.)

As Brücke who found some traditional kinds of poetry reading “ridiculous,” Meumann claimed that the reader/speaker must follow the rhythm of the ideas exposed by the poem instead of artificial traditional meter which he could dispense from and rightly “mock.”

Likewise, in poetry the words form logical contexts, groups of ideas, that often line up in very irregular lengths which are not completely compensated by any acceleration of speech, and whose emotional character often compels us to accelerate, slow down, and mock all “regularity of measure [*Taktgleichheit*].” (p. 90)

He recognized that the metric regularity played an important role in poetry but he underlined the fact that it was not a *conditio sine qua non* of the rhythm.

The “regularity of measures,” or better yet, the marking of a uniform progress in time, by indicating main moments [*Hauptmomente*] in the course of the ideas, equally distant in time, by means of the main accentuations [*Hauptbetonungen*], is so essential to all complex rhythmic formations, that nowhere can a rhythmic change of our experiences be found in which they are completely lacking. [Yet,] it is not a *conditio sine qua non* of all rhythm, without which no impression of rhythmized sensations could arise. Rather, each individual rhythmic group can have a strong rhythmic character, even if it is not repeated by a second one and if there is no indications marking a regular progress in time. (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, p. 87-88, my trans.)

Meumann traced the need of regularity back to the motor dimension of rhythm, which implicated “the (temporal, spatial and intensive) controlled progress of movements.”

But if a larger rhythmic whole is to be created that makes an aesthetically pleasing impression, then the rhythmic group must be resumed by others of the same or *similar* construction, and, provided that the pauses are not unpleasantly popping up, with equal pauses between the groups, which by itself gives a certain equality in the marking of the main accentuation times.

What is the significance of this tendency of any rhythm to maintain the same time intervals between the main moments? It seemed to me, from the timing experiments [*Taktirversuchen*], that, on the motor side, the rhythmic ordering of the impulses was, on the one hand, an expedient operation for a rapid automatization of the innervation change, and thus, on the other hand, at the same time, a sum of resources for maintaining the (temporal, spatial and intensive) controlled

progress of movements. (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, p. 88, my trans.)

To the motor dimension Meumann added a second factor based, this time, on the limited span of human consciousness, an aspect underlined by Wundt.

All rhythm shows not only this universal tendency to observe *the same* time relations of the rhythm principal moments, but also the tendency to observe certain *absolute* time values in them. Numerous experiences in experimental psychology practice attest that there is a natural period of attention, during which the capacity of tension [*Spannungsenergie*] remains at its maximum. (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, p. 89, my trans.)

The conclusion of his observation on time-lengths was that two natural “tendencies,” dialectically opposed, were to be taken into account. Reading poetry mobilized simultaneously a “beating tendency” and a “phrasing tendency” which were the two extremes between which any reading performance—“apart from the scanned speech which runs contrary to the very nature of the poetic material”—oscillates.

Apart from the scanned speech [*scandirenden Sprechen*] which, according to what I have said above, runs contrary to the very nature of the poetic material, then one can say that the poetic reading is dominated by two tendencies, which sometimes oppose each other, sometimes harmoniously unite, sometimes successively take on the production of the rhythmic impression. I will call them the beating tendency [*taktirende Tendenz*], and the phrasing (grouping) tendency [*phrasirende (gruppierende) Tendenz*]. In the former, the original/proper [*eigentlich*] rhythmic need asserts itself, it always urges [us to meet] the general condition of all rhythmic order of our successive experiences, [i.e.] the equality of the intervals between the main rhythmical moments. In the latter, the independent interest in the content constantly expresses itself; since the nature of the idea movement/flow of consciousness [*Vorstellungsbewegung*] does not permit a complete schematization of its course, as the rhythmical interest [would] demand, we are constantly compelled by the desire of meaningful reading to get rid of the rhythmic principle. (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, p. 91-92, my trans.)

Concerning the third element involved in the duration dimension of rhythm, the pauses, Meumann rapidly underlined their significance. Interruptions in the flow are as important as the segments that they delimit.

Further, as regards the significance of the third rhythmic element deriving from time duration: the pauses, these are of the greatest importance to the verse rhythm. With the pauses we mark the smallest rhythmic units emerging for the ear, the word groups organized under one main accentuation, the larger groups into which we combine them, the verse ends (where we want to make them stand out, and especially where they are marked by the rhyme), finally the strophe conclusions. (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, p. 93, my trans.)

Having finished with the analysis of the role of duration/speed in the rhythm, Meumann switched to the last element of the “time factor”: the repetition. He thought that the experiments and conclusions reached in the chapter dedicated to music already shed some light on the subject.

The third time factor we envisaged was the repetition. The general psychic fact, expressed in the effect of repetition in rhythm, has been presented (p. 50) on the example of rhythm in music, and it is easy to transfer the indications given there to poetry. (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, p. 93, my trans.)

