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## Energy Spent in Orientation: Yuri Tynianov's Motor-Forces Approach to Rhythm

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**Abstract** – This article presents some synthetic reflections on the notion of rhythm developed in Yuri Tynianov's *The Problem of Verse Language* (1924), with particular attention to the relationship between the conception of the work unity and its peculiar space-time configuration, the status of flow and energy, the role of reception, and the copresence of the motoric and the phenomenological approaches.

**Keywords** – Yuri Tynianov; Rhythm; Work-system; Motoric Energy; Verse Aesthetic Reception.

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# Energy Spent in Orientation: Yuri Tynianov's Motor-Forces Approach to Rhythm

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## 1. Introduction

Even though a century has passed since its publication, Yuri Tynianov's *The Problem of Verse Language* (1924) still constitutes an indispensable theoretical and methodological contribution to the scientific study of metrical and rhythmical facts and their interaction with semantics in poetic texts. And although the programmatic premise of the research of the philologist, critic, historian, and theoretician of literature, a pillar of the formal school of the OPOJaz, is the rigorous analysis of the immanent elements within the work, excluding the interference of extrinsic speculative factors, the density and richness of the questions presented in his book reach such a depth and breadth of horizon to motivate a wide-ranging meditation on the aesthetic and hermeneutic experience concerning the creation and fruition of the poetic work.

This article presents some synthetic reflections prompted by *The Problem of Verse Language*, focusing on Tynianov's notion of rhythm, and starting from the theoretical nuclei of the research that in our opinion are particularly worthy of interest:

1. The relationship between the conception of the unity of the work, and its peculiar space-time configuration (we could call it the 'anti-chronotope' of the whole);
2. The consequent issue of flow and energy;
3. The issue of "equivalents" as both semiotic paradigmatic elements and 'blanks' to be filled in, and thus the role of reception in Tynianov's system.

These theoretical nuclei are closely intertwined with each other, revolving around the central problem of rhythm. We will briefly examine them, dwelling on two main points of reference for the Russian scholar's theoretical framework regarding rhythm:

- a. A motoric, or kinetic, approach;
- b. A phenomenological approach.

## 2. The 'Anti-Chronotope' of the Whole

In the first pages of *The Problem of Verse Language*, discussing the concept of form, Tynianov enunciates a dichotomy between two ideas linked to the concept of space, one static and the other dynamic, the former deriving from a misleading analogy:

We have just recently overcome the celebrated analogy: form - content = glass - wine. But all spatial analogies applied to the concept of form are important in that they only pretend to be analogies. In actual fact, a certain static element, intimately connected with spatiality, invariably slips into the concept of form. (Instead of this, one should recognize even spatial forms as dynamic *sui generis*.) [...]

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There appears the dangerous concept of “symmetry of compositional facts”, dangerous because there can be no talk of symmetry where one finds amplification [Russian: *usilenie*]. (Tynianov, *The Problem* 12)<sup>1</sup>

The analogy of form as a container that can be filled with content, which is in se misleading and difficult-to-eradicate, also implies that this container is stable and firm, enclosing and compacting its content in a proportioned balance. The concept of dynamic space is instead the cornerstone of Tynianov’s definition of the unity of the work as a system, positing a conflictual interaction between the elements within it:

The unity of the work is not a closed, symmetrical intactness [Russian: *tselost’*], but an unfolding, dynamic integrity [*tselostnost’*]. Between its elements is not the static sign of equality and addition, but the dynamic sign of correlation and integration.

The form of the literary work must be recognized as a dynamic phenomenon. (12)<sup>2</sup>

According to this premise, the work is not a place of harmonious and irenic coexistence but, on the contrary, a conflictual space, a battlefield, which, in order to remain whole, is necessarily being crossed by the interaction of the elements trying to overwhelm each other.

Art lives by means of this interaction and struggle. Without this sensation [Russian: *osbchushchenie*] of subordination and deformation of all factors by the one factor playing the constructive role, there is no fact of art. (33)<sup>3</sup>

It is clear from these statements that Tynianov’s critical and theoretical work moves within an ultra-modernist paradigm, which opposes the avant-garde’s conflicting and dissonant principles to the traditional classicist criteria of harmony and symmetry. Furthermore, we are faced with a crucial stage in the history of literary theory, the elaboration of the notion of form as a functional and dynamic system, which, with other isomorphic models proposed by different disciplinary fields – starting with linguistics and anthropology – will play a pivotal role in the culture of the second half of the 20th century nourishing the paradigm of Structuralism (Steiner, Pilshchikov, “‘System’ and ‘Structure’”). The undoubtedly polygenetic origin of this notion, impossible to pin down in a precise place and time, nevertheless owes not a little to the work of the Russian Formalists engaged in a close and passionate confrontation with literary texts, in a *milieu* where artistic experimentalism was operating through historical and political earthquakes (Sini, “L’interro inquieto”). This view of form as a conflictual system of functions is all the more remarkable as it is consistent with Tynianov’s global systemic approach to literature, for “the key concept» of [his] poetics was the literary system. Understood as a

<sup>1</sup> “Мы недавно еще изжили знаменитую аналогию: форма – содержание = стакан – вино. Но все пространственные аналогии, применяемые к понятию формы, важны тем, что только притворяются аналогиями: на самом деле в понятие формы неизменно подсовывается при этом статический признак, тесно связанный с пространственностью (вместо того чтобы и пространственные формы осознать как динамические *sui generis*. [...]) появляется опасное понятие ‘симметрии композиционных фактов’, опасное, – ибо не может быть речи о симметрии там, где имеется усиление.” (*Problema*, 9-10)

<sup>2</sup> “Единство произведения не есть замкнутая симметрическая целость, а развертывающаяся динамическая целостность; между ее элементами нет статического знака равенства и сложения, но всегда есть динамический знак соотносительности и интеграции. Форма литературного произведения должна быть осознана как динамическая.” (10)

<sup>3</sup> “Искусство живет этим взаимодействием, этой борьбой. Без ощущения подчинения, деформации всех факторов со стороны фактора, играющего конструктивную роль — нет факта искусства.” (10)

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hierarchical set of variables, it consisted of a series of correlated subsystems (for example genres), which in turn consisted of a series of individual work-systems” (Steiner 184).

