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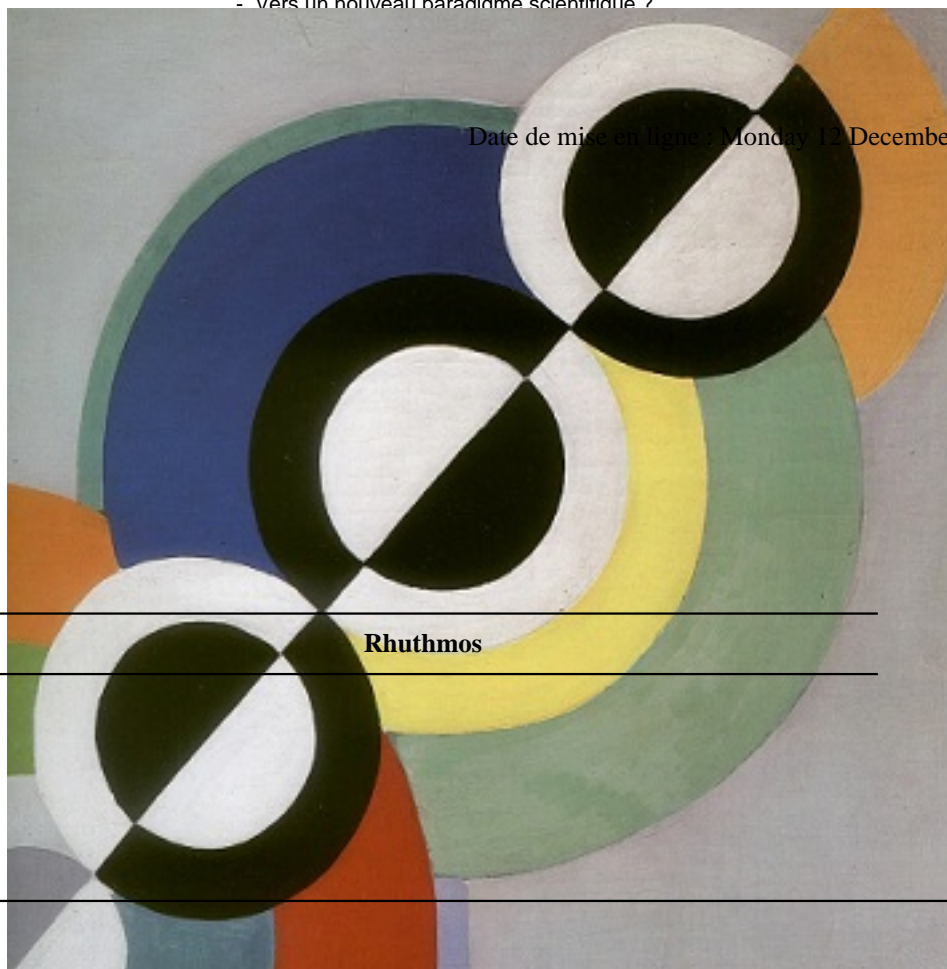
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Towards a non-Platonic Aesthetics of Rhythm (1870-1875)

- Recherches

- Vers un nouveau paradigme scientifique ?

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Rhuthmos

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A second way to figure out the meaning of Nietzsche's concept of *eurhythm* is simply to look at his descriptions and evaluations of ancient Greek culture. It is common knowledge that his first concern was to contest the Apollonian Platonic aesthetics and that, in order to reach his goal, he reevaluated all Dionysian aspects. But this did not mean sheer inversion either. We need here to be extra careful.

In *The Dionysiac World View* (1870) and in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), Nietzsche characterizes both Apollo and Dionysus as "stylistic opposites which exist side by side and in almost perpetual conflict with one another" and which "appeared fused together in the work of art that is Attic tragedy."

The Greeks, who simultaneously declare and conceal the mystery of their view of the world in their gods, established as the double source of their art two deities, Apollo and Dionysos. In the realm of art these names represent stylistic opposites which exist side by side and in almost perpetual conflict with one another, and which only once, at the moment when the Hellenic "Will" blossomed, appeared fused together in the work of art that is Attic tragedy. (eKGWB/DW-1 ca. 11/08/1870, trans. Ronald Speirs)

Nietzschean *eurhythm* stems from the tense relation between the two main artistic drives which perfectly blended, so Nietzsche claims, in Phidias' sculpture and classical tragedy.