But he added a few interesting remarks articulating the concept of repetition with the dialectic between the “beating and phrasing tendencies,” already singled out in the examination of the variable regularity of time-lengths in rhythm. Repetition was not limited, as metrists claimed, to accents regularly dividing into equal sections the duration of the poem. Meumann perceived another type of repetition of larger groups of words, which could be the same or only “similar.”

If, by [reciting] verse, we get closer to scanned speech [*der scandirende Sprechweise*], the beating tendency becomes more evident, the repetition of the principal accentuations has a particular effect as the marking of the recurrence of both *equal time-lengths* and *corresponding time moments*. If, instead, we get closer to phrasing-grouping speech [*der phrasirenden gruppirenden Sprechweise*], the repetition comes to effect as the resumption of rhythmic groups by same *or similarly* built groups. Precisely in this respect, the repetition of analogous conditions has a very special, if often underestimated, significance for the freely uttered verse. (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, p. 94-95, my trans.)

By that single observation, he remarkably reintroduced the echoes, alliteration, assonances, and all forms of signifier repetitions he had regrettably forsaken in his previous analyses.

1. It is a great mistake of some modern metricists [to believe] that the repetition of groups increases their rhythmic effect only when the groups are built equal. [...] 2. A larger combination of rhythmic groups, which in itself seems quite arhythmic because of the great irregularity between the individual groups, seems at once to be well rhythmized when *repeated* as a whole. 3. A larger combination of rhythmic groups undergoes complete rhythmization, [even] when it is only *partially* repeated. The rhythmizing effect then extends to the non-repeated parts. 4. A rhythmic group is enhanced in its effect when it is taken up by a following richly articulated and *more developed* form. (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, p. 95, my trans.)

Although he still used the feeble term of “sum,” Meumann finished the third chapter of his essay with an extraordinary recovery and anticipation of the poetic rhythm as a *system* of “corresponding rhythmic parts.”

The repetition of corresponding rhythmic parts [*sich entsprechender rhythmischer Theile*] is

finally the actually synthetic element of rhythm. By the type of resumption (increased or weakened) of former members, by the number (frequency of recurrence) of the different accentuation levels, by the number of main accents combined into a rhythmic whole, by the times after which the repetitions take place (“pauses”), by the return of the groups, series, periods, the whole sum [*die ganze Summe*] of the rhythmic forms arises.

In poetry, so develop the rhythmic syllable and word groups, the verse sections, the verses, the verse groups i.e. the strophe, the strophe groups i.e. the poem.

The task of psychology in relation to these particular rhythmic individual forms is the search for the factors of consciousness that are involved in this construction of form. (*Research on the Psychology and Aesthetic of Rhythm*, 1894, p. 96, my trans.)

In short, as his analysis of the specificities of *the uttered-speech rhythmizomenon*, Meumann’s careful study of *the actual poetic performance*, whether by the speaker or the hearer, met with notable success. It brought convincing evidence concerning the variable duration of the syllables, of the time-lengths between the main accents, and the pauses. Most remarkably, although he wrongly attributed them to natural psychological trends, he accurately recognized the two main opposite poetic manners of his time: the traditional metric as well as the more modern *verslibriste* one. Finally, without yet being aware of his predecessors’ contribution, he glimpsed anew at the 18th-century notion of a rhythmic system based on the repetition of intertwined similar or quasi-similar groups of sounds (see vol. 2, chap. 3 and 4).

I won’t go much further into Meumann’s contribution and leave aside the fourth chapter dedicated to his experimental investigation of rhythm. It basically repeated the same points as the three preceding ones and added little to them. The most interesting passages, yet, concerned balanced comments on Brücke’s previous experiments with the kymograph 1871 (p. 101-102), the most recent use of the microscopic phonogram (1891) by J. D. Boeke which was not really convincing to Meumann (p. 104), the result of the new voice recording apparatus (1891) conceived by the French founder of experimental phonetics Jean-Pierre Rousselot (1846-1924), which he admitted, however, not to have used due to lack of material (p. 105).

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Meumann’s essay on rhythm was a remarkable piece of scientific investigation.

1. For the first time in psychology, rhythm was taken as main subject of investigation. Whereas Meumann’s predecessors contented themselves with incidental or partial analyses, he decisively put rhythm at the center of his concerns and was instrumental in the surge of inquiries which occurred during the last decades before WWI.

2. For the first time too, Meumann proposed a thorough and discerning critique of the main theories of rhythm available at the end of the 19th century. His judgment was sound. He rightly rejected, as sheer speculation, all *developmental theories* aiming at reconstructing the “genesis of rhythm” from

an original factor arbitrarily chosen by the theoretician. He highlighted, without yet recognizing other more positive aspects, some drawbacks of the *teleological theories* as that developed by August Wilhelm Schlegel, who considered rhythm beneficial to the organism because it would allow saving strength by regulating it. He rapidly but efficiently drew attention to the limitations of the *aesthetic theories* as Schopenhauer's who gave too much importance to architecture, which was actually only secondary to seeing and hearing. He even pertinently distanced himself from the *physiological theories*—with the important exception of Ernst Mach's—which had been very popular in the first half of the 19th century and which too rapidly assigned the rhythm to this or that repetitive physiological phenomenon.