[...] we have to begin by agreeing that a literary work is a system, and that literature is also a system [...].

Having analyzed individual elements of a work, such as the plot or style, rhythm and syntax in prose, rhythm and semantics in poetry, etc., we are convinced that these elements can be abstracted to a certain extent *as a working hypothesis*, but that they are all *interrelated with one another* and exist in interaction. Studying rhythm in verse and in prose necessarily reveals that the role of one and the same element within different systems is different.

I use the term constructive *function* (of a given element) to refer to the interdependence of each element of a literary work (a system) with its other elements and, it follows, with the system as a whole. (Tynianov, “On literary evolution” 269)<sup>4</sup>

It is also worth noting that the point of view from which Tynianov treats the unity of the work is not purely theoretical but also aesthetic, as the references to *sensation* indicate: the unfolding struggle within the text between the factors, and the subordination and deformation of all factors by the constructive one are apparently perceived by someone:

The sensation of form is always the sensation of the flow [Russian: *protekanie*] (and, consequently of the alteration) of correlation between the subordinating, constructive factor and the subordinated factors. It is not obligatory to introduce a *temporal* nuance into this concept of flow, or “unfolding.” Flow and dynamics may be taken as such, outside of time, as pure movement. Art lives by means of this interaction and struggle. (*The Problem* 33)<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, according to Tynianov, the dynamism of the form should not be intended as a temporal event, but rather as a flow outside of time.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> “[...] нужно заранее условиться в том, что литературное произведение является системой, и системой является литература. [...] Прodelать аналитическую работу над отдельными элементами произведения, сюжетом и стилем, ритмом и синтаксисом в прозе, ритмом и семантикой в стихе и т. д. стоило, чтобы убедиться, что абстракция этих элементов как *рабочая гипотеза* в известных пределах допустима, но что все эти элементы *соотнесены между собою* и находятся во взаимодействии. Изучение ритма в стихе и ритма в прозе должно было обнаружить, что роль одного и того же элемента в разных системах разная. Соотнесенность каждого элемента литературного произведения как системы с другими и, стало быть, со всей системой я называю конструктивной *функцией* данного элемента.” (Tynianov, “O literaturnoj evoliutsii” [ed. Chudakova, Chudakov, Toddes]) 272)

<sup>5</sup> “Ощущение формы при этом есть всегда ощущение протекания (а стало быть, изменения) соотношения подчиняющего, конструктивного фактора с факторами подчиненными. В понятие этого протекания, этого ‘развертывания’ вовсе не обязательно вносить *временной* оттенок. Протекание, динамика может быть взято само по себе, вне времени, как чистое движение. Искусство живет этим взаимодействием, этой борьбой.” (*Problema* 10) (original emphasis, as always from now on).

<sup>6</sup> In the last quote, one could also glimpse some consonance with the Bergsonian concept of “duration” (*durée*); however, we will see below how Tynianov excludes the idea of “subjective time”. The French philosopher was indeed well known to Russian Formalists (Curtis; Fink; Levchenko, 46-58; Nethercott; Svetlikova, “Bergson v ‘Novom IEFe’”; Sini, “L’interio irrequieto” 195-98); among *opojazovtsy* Osip Brik initially overtly evoked him while reflecting on rhythm (Akimova, 534-5).

### 3. Motor-Energy

Tynianov thus conceives of the work-system as an ongoing conflictual dynamic – neither spatial nor temporal – of constructive factors. In verse, the hegemonic factor – the constructive function, or the principle of construction<sup>7</sup> – is rhythm, which subordinates all the elements of the whole, from phonetics to morphology and especially semantics. The deformation of meaning is the distinctive action of verse.

Already in 1921-1922, the scholar stated:

The deformation of sound through meaning is the constructive principle of prose; the deformation of meaning through sound is the constructive principle of poetry. Partial changes in the interrelation of these two elements are a driving force in both poetry and prose. (Tynianov, “On the composition of Eugene Onegin” 118)<sup>8</sup>

How does rhythm affect meaning in verse? And before that, what is the nature of rhythm? Here again, Tynianov must deal with the question of time, an inevitable one when it comes to explaining a phenomenon commonly associated with the temporal course. From his part, the scholar declares:

Attempts to join the basis of rhythm with the temporal feature end in failure. Lotze stated the “paradox” that time does not play any role whatsoever in verse rhythm. (Tynianov, *The Problem* 153n).<sup>9</sup>

For Tynianov, rhythm is a *motor-energetic* (Russian: *motorno-energeticheskoe*) phenomenon involving amounts of *spent work* (Russian: *zatrachennaja rabota*). The text is a battlefield, a living whole passed through and permeated by energy flows. But this energy does not wander anarchically in a bubbling chaos.<sup>10</sup> It is, instead, the verse hierarchical organization, its rhythmical segmentation. Here the meter, intended as the “dynamic grouping of vocal material according to an accentual indication”, plays a fundamental role.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Eikhenbaum’s notions of *formanta*, or *formoobrazujuščaya dominanta* and Jakobson’s *dominant*, indebted, though each one in its peculiar elaboration, to Broder Christiansen aesthetics.

<sup>8</sup> “Деформация звука ролью значения — конструктивный принцип прозы; деформация значения ролью звучания — конструктивный принцип поэзии. Частичные перемены соотношения этих двух элементов — движущий фактор и прозы и поэзии” (“О kompozitsii ‘Evgenija Onegina’” 55). Regarding Tynianov’s subsequent doubts about the word *deformation* rather than the more neutral *transformation*, see the editors’ note “On the composition of ‘Eugene Onegin’” 161n. Cf. Tomashevsky 8: “The sound design (lett. *assignment* [Russian: *zadanie*]) in poetry dominates over the semantic one” (“звуковое задание в стихах доминирует над смысловым”) (my transl., but I owe to Igor Pilshchikov (“The Concepts of ‘Verse’, ‘Meter’ and ‘Rhythm’” 98) the translation of *zvukovoe zadanie* as *sound design*).