The more vigorously the Apolline spirit of art now flourished, the more freely did his brother-god Dionysos develop; in the same period as the first of them was attaining to the full, one might say immobile, vision of beauty, at the time of Phidias, the other was interpreting the mysteries and terrors of the world in tragedy. (eKGWB/DW-1 ca. 11/08/1870, trans. Ronald Speirs)

But can we be more specific? In what sense were Phidias' sculpture or classic Tragedy *eurhythmic*? How exactly did they perform the perfect blend of Dionysian dynamics with Apollonian forms? What could be the main features of a work of art that would be both Apollonian and Dionysian? What, in a more general sense, could be an artistic *eurhythm* that would be the result of the integration of two opposite tendencies without being their Hegelian synthesis, i.e. their suppression and transformation into something else?

In *The Dionysiac World View*, Nietzsche's very first answer to this question is very close to the one that will be given a few decades later by Freud: that kind of work allows "idealization," "redemption" and "transfiguration" by *symbolizing* the "truth," i.e. the most instinctive will.

This co-existence marks the high point of Hellenic culture; originally, only Apollo is a Hellenic god of art, and it was his power which so moderated Dionysos when he came storming in from Asia that the most beautiful brotherly bond could come about. Nowhere can the incredible idealism [*Idealismus*] of the Hellenic race be grasped more readily than here: a cult of nature which, amongst the peoples of Asia, had meant the crudest unleashing of the lower drives, a panhetaeric animality which sundered all social ties for a certain period of time, was transformed amongst the Hellenes into a festival of universal redemption [*ein Welterlösungsfest*], a day of transfiguration [*ein Verklärungstag*]. All the sublime drives of their character were revealed in this idealization of orgy. (eKGWB/DW-1 ca. 11/08/1870, trans. Ronald Speirs)

In tragedy the singing and dancing is no longer the instinctive intoxication of nature; no longer is the Dionysiacally excited mass of the chorus the popular mass which has been seized unconsciously by the drive of spring. Truth is now *symbolized*. (eKGWB/DW-3 ca. 11/08/1870, trans. Ronald Speirs)

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In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche elaborates further his idea. In the older Dionysian dithyramb and in the tragedy, which according to Aristotle developed from it, a new expressive chain formed. The symbolization was henceforth ensured by "the entire symbolism of the body, not just the symbolism of mouth, face, and words, but the full gestures of the dance all the limbs moving to the rhythm." Speech was dubbed by body movements which formed with rhythm and harmony an expressive complex.

In the Dionysian dithyramb man is aroused to the highest intensity of all his symbolic capabilities. Something never felt before forces itself into expression the destruction of the veil of Maja, the sense of oneness as the presiding genius of form, of nature itself. Now the essence of nature must express itself symbolically; a new world of symbols is necessary, the entire symbolism of the body, not just the symbolism of mouth, face, and words, but the full gestures of the dance all the limbs moving to the rhythm. And then the other symbolic powers grow, those of music, rhythm, dynamics, and harmony all with sudden spontaneity. (*The Birth of Tragedy*, § 2, trans. Ian C. Johnston)

Quite understandably Nietzsche proposes two versions of this eurhythmic chain: one Apollonian which was published; the other Dionysian which remained undisclosed. At the end of *The Birth of Tragedy*, indulging in the pompous taste common in his time, he marvels over the beauty of a Mediterranean landscape featuring "rows of high, Ionic columns" and "luminous marble," where "human beings walk solemnly or move delicately, with harmonious sounds and a rhythmical language of gestures." Eurhythmia seems here very close to its classical definition.

As he ["who would feel translated, even just in dream, back into the life of an ancient Hellene"] wandered beneath rows of high, Ionic columns, gazing upwards to a horizon cut off by pure and noble lines, seeing beside him reflections of his own, trans-figured form in luminous marble, surrounded by human beings who walk solemnly or move delicately, with harmonious sounds and a rhythmical language of gestures [*mit harmonisch tönenden Lauten und rhythmischer Gebärdensprache*] would such a person, with all this beauty streaming in on him from all sides, not be bound to call out, as he raised a hand to Apollo: "Blessed people of Hellas! How great must Dionysos be amongst you, if the God of Delos considers such acts of magic are needed to heal your dithyrambic madness!" (*The Birth of Tragedy*, § 25, trans. Ronald Speirs)

One could think, considering the harsh criticisms Nietzsche received after the publication of *The Birth*, that this luminous conclusion was partly motivated by a necessary prudence. But if one looks at *The Dionysiac World View*, where one could expect to find a more critical conception of eurhythmia, one will be surprised to find an almost similar definition concerning the experience of Dionysian worshippers. The Dionysian dancer "is no longer an artist, he has become [himself] a work of art." His ecstatic dance is not chaotic or completely disorderly. It partakes in the symbolization process and demands a supple control of the body movements, which should imitate the nice going, the measured walking, "the ecstasy and sublimity" of the gods whom the dancer saw "in his dreams."