3. Meumann's own perspective was surprisingly innovative. Whether because of his youth and sensitivity to the newest forms of art, especially in music and poetry, or simply because of his interest in experimental observation and his unambiguous support for empiricism, Meumann elaborated a conception of rhythm which was much closer to actual artistic practices than the previous theories which usually were only speculatively derived and had mostly prescriptive aims.

4. On the theoretical level, Meumann clearly took an Aristotelian stand: for him as for Aristoxenus, rhythm should be differentiated from the matter to be rhythmized (*rhythmizomenon*) (see vol. 1, chap. 3). Therefore, he contended, we must be aware that its characteristics change according to the medium to which it is applied. Yet, rhythm is not a formal organization of the movement of some matter that could be interpreted in a sheer Platonic way as existing *per se*. Any rhythmic form, he noticed, is primarily produced by the human mind and its study, therefore, resorts to psychology. It should be grasped through scientific experimentation, observation and theorization. Sheer formal speculation à la Hermann, or mere Westphal-style philological studies are not sufficient. Rhythm must be understood both from definite psychological hypotheses and from the real practice of music or poetry, that is, from the really playing, declaiming and hearing individual.

5. One cannot help noticing Meumann's devastating critique of the traditional metric triggered by this Aristotelian stand. Just as Nietzsche, who also praised Aristoxenus and rejected most of the conceptions brought forth by Hermann, Westphal and others (see vol. 2, p. 290 *sq.*), but also as Brücke, Meumann rejected most of the contributions of the "metrists."

6. He did not go as far as to reinstate the perspective of the Aristotelian *Poetics* or the Aristotelian poetics of the 18th century, but he was quite close to them. Whereas Wundt and most of his contemporaries neglected poetry, his new approach resulted in stoutly reintroducing it into the picture and giving it primacy over music.

7. This move was very fruitful because, for the first time since Humboldt, Meumann showed an interest in language not only as *written* but also as *uttered speech*. This revolutionary way of addressing the question, based on the best empiricism, explains as a matter of fact a series of admirable findings.

8. Contrarily to musical rhythm, which tends to captivate the attention, poetic rhythm surmounts the metric rule. It frees the attention from regularity and repetition and, consequently, opens up new possibilities for developing the human mind. Meumann did not elaborate on this, but this stand implied an ethical and political principle that is still valid today.

9. Through its whole system, which largely overcomes the usual semiotic meaning based on linear succession of discrete signs, the poetic rhythm produces indeed what Meumann termed “a side effect,” “a relatively independent meaning beside that of the verse,” or “verse painting”—which was clearly reminiscent of what Diderot called “hieroglyph,” Schlegel “the law that poetry gives to itself,” and Meschonnic, much later, *signifiante du poème* (see vol. 2, chap. 3 and 4).

9.1. On the one hand, instead of the age-old metric count equating a short syllable with one time and a long one with two, Meumann proposed to carry out a detailed observation of *the real performance of one who utters poetry*, concerning the duration of the speech syllables, the time-lengths between the accents, and the pauses. His conclusion was that reading poetry mobilized simultaneously a “beating or scanning tendency” and a “phrasing or grouping tendency” which were dialectically opposed—but with no *Aufhebung*. Although he thought that these tendencies were innate to the human mind when they actually were only two battling historical ways to make poetry, this conclusion showed his sensitiveness to the real poetic practices of his time.

9.2. On the other hand, repetition was not limited, as metrists claimed, to accents regularly sequencing the poem. Meumann showed that another type of repetition of larger groups of words, which could be the same or only “similarly built,” participated in the production of the *signifiante*. This was again an insightful glimpse into the notion of a rhythmic system based on the repetition of intertwined similar or quasi-similar groups of sounds.

10. Naturally, Meumann met with the limitations due to his ignorance of the philosophers, artists, and theoreticians who, between 1750 and 1805, had renovated the *Aristotelian poetic paradigm*; to his own psychological viewpoint which, he questionably thought, was the only one to be able to expose the deeper features of rhythm by referring them to the activity of the mind on the sound impressions; to his wrong generalization of the German language case based on word accentuation; to the primacy he granted to consciousness and will in the poetic work; to the discrepancy between, on the one hand, his deep concern for utterance and hearing of words, his ideas concerning the role of melody, harmony, and pause in the formation of musical rhythm, and, on the other hand, his way to consider poetic rhythm as primarily determined by the organization of logical sequences backed by a hierarchized system of accents. In short, despite his tremendous empirical and theoretical work, he stayed within the frame of the *Platonic metric paradigm* and actively participated in its spreading.

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