<sup>9</sup> “Попытки свести основу ритма к временному моменту терпят неудачу. Еще Лотце высказал ‘Paradoxie’, что время не играет никакой роли в стихотворном ритме.” (*Problema* 129n, with reference to Lotze 300). For a view of rhythm which, on the contrary, accords time an essential role, see Chatman 99.

<sup>10</sup> A thorough study of the theoretical roots of Tynianov’s concept of energy still needs to be done. For some hinted comparison with Christiansen’s *Philosophie der Kunst*, see Sini, “L’intero irrequieto” 206-8. For an interesting parallel with Durkheim’s idea of *energy*, see Zenkin.

<sup>11</sup> For a solid and convincing analysis of the notions of rhythm and meter in Russian verse theory from both *constructive* and *descriptive* points of view, see Pilshchikov, “The Concepts of ‘Verse’, ‘Meter’ and ‘Rhythm’”.

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The motor-forces characterization of rhythm coincides with the hierarchy of rhythmical elements. The major component of rhythm is meter. Factors of “instrumentation,” of rhyme, etc., may be absent, but once the sign of rhythm is given, then along with this is given the sign of meter as a necessary condition of rhythm. Perhaps this is partially connected with the fact that meter deforms the sentence in the accentual respect, redistributing strength to a certain degree, and, via this, more than any other component, complicates and pushes forward the motor-forces side of speech [...]. (Tynianov, *The Problem* 154-5n)<sup>12</sup>

### 4. Signs, equivalents, progressive-regressive dynamics

Tynianov’s statement on the motor-force nature of verse is interconnected with the reference to *sign*, a concept present since the first pages of *The Problem of Verse Language*. This presence discloses the phenomenological ground of his proposal, although this is not as manifest as its Moscow Formalists’ foundation.<sup>13</sup>

“Reversing the hierarchy between central and peripheral markers of verse” (Steiner 188), the scholar affirms that “*the constructive principle is recognized not in the maximum of conditions which create it, but rather in the minimum of conditions*”: (Tynianov, *The Problem* 38)<sup>14</sup>

The minimal conditions of rhythm are such that the factors whose interaction generate it are not given the aspect of a system, but the aspect of a *sign* of a system. In this way, rhythm may be given the aspect of a sign of rhythm, which simultaneously appears as a sign of meter, a necessary factor of rhythm, the dynamic grouping of material. (Tynianov, *The Problem* 49)<sup>15</sup>

Consequently, the meter as an isosyllabic, regular accentual or, in general, isochronous/isomorphical system may be absent. As we read, its sign, or – and it is the same – its *principle*, or, again, its *equivalent*, is sufficient. Let us follow Tynianov’s argument.

In the cases of both regular and non-regular meters, the motor-force process involves moments of preparation ([Russian: *izgotovka*]) and moments of allowance (or *resolution* [Russian: *razreshenie*]):

The most simple and basic phenomenon here will be the isolation [Russian: *vydelenie*] of some metrical group as a *unit*. This isolation is simultaneously a dynamic preparation for the following, similar (not identical, but similar) group. If this metrical preparation is allowed, we have before us a metrical system. Metrical grouping follows the path of (1) dynamically-successive metrical preparation, and (2) dynamically-simultaneous metrical allowance, uniting metrical unities into

<sup>12</sup> “Моторно-энергетическая характеристика ритма совпадает и с иерархией ритмических элементов. Главным компонентом ритма является метр; могут отсутствовать факторы “инструментовки”, рифмы и т. д., но раз дан знак ритма, то этим дан знак и метра, как необходимого условия ритма. Быть может, это отчасти связано и с тем, что метр деформирует приложение в акцентном отношении, перераспределяет до известной степени силу их и этим больше чем какой-либо другой компонент усложняет и выдвигает моторно-энергетическую сторону речи [...]” (Tynianov, *Problema* 130n)

<sup>13</sup> “As Maksim Kenigsberg wrote in 1923, “Verse in its essence is not a physical, but a semiotic phenomenon”. Verse is a sign, and, in the same way, meter and rhythm are signs – this was the position of the ‘phenomenological’ wing of the Moscow Linguistic Circle: in particular, Kenigsberg, Nikolai Zhinkin, and Grigorii Vinokur.” (Pilshchikov, “The Concepts of ‘Verse’, ‘Meter’ and ‘Rhythm’” 97)

<sup>14</sup> “Конструктивный принцип познается не в максимуме условий, дающих его, а в минимуме.” (Tynianov, *Problema* 17)

<sup>15</sup> “Минимальные условия ритма в том, что факторы, взаимодействие которых его образует, могут быть даны не в виде системы, а в виде *знаков* системы. Таким образом ритм может быть дан в виде знака ритма, который одновременно является и знаком метра, необходимого фактора ритма, как динамической группировки материала.” (Tynianov, *Problema* 29).

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higher groups – metrical wholes. The first, in and of itself, will be a progressive motor force of grouping, while the second will be regressive. (49)<sup>16</sup>

This progressive-regressive process traversed by the motor-energy – which we could describe in phenomenological terms as a dynamic of *protentions* and *retentions* – can be either completed or partial: the expectation of the same measure can be either satisfied or frustrated.