He feels himself to be a god; that which had previously lived only in his imagination he now feels in his own person. What does he now care for images and statues? Man is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art; man himself now moves with the same ecstasy and sublimity with which, in dream, he once saw the gods walk. (eKGWB/DW-1 ca. 11/08/1870, trans. Ronald Speirs)

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These two famous texts do not provide much more information on eurhythmy but they do show us the direction into which looking for: symbolization is transformation of affects into rhythm. Let us then turn to the notes on the orchestric rhythmic (1870-1872), where the specific features of the very tense symbolization process which produces eurhythmy become clearer.

Let us recall first the nature and the role of the chorus. The Χορὸς (*choros*) was a homogeneous, non-individualized group of performers, who commented with a collective voice on the dramatic action. It consisted of between 12 and 50 players, who variously danced, sang or spoke their lines in unison and sometimes wore masks. Important is to note that choruses existed in the context of tragedy, comedy, and also in satyr plays, which were all performed at least in the 6th and 5th centuries during Dionysian celebrations. In the more ancient rural Dionysia, after the procession, there were contests of dancing and singing, and choruses led by a Χορηγὸς (*chorégos*) would perform dithyrambs, sing hymns and dance in honor of Dionysus. Some of these rural festivals may have included dramatic performances, possibly of the tragedies and comedies that had been produced at the City Dionysia the previous year. In the City Dionysia, after the procession, the *chorégoi* led their choruses in the dithyrambic competitions. These were extremely competitive, and the best flute players and celebrity poets offered their musical and lyrical services. During the 5th century BC, five days of the festival were set aside for performance of three tragedies and one satyr play. The other two days were likely devoted to dithyrambic contests until 487/6 BC when comic poets were officially admitted to the agons and eligible for their own prizes.

Nietzsche pays a lot of attention to these half religious half theatrical practices. We remember that, according to him, in the chorus performances the musical rhythm followed the irregular rhythm of poetry and both followed in turn the ever changing rhythm of the dance.

Principles: intimate fusion of words and music, but in a way that the duration of the spoken word generally prevails. Infinite mimicry [*Mimik*]: the music has no absolute character. Insofar as it is imitative, it has no regular measure [*Taktgleichheit*]. (at least [it is] not necessary) (*Griechische Rhythmik*, KGA II3, p. 92, my trans.)

Exactly as in *The Dionysiac World View*, Nietzsche describes the chorus dance "which was not a whirling dance" as "a nice going." But the last sentence introduces a new parameter: this "nice going [...] naturally [met] with uneven measures."

An important law [was] that the measure [*Takt*] originally was part of the orchestics: the singer would adjust to the dance (which was not a whirling dance [*kein Wirbeltanz*], but a nice going [*sondern ein schönes Gehen*]) Naturally meeting with uneven measures [*ungliechem Takte*] multiple $\frac{1}{2}$ [kinêseis - movements] of the dancers. (*Zur Theorie der quantifizierenden Rhythmik*, 1870-1872, KGA II3, p. 270, my trans.)

The primacy of dance upon poetry and music probably explains that unlike the Moderns, the Greeks used a quite larger number of measures [1]. Besides the four simple measures which were identical to modern ones (3/8, 3/4, 2/4, 6/8), there existed a dozen others (4/8, 5/8, 9/8, 4/4, 5/4 or 10/8, 12/8, 15/8, 16/8, 18/8, 20/8, 25/8 (*Griechische Rhythmik*, KGA II3, p. 107-109). This rhythmic wealth resulted in frequent use of uneven five-beat measures (5/8, 5/4, 15/8, 25/8) which survived in modern Europe "here and there in Folksong" but were outlawed in art music. A ternary measure could be even associated with a quinary measure which formed a particularly unbalanced meter: the

dochmiach, expressing in tragedy extreme agitation or distress.