If preparation, allowance, and unification are total, they “break up unities into pieces (*Ab-schnitt*, or stops). They may lead to even higher groups and result in the *realization* [Russian: *osoznanie*] of metrical form (the sonnet, the rondeau, etc., as metrical forms)” (49).<sup>17</sup> But “if the dynamic preparation is not allowed in the following similar group”, “meter ceases to exist in the shape of a regular system, but it does exist in another way”:

“Prohibited preparation” is also a feature which creates dynamism. Meter is retained in the shape of a metrical impulse; thus, every “prohibition” results in a metrical regrouping. We have either a coordination of unities (which is accomplished progressively), or a subordination (which is accomplished regressively). Such verse will metrically be free verse, *vers libre*, *vers irregulier*. Here meter as a dynamic principle replaces meter as a system. Properly speaking, we have orientation [Russian: *ustanovka*]<sup>18</sup> toward meter, the equivalent of meter.

Therefore, the concept of *verse unity* receives quite an exceptional significance here, along with the feature of its isolation. (Tynianov, *The Problem* 50)<sup>19</sup>

In this case, a fundamental shift in the medium – in the “radical of presentation” (Frye) – occurs, and the graphic layout takes on enormous importance:

The graphic plays a special role here, drawing signs of metrical unity together with the sign of rhythm. The graphic here becomes a signal of verse, of rhythm. Just as in systematic verse there exists, as a measure, a small unity isolated from the series, so here the basic measure is the series

<sup>16</sup> “При этом простейшим и основным явлением будет выделение какой-либо метрической группы как *единства*; это выделение – есть одновременно и динамическая изготовка – к последующей, подобной (не тождественной, а именно подобной) группе; если метрическая изготовка разрешается, – перед нами метрическая система; метрическая группировка идет по пути 1) динамически-сукцессивной метрической изготовки, 2) динамически-симультанного метрического разрешения, объединяющего метрические единства в более высокие группы – метрические целые. При этом первая будет, само собою, – прогрессивным двигателем группировки, второе же – регрессивным.” (30)

<sup>17</sup> “Изготовка и разрешение (а с тем вместе и объединение) могут идти вглубь, разлагая единства на части (*абшниты*); они могут вестись и на более высоких группах и приводить к *осознанию метрической формы* (сонет, рондо и т.д. как метрические формы).” (30)

<sup>18</sup> On the fundamental concept of *ustanovka*, see the editors’ “Appendix” of *Permanent Evolution* 340-1, and *passim*; Sini, “Il tenacissimo telos” 203-8.

<sup>19</sup> “Но что если динамическая изготовка не разрешается в подобоследующей группе? Метр в таком случае перестает существовать в виде правильной системы, но он существует в другом виде. “Неразрешенная изготовка” есть также динамизирующий момент; метр сохраняется в виде метрического импульса; при этом каждое “неразрешение” влечет за собою метрическую перегруппировку – либо соподчинение единств (что совершается прогрессивно), либо подчинение (совершающееся регрессивно). Такой стих будет метрически свободным стихом, *vers libre*, *vers irregulier*. Здесь метр как систему заменяет метр как динамический принцип – собственно, установка на метр, эквивалент метра. Совершенно исключительное значение получает здесь поэтому понятие *стихового единства* и момент его выделения.” (Tynianov, *Problema* 30-1)

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itself. Dynamic preparation is applied to it as a whole, and the prohibiting of it in the following verse series is a feature which also makes the series dynamic as a whole. (50)<sup>20</sup>

Thus, for Tynianov, meter as a regular accentual system can be absent and substituted by its *equivalent*, as it happens in the free verse. We can once again observe the strong link between Tynianov's proposal and his contemporary literary context. Indeed, his is a theory of verse that intends to scientifically account for both the canonical poetic forms and those produced by the free verse revolution carried out in Europe and Russia between the end of the nineteenth century and the 1910s, as the mentions of Mallarmé and Burliuk show:

The motor-force nature of rhythm would even explain the important significance of the verse graphic. Besides the designation of the unity of the series and the group, the graphic has its own significance. The revolution of the Futurists in the area of the verse word (resp. of rhythm) was accompanied by a revolution in the area of the graphic. (There was an article about this by N. Burliuk.) Consider such phenomena as the graphics of Mallarmé, etc. The fact of the matter is that violation of an habitual graphic causes phonetic and motor images to arise which stand between the graphic and meaning. (These are effaced in normal writing.) (156n)<sup>21</sup>

### 5. The Blanks of the Dots

In light of the fundamental role of the graphic medium not only for free verse but also for modern poetry – the latter too belonging to the ‘Gutenberg galaxy’ –, one of the most fruitful theoretical contributions in Tynianov's work is the concept of equivalent. As we saw, an equivalent of the text is any substitution of non-verbal elements in place of verbal ones. It is a sign designating an orientation toward a sense to be fulfilled.

For example, the omitted stanzas in Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* are equivalents. In this poem, Pushkin inserted numbers, in place of words, to indicate a presence. For Tynianov, this fact can be explained “if we understand this omission as a compositional device, one of unusual significance”;

and this significance lies entirely in the verbal dynamics of the work, rather than in the *plan*, *coherence* or *events of the story* (fabula). [...]

The numbers give a kind of equivalent to stanzas and lines, which could contain anything; instead of verbal masses, there is a dynamic sign pointing toward them; instead of a specific semantic weight, there is an indeterminate [Russian: *neopredelennyj*], mysterious semantic hieroglyph. Given this hieroglyph, the following stanzas and lines are perceived [Russian: *vosprinimajutsja*] as

<sup>20</sup> “Особую роль здесь играет графика, дающая вместе со знаком ритма знаки метрического единства. Графика здесь является сигналом стиха, ритма, а вследствие этого и метрической динамики – необходимого условия ритма. Тогда как в системном стихе существует как мера мелкая единица, выделенная из ряда, – здесь основой, мерой является сам ряд, причем динамическая изготовка распространяется на него целиком и неразрешение ее в следующем стиховом ряде есть момент, тоже целиком динамизирующий этот ряд.” (31)

<sup>21</sup> “Моторно-энергетическая природа ритма объяснила бы и важное значение стиховой графики. Помимо обозначения единства ряда и группы графика имеет и свое значение. Революция футуристов в области стихового слова (resp. ритма) сопровождалась и революцией в области графики (об этом была статья Н. Бурлюка). Ср. такие явления, как графика Малларме и т.д. Дело в том, что при нарушении обычной графики возникают звуковые и моторные образы, посредствующие между графемой и значением (они стерты при привычном письме)”. (132, with reference [without editorial indication] to Burliuk, and [with bibliographical indication] to Paul 381-382).



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semantically complicated and pregnant with meaning. (Tynianov, “On the composition of ‘Evgenie Onegin’” 124)<sup>22</sup>

Instead of the stanza we have a *sign* of the stanza, an *indeterminate* “hieroglyph” offered to the perception as a call for concretizations. Thus, the omission is not empty but full: semantically full and also rhythmically full. Indeed, according to Tynianov, equivalents “find an explanation in the presence of the statement on the motor-force nature of verse.”

Equivalents become feasible in the capacity of a particular, articulatory potential. Omissions of a text indicating meter are especially typical here. The possibility of the equivalent, which is the possibility of making an omission equal in value with a line, is based on the fact that we give to this omission (it is all the same whether this is actually done or only potentially done) a particular element of motion (outside of vocal material). Without this, the following lines would be presented as lines which do not directly follow after the last line of the text, rather than lines which are separated from it by equivalents of lines (and not by a pause!). (*The Problem* 156n)<sup>23</sup>

Tynianov explains the presence of dots rather than words in some poems of Pushkin not as “omissions,” or “unwritten fragments,” but as constitutive parts of the poem, although impossible to reproduce acoustically.

For example, from 1824 to 1829, Pushkin worked on different versions of his poem *To the Sea* (*K moriu*), focusing in particular on the thirteenth stanza. He decided to substitute this totally finished stanza with two words, followed by a series of dots replacing the verses:

Мир опустел.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

The world has emptied.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

For Tynianov, “The dots here do not even remotely allude to the semantics of the text or its phonation, but they nevertheless give quite enough to become an *equivalent of the text*”.

The given *meter* (with a shaped momentum) is in definite stanzaic arrangement [...]

<sup>22</sup> [...] если понять эти пропуски как композиционный прием, все значение которого, значение необычайного веса, — не в *плане*, не в *связи*, не в *происшествиях* (фабула), а в словесной динамике произведения. В этих цифрах даются как бы эквиваленты строф и строк, наполненные любым содержанием; вместо словесных масс — динамический знак, указывающий на них; вместо определенного семантического веса — неопределенный, загадочный семантический иероглиф, под углом зрения которого следующие строфы и строки воспринимаются усложненными, обремененными семантически.” (Tynianov, “O kompozitsii ‘Evgenija Onegina’” 60)

<sup>23</sup> “Факты эквивалентов [...] поддаются объяснению при утверждении моторно-энергетической природы стиха. Эквиваленты становятся возможными в качестве известной производительной потенции. Пропуски текста, указывающие метр, здесь в особенности характерны. Возможность эквивалента, возможность сделать пропуск равноправным стихом основана и на том, что мы уделяем этому пропуску (все равно, фактически или только потенциально) известный элемент движения (вне речевого материала), без которого последующие стихи не могут быть представлены как стихи, не непосредственно следующие за последней строкой текста, а отделенные от нее эквивалентными строками (не паузой!).” (*Problema* 129n)

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The meter is given as a *sign*, as an almost partially-hidden *potential*. Before us, however, is the sign of the equality of the segment and of the dots with an entire stanza, allowing us to regard the line of the following stanza [...] precisely as part of the following stanza. (Tynianov, *The Problem* 43-44)<sup>24</sup>

The dots do not trace an absence, nor a mystical void, but are rather the sign of tension, of an unfolding flow, a pulsating orientation towards the filling of rhythmic and semantic indeterminacy and the construction of the text:

In the segment between the beginning of the stanza and the beginning of the next stanza is the *flow of a stanza* [*protekla strofa*], and the metrical energy of an entire stanza is communicated to the segment. Thus the meaningful validity of the equivalent is revealed. Before us is an uncertain text (the uncertainty of which, however, is quite limited and semi-revealed), but the role of an uncertain text (of *any text* in the semantic aspect), instilled into the continuous construction of verse, is immeasurably greater than the role of a definite [*opredelennyi*] text. The feature of this partial uncertainty is filled, with the maximum tension of the missing elements, of that which is potentially given. (44)<sup>25</sup>

The stanza “has flown”. The space of the dots is a current of the energy, of the labor expended. It seems to us that the scholar is here grasping the importance of the “points of indeterminateness” (*Unbestimmtheitsstellen*), to use Roman Ingarden terminology, or also, Wolfgang Iser’s “blanks” (Rossi; Chrzanowska-Kluczevska).

In any case, through the dots, like through other equivalents, the space of the listener, or reader is configured. Not at all a pure mental space, but the place where the energy of their work unfolds. A full-fledged embodied space.

Whether this old-fashioned formulation could foreshadow the “Enactivism” “of the third generation” (Caracciolo and Kukkonen) warrants further discussion.

## 6. Beyond the Living Word

At the end of the preface to *The Problem of Verse Language*, Tynianov declares that “parts of the present work were read in the winter of 1923 at the Society for the Study of the Theory of Poetic Language (Opoiav) and the Society for the Study of Artistic Literature,” at the Russian Institute for the History of the Arts.<sup>26</sup> The author expresses his “gratitude to the members who took part in the discussions there”, with “special thanks to S. I. Bernshtein for the valuable

<sup>24</sup> “Точки здесь, само собою, не намекают даже отдаленно на семантику текста и его звучание, и все же они дают вполне достаточно для того, чтобы стать, *эквивалентом текста*. Дан метр в определенном (определяемом инерцией) строфическом расположении; [...] метр дан как *знак*, как почти не обнаруживаемая *потенция*, но перед нами знак равенства отрезка и точек целой строфе, позволяющий отнести к стихам следующей строфы [...] именно как к следующей строфе.” (Tynianov, *Problema* 23-24)