We [Moderns] have 2 kinds of measure [*Taktarten*], even or uneven [*gerade u. ungerade*]. In the Middle Ages the two-part [measure] was called according the Plato-nic symbolic *genus imperfectum*, the three-part [measure] *genus perfectum*. A third kind of measure [*Taktart*] the five-part [measure] appears here and there in Folksong. It is by no means coordinated [with the previous ones]. But it was [coordinated] since the 6th century (in ἰσόμετρον [ὑπόσκημα] and chorus songs of the comedy, then with the three-part mixt in the ἰσομέτρον [monôdiai] of the Tragedy). (*Griechische Rhythmik*, KGA II3, p. 108, my trans.)

Such mixts resulted in uneven poetic meters, since two heterogeneous kinds of measure were then brought together. Nietzsche notices for instance the blending of a 5/4 measure with a 2/4 measure in a piece, the nome in honor of Athena, composed by Olympos who according to legend was originally from Phrygia. This rhythmic disproportion, probably invented by performers-poets-musicians from Asia Minor, was therefore one of the first forms that the symbiosis of Dionysian and Apollonian principle took in Greek art.

When studying Aristoxenus and Aristides Quintilianus, Nietzsche notes that *πίδες ἀλόγοι* (irrational feet) were the "most striking features in Greek rhythmic" (*Griechische Rhythmik*, KGA II3, p. 114). But the meaning of this classification is not completely clear. As we have already seen above (chap. 2), the term *álogon* appears in *The Timaeus*. *Alogía*, i.e. *want of reason, unreasonable conduct, absurdity* characterizes the initial chaos before its shaping and organization by the demiurge.

[...] that burdensome mass which afterwards adhered to him of fire and water and earth and air, a mass tumultuous and irrational [ἰσόμετρον ἄλογον ὄντα] [...] (*Timaeus*, 42d, trans. W.R.M. Lamb)

This chaos in its "natural condition" is "*ἀλόγος καὶ ἀμετρὸς*" which means *irrational and without measure, immense, excessive, boundless*. Then the Demiurge shapes and organizes it "by means of forms and numbers."

Before that time, in truth, all these things were in a state devoid of reason or measure [ἄλογος καὶ ἀμετρὸς] but when the work of setting in order this Universe was being undertaken, fire and water and earth and air, although possessing some traces of their own nature, were yet so disposed as everything is likely to be in the absence of God; and inasmuch as this was then their natural condition, God began by first marking them out into shapes by means of forms and numbers [ἰσόμετρον ἀλόγος καὶ ἀμετρὸς] (*Timaeus*, 53a-b, trans. W.R.M. Lamb)

Drawing on this view, Timaeus contrasts the "*irrational* pleasure" felt by the crowd with the real "*intellectual* pleasure" which grows in our soul from harmony and rhythm. Both harmony and rhythm are "auxiliary to the inner revolution of the Soul" to help it achieving or recovering balance.

Concerning sound also and hearing, once more we make the same declaration, that they were bestowed by the Gods with the same object and for the same reasons; for it was for these same purposes that speech was ordained, and it makes the greatest contribution thereto; music too, in so far as it uses audible sound, was bestowed for the sake of harmony. And harmony, which has motions akin to the revolutions of the Soul [$\acute{\alpha}\nu\alpha\rho\mu\acute{\omicron}\nu$ $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\alpha\rho\mu\acute{\omicron}\nu$ $\acute{\alpha}\mu\acute{\alpha}\iota\acute{\iota}\acute{\omicron}$ - *tês psukhês periódous*] within us, was given by the Muses to him who makes intelligent use of the Muses, not as an aid to irrational pleasure [$\acute{\iota}\acute{\omicron}\nu\acute{\iota}\acute{\omicron}$ » $\acute{\epsilon}\delta\acute{\omicron}\nu\acute{\eta}\nu$ $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\nu$], as is now supposed, but as an auxiliary to the inner revolution of the Soul, when it has lost its harmony, [$\frac{1}{2}\acute{\alpha}\nu\acute{\alpha}\rho\mu\acute{\omicron}\nu$ $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\alpha\rho\mu\acute{\omicron}\nu$ $\acute{\alpha}\mu\acute{\alpha}\iota\acute{\omicron}$ - *anármoston psukhês períodon*] to assist in restoring it to order and concord with itself. And because of the [ame-trical/irregular/erratic] [$\frac{1}{4}\mu\acute{\alpha}\mu\acute{\omicron}\nu$ $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\alpha\rho\mu\acute{\omicron}\nu$ - *ámetron*] condition, deficient in grace, which exists in most of us, Rhythm [$\acute{\rho}\eta\theta\mu\acute{\omicron}\nu$ $\frac{1}{4}\acute{\alpha}\nu\acute{\omicron}\nu$ - *rhuthmós*] also was bestowed upon us to be our helper by the same deities and for the same ends. (*Timaeus*, 47c-e, trans. W.R.M. Lamb, my mod.)