<sup>25</sup> “Стало быть, между отрезком, начинающим рассматриваемую строку, и началом следующей строфы “*протекла*” *строфа*, и метрическая энергия целой строфы сообщается этому отрезку. При этом обнаруживается огромная смысловая сила эквивалента. Перед нами неизвестный текст (неизвестность которого, однако же, несколько ограничена, полукоткрыта), а роль неизвестного текста (*любого* в семантическом отношении), внедренного в непрерывную конструкцию стиха, неизмеримо сильнее роли определенного текста: момент такой частичной неизвестности заполняется как бы максимальным напряжением недостающих элементов — данных в потенции — и сильнее всего динамизирует развивающуюся форму.” (24)

<sup>26</sup> *Rossijskij institut istorii iskusstv: RIII.*

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things he pointed out” (Tynianov, *The Problem* 29).<sup>27</sup> The special thanks testify not only to a biographical relationship between the two scholars, but also to the theoretical and methodological closeness between Tynianov and the Institute of the Living Word of Petrograd.<sup>28</sup> Bernshtein was an energetic promoter of the Institute, in whose activity several members of the Opojaz participated, namely within the Commissions “for the melody of speech”,<sup>29</sup> and “for the theory of declamation”.<sup>30</sup> The Institute based its work “both on the empirical phonetic research of Paul Verrier and Eugène Landry, and on the subjective acoustic and pronunciation methods of Eduard Sievers” (Schmidt 44), the latter representing, with Franz Saran and others, the *Obrenphilologie*.

When in 1923, at the Russian Institute of the History of Arts, Sergei Bernshtein founded the Cabinet for the Study of Artistic Discourse, consecrating it to sound discourse – scenic discourse and the oral reading of works in verse and prose (declamation and story) –<sup>31</sup> Tynianov had already embarked on his own path. Indeed, in *The Problem of Verse Language*, he quotes the colleague’s works, but their theoretical distance is manifest.

Experimental investigations lead to the complete negation of isochronism.\* [footnote] \*See the experiments of Landry, and the work of S.I. Bernshtein\*. Regarding the impossibility of establishing isochronism, Rousselot wrote:

[...] rhythm is not based on acoustic time, but on time of articulation”.

If one cannot doubt the correctness of the formulation of the problem, we can doubt the correctness of its solution. “Articulatory time” is a palliative which does not resolve the significance of the absence of isochronism, but complicates the question even more. “Subjective time,” of course, saves the position, but upon closer analysis proves to be a complex derivative, at the base of which lies a forceful feature—the feature of “expended work.” [...] [...] It is quite clear that a line [in *vers libre*] consisting of one word and a line consisting of many long words, even taking into account the “subjectiveness” of time, must be *unequal in value*. Meanwhile, the whole point of these lines is that they are *all equal in value* as verses, in spite of their enormous temporal difference, for on each we spend (or should spend) a particular and even equivalent amount of work. [...]

Not the acoustic concept of time, but the motor-forces concept of spent work should be placed at the centre of the discussion of the question of rhythm. (154 (Tynianov, *The Problem* 153-154n)<sup>32</sup>

<sup>27</sup> “Части настоящей работы были читаны зимою 1923 г. в Обществе изучения теории поэтического языка (Опояз) и Обществе изучения художественной словесности при Рос. Институте Истории Искусств, членам которых, принявшим участие в обсуждении, приношу свою благодарность. Особою благодарностью я обязан С. И. Бернштейну за его ценные указания.” (Tynianov, *Problema* 6)

<sup>28</sup> *Institut Zhivogo Slova*: IZhS. See Vassena; Feshchenko.

<sup>29</sup> *Komissija po melodii rechi*, since 1919.

<sup>30</sup> *Komissija po teorii deklamatsii*, since 1921. The activities of these Commissions are linked with some Eikhenbaum’s works, as for example *Melodies of the Russian lyric verse* (1922) and “On the Chamber declamation” (1923). However, since 1918 (“The illusion of the Skaz; The verse reading”) Eikhenbaum’s critical and theoretical activity revolved around the living word.

<sup>31</sup> In this experimental phonetics laboratory Bernshtein engaged in recording the poets’ voices on wax rolls, to examine them under all prosodic parameters and thereby determine the original form of each composition (which would therefore coincide with the reading aloud performed by the author) and the possible variants embodied by the different performances; see Schmidt; Heldberg Olenina; Zolotuchin.

<sup>32</sup> “Экспериментальные исследования приводят к полному отрицанию изохронности [...] Rousselot по поводу невозможности установить изохронность писал: [...] ритм основан не на акустическом времени, а на времени артикуляционном” [...] Если нельзя сомневаться в правильности постановки проблемы, то можно сомневаться в правильности ее разрешения.

## 7. Impulses, Muscles, Currents

Thus, Tynianov does not merely downgrade the importance of the *phoné* for the definition of rhythm as the constructive principle of verse language, but weaves around the living word a theoretical framework that both goes beyond and essentially contests the Ohrenphilologie approach of Saran and Sievers, the experimental phonetic analysis of voice singularities, and, finally, the very centrality of the acoustic moment.

We saw how Tynianov (as well as Eikhenbaum) contrasts the idea of a sound layer mechanically added to the semantic content with a conception of artistic form as a dynamic whole in which the rhythmic component (or melodic, according to Eikhenbaum) is the organising and dominant principle. Once this systemic idea of form has matured in the forge of *OPoJaz* – a decisive step for the path of the Russian *spetsifikatory* as well as for the theory of literature to come – the phenomena relating to the production and listening of the living word, among them the acoustic and articulatory factors, become constructive elements in conflictual interrelation with other elements that make up the whole of the work and are subordinated by the constructive function.

However, although the Formalists soon distanced themselves from the main theoretical and methodological assumptions of the *Ohrenphilologie* and of experimental phonology, it is also worth noting that the motor-energetic conception, which constitutes an essential point of reference for their studies on rhythm and versification, is linked to both research directions.

We may verify it via one of the key concepts of *The Problem of Verse Language* also pivotal for Boris Tomashevsky's and Osip Brik's proposals, albeit treated by each scholar in its own specific guise (Steiner 173-88): the concept of *rhythmic impulse*. In particular, Tynianov shares with Brik the motoric (or kinetic) approach to poetic rhythm, the idea that *poetic rhythm is the motoric (or kinetic) precondition of verse*. Writes Brik:

As a scholarly term, rhythm means a particular formation of the motor processes [...] Rhythm is motion shaped in a particular way.

It is necessary to strictly distinguish between movement and the result of movement. [...]

Only verse discourse can be rhythmically formed, and not the result of this discourse. [...]

Rhythmic movement is prior to verse. It is not the rhythm that can be understood from the verse line, but inversely, the verse can be understood from the rhythmic movement. ("Rhythm and Sinyax")<sup>33</sup>

‘Артикуляционное время’ — паллиатив, который не разрушит значения факта отсутствия изохронности, но еще более усложнит вопрос. ‘Субъективное время’ спасает, конечно, положение, но при ближайшем анализе оказывается сложным производным, в основе которого лежит энергетический момент — момент ‘затраченной работы’. [...] Совершенно ясно, что стих [в *vers libre*], состоящий из одного слова, и стих, состоящий из многих длинных слов, даже считаясь с “субъективностью” времени, должны быть *неравноправными*. [...] вся суть этих стихов в том, что все они *равноправны* как стихи, несмотря на свое громадное временное отличие, ибо на каждый мы затрачиваем (или должны затрачивать) известный равный эквивалент работы. Не акустическое понятие времени, а моторно-энергетическое понятие затраченной работы должно быть поставлено во главу угла при обсуждении вопроса о ритме.” (*Problema* 129-30n, with reference to Tomashevsky; Rousselot 307)

<sup>33</sup> “Ритм, как научный термин, обозначает особое оформление двигательных процессов. [...] Ритм — это особенным образом оформленное движение. Надо строго различать движение и результат движения. [...] Ритмически оформленной может быть только стихотворная речь, а не результат этой речи. [...] Ритмическое движение первее стиха. Не ритм может быть понят из

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Therefore, rhythm can be seen as a form of motion. Since “all motion has two characteristics by which it proceeds; motion can be weaker and more intense, it can be lasting and it can stop,”<sup>34</sup> consequently, “rhythmic shaping is a function of a quantity (the increase or decrease in motion) and duration (the continuity or discreteness of motion). The projection of rhythm onto verbal material – the kinetic organization of an utterance in terms of stresses and intervals – constitutes the ‘rhythmical impulse’ (Steiner 173).

As Marina Akimova suggests (536), Brik’s couple *strength* and *duration* and the same term *impulse* reveal the influence of the phraseology and argumentation of the German philologist Eduard Sievers, writing on *Stärke und Dauer* in *Grundzüge der Phonetik*, and on *Volitional Impulse* [*Willensimpuls*] in *Rhythmisch-melodische Studien*.

If Tynianov insists, throughout *The Problem of Verse Language*, upon the idea of an energy permeating the verse and upon the moto-energetic conception of the spent work at the basis of the question of rhythm, other scholars close to Bernshtein also work on the gestural-motor aspects involved in the poetic experience. For the representatives of *Obrenphilologie* “of particular interest were the involuntary motor reactions (movements of the diaphragm, bodily motions, facial expressions, and gestures) accompanying an utterance, which, in their opinion, were decisive in articulating the phonic substance of language” (Steiner 160). Bernshtein’s student Sofia Vysheslavtseva, “theorizes the aesthetic experience of poetry composition quite literally in reference to corporeal movement” (Olenina, 473). For Vysheslavtseva one of the fundamental stylistic aspects of the poetic text is *motornost*’, defined as the ability to induce bodily movement:

The excitation and deliberate regulation of motor-muscular sensations make up the process of one’s psychophysical ‘feeling into’ the poetic work [*protsess psikhofizicheskogo vzhivaniia v poeticheskoe proizvedenie*] (Vysheslavtseva 51)

It is worth recalling here that a motoric approach to poetry was also proposed by Jan Mukařovský in his essay *The motor process in poetry* (*O motorickém dění v poezii*), written in 1926-27, and discussing – among several other sources as Karl Groos and Marcel Jousse –, Henri Bremond’s *The Pure Poetry* (*La poésie pure*) (1925). Beyond any metaphysical implications, which the Czech scholar does not accept, Mukařovský draws from Bremond the central figure of the *current* (*courant*): the essence of poetry is a current, whose conductors are all the components of the poetic text. Mukařovský reinforces this idea by specifying it in the terms of “motor action of a compact and consistent character” [Czech: *motorické dění jednotného*] (*Il processo motorio* 33). The heritage of the “late nineteenth-century physiological psychology”, representing “the scientific root” of the motoric conception of poetry (Olenina 458; 475), are combined by Mukařovský with other theoretical solicitations to sketch an original aesthetic “reflection on the relationship between language and sense” (*Il processo motorio* 92), valorising the movement, the orientation – the future *semantic gesture* –, the tendency, the flow (here not without a reference to Bergson) rather than the muscular efforts. It only remains to consider that in a few years Mukařovský would participate in the works of the Prague Linguistic Circle, and specifically in the writing of the Theses of 1929, presenting a full-fledged functionalist vision, to which Tynianov undoubtedly made a relevant contribution.

стихотворной строки, а обратно — стихотворная строка может быть понята из ритмического движения.” (Brik 505) (here and below, my transl.)

<sup>34</sup> “Всякое движение имеет два признака, по которым оно протекает; движение может быть слабее и интенсивней, оно может длиться и прекращаться.” (Brik 506)

## 8. Perception, Attention, Assignments

The fact is that in Tynianov's work, alongside the motor-energy approach, it is possible to discern a phenomenological attitude towards poetic experience. We pointed this out above reporting Tynianov's explanation of rhythm progressive-regressive dynamics and his statements about the dots in place of verses and stanzas that recalled to us Ingarden's points of indeterminacy or Iser's blanks.