Harmony and rhythm are gifts of the gods which aim at infusing measure and grace into men in order to help them to overcome the original *alogía* and to get in tune with the divine geometrical and arithmetical harmony,

Nietzsche knows about this but he notices with great interest that both Aristoxenus and Aristides Quintilianus transformed this Platonic cosmological concept into a rhythmic category. Some Greek meters were composed of two conflicting feet, or in some particular line a heterogeneous meter broke the rhythmic continuity. These phenomena would be named *alogía* "irrationality," because arithmetical proportions of the meter or the line were affected. However none of them considered them as chaotic, abnormal, or even distasteful. It is as if *alogía* would not denote any longer, in a precise Platonic way, something belonging to the "tumultuous mass" before God's shaping of the world but to things belonging to the new world born thanks to His rhythmic intervention. Or if it would be, in a more Aristotelian way, a mere technical category necessary to describe the *complexity* of Greek music as these thinkers perceive it.

In his famous treaty *On Music* I, 14, Aristides emphasizes that all *álogoi* meters can be analyzed and that there are never entirely devoid of any order. Similarly in his partly preserved *Elements of Rhythmic*, II, 20, Aristoxenes mentions the *choree* or *choriamb* (á á) as an » $\dot{\iota}^3\grave{\alpha}$ meter which is composed of a trochee (á) followed by an iamb (á), in other words of two feet whose *arsis* and *thesis* are exactly opposed.

Nietzsche in turn traces the *alogía* to the association in the same meter of a trochee with an iamb (á á), or a dactyl with an anapeste (á á á) (*Griechische Rhythmik*, KGA II3, p. 177). He dedicates several pages to the analysis of the various "irrational" meters, which he calls *khoreîos* (á á) and *bakkhêîos* (á á). He notices that irrationality is also produced by the introduction of a heterogeneous meter into a line of verse, for instance a dactyl (á á) or a spondee () in the middle of an iambic trimeter (*ibid.*, p. 181-187).

All these configurations are disturbing to the Moderns because the long syllables or for us the stressed syllables are either opposed or facing each other. In French prosody, for instance, although Meschonnic has shown their common existence in poetry already since the middle of the 19th century as well as in ordinary language, this last kind of rhythmic configuration called *contre-accent* was considered as cacophonous and banned by metricians and purists until late in the 20th century (Dessons & Meschonnic, 1998, p. 152-156). Likewise such plays with long and short syllables had in Greece an expressive function and was an important part of the effect produced on the listener by the rhythm of a poem or a piece of theater.

Strikingly, in order to give a modern account of that kind of phenomenon Nietzsche translates into rhythmic the concept of "dissonance" which traditionally pertains to harmony. Throughout the 19th century metricians have been discussing the "logaoedic verse," a notion that is now obsolete. He claims that this kind of verse, which unevenly blends equal metrical feet (anapest, dactyl) with double feet (iamb, trochee), proves the existence in ancient Greek poetry of a specific "dissonant" Dionysian "time-measure" which was complex and irrational, free from any architectural symmetry and featuring in most expressive dances.

I believe that the impulse to play with strong dissonances of time-measure [*mit starken Dissonanzen des Zeitmaßes*] is a fruit of the Dionysus cult. The logaoedic verses are therefore not to be used with pauses on the same measures [*zu gleichen Takten*]. They are characterized by the change of measure [*Taktwechsel*] (which is strongly mimic). (*Rhythmische Untersuchungen*, KGA II3, p. 329, my trans.)

The name $^2\pm^0\grave{\alpha}\mu\ddot{\omicron}\grave{\iota}^1$ given to certain kinds of verse with uneven beat number seems to him a good piece of evidence

of this origin since $\text{ᾶ}^{-}\text{ᾷ}^{-}\text{Ᾱ}^{-}$ meant feast of Bacchus, Bacchic frenzy, or revelry.

Previously $\text{ᾶ}^{-}\text{ᾷ}^{-}\text{Ᾱ}^{-}$ in the Dionysian and Demeter cult songs. (*Griechische