With regard to the first aspect – the motor-force process involving moments of preparation and resolution – availing ourselves of the exegetical support of Husserl scholars, we could describe rhythm as the structure of the course of perception. In the light of Husserl's writings on perception, attention and interest, rhythm can be understood as the constitutive logic of the conditions of possibility of the relationship between interest and perception.

In this way Carlo Serra explains how rhythm is the mechanism controlling perceptive path:

A scansion made up of differentiated acts, but motivated by a single interest, takes on the character of a rhythmic cycle, which can run along different temporal layers, bringing the process together not in a disaggregate series of separate moments but rather phases, grasped as a unit. A double path thus opens up in the perceptive path, according to a well-known phenomenological direction: the intentions that are progressively fulfilled by the response are transformed into a response that opens up new aspects [...]

The unitary and the continuous, however paradoxical it may appear, are formed together. (324)

In Tynianov's terms, the resolution opens a new preparation, the rhythmical segmentation is ongoing unification.

Interest is at work in the perceptive path. With reference to the Husserlian notion of interest as an essential part of every act of explicit or "focused" intentionality, i.e., attention, Maren Wehrle, writes:

Whereas the act of singling out an object "for me" (i.e., *spezielle Meinung*, *Sonderwahrnehmung*) from the circumspection of a general objective context (i.e., *Auffassung/Wahrnehmung*) is deemed to be the formal condition for attention, there has to be a concrete interest involved to describe the full blown phenomenon of attention, an interest that is caused by or refers to an intended object. This interest [...] has to be understood primarily as a perceptive one (Hua 38, p. 103). At the same time, interest refers to the act of attending itself, in that it is described by Husserl – here using the words of Stumpf – as a pleasure in the very act of noticing (*Laust am Bemerken*) (Hua 38, p. 108). (46)

"Intentionality is thus not only an epistemic process of intending and fulfilment, but in its concreteness it is also an expression of tension and resolution of a perceiving subject" (47).<sup>35</sup> This tension is a process of singularizations and overlaps, as in the rhythmical flow of energy through accentual distribution, verses and stanzas.

The perceptive experience unfolds as "the process whereby each aspect of an object that falls under the lens of interest not only fulfils an intentional act, but also becomes the theme for subsequent fulfilments." (Serra 234)

*in the unravelling of the course of perceptions, interest seems to gain as much as it loses and intentions pass into fulfilments, fulfilments into intentions. [...]*

<sup>35</sup> We note here, *en passant*, the reference to Carl Stumpf's *Tonpsychologie* (1883), dedicated to the psychology of sound. The German scholar was known in the *OPoJaz milieu*: for example, Bernshtein (47) quotes Stumpf's article "Singen und Sprechen" in a contribution to a collective publication in 1926 in which also Tynianov participates. On the other hand, for the relationships between Husserl and Stumpf, also regarding the link perception/imagination, see Depraz (15-16).

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“The transition phase between new and old perceptions,” writes Serra, is “driven by the thirst for the new”:

here, the intensification of tension pervades the progress of the process, when we move from the saturation of the interest, through the known side of something, to the insaturation linked to the appearance of an intention aimed towards what comes to attention for the first time. Husserl speaks of acts merged together, non-separable, but it is the retroactivity of the function of interest, burning the new out [consuming the new], which allows itself to be guided by differential increases of intensity. (324)

Like in the rhythmical process described by Tynianov, “the form of the internal process of perceiving is a continuous crossing of the threshold, in the perpetual sliding from the known to the newly arrived. This double movement has all the characteristics of an advancing continuity” (Serra 324) and of intensity.

With regard to the question of equivalents, exemplified by the dots, it seems to us that Tynianov’s position delineates the role and task of the reader but does not give her the priority that we can find in Tomashevsky’s metrical (and literary) theory, where “the decisive criterium is the listener’s perception”.<sup>36</sup> It could be said with a brachiology that Tynianov is more on Ingarden’s side than Iser’s (Rossi, “Strategie della reticenza”; *Wolfgang Iser*). The brief, and necessarily simplified, remarks on the structure of perception marked by attention and interest according to phenomenology seem to us to suggest that, for Tynianov, that of poetic verse is an intense experience of interest and involvement, and the structure of this experience is governed - scanned and reunified - by the energy of rhythm.

It is a relational structure, a task to be performed but not arbitrary because it is assigned by the text – and before, by the poet. Dots are there to indicate an orientation. Something is given, which draws attention, as happens in the passive syntheses described by Husserl.

Tynianov writes:

All the verse elements *are not given but assigned* [*ne dany, a zadany*]: rhythm is given as rhythmic energy striving to be discovered; melodic and instrumental partitions and connections are given [...] Verses differ from prose not so much by its immanent features, its givenness, as by the assigned series, the key (Nekrasov’s verse forms)<sup>37</sup>

The pair ‘dany i zadany’ – crucial, by the way, for the young Bakhtin’s philosophical reflection – hardly translatable in its symmetry, unlike in German and Russian, shows the inseparable relationship between, on the one hand, the text’s invitation to ride the dots and fill in the blanks; and, on the other, the task of filling them in, within the ‘anti-chronotope’ of the whole, neither spatial nor temporal, in continuous movement – the current, the orientation that is traced as a map by the work, and by its rhythmic impulse.

<sup>36</sup> “Решающим критерием, является восприятие слушателя.” (Tomashevsky 8). Here and below, my transl.

<sup>37</sup> “Все стиховые элементы *не даны, а заданы*: задан ритм как стремящаяся к обнаружению ритмовая энергия, заданы мелодические и инструментальные членения и связи [...]. Стихи от прозы отличаются не столько имманентными признаками, данностью, сколько заданным рядом, ключом.” (Tynianov, “Stikhovye formy Nekrasova.” [ed. Chudakova, Chudakov, Toddes] 25)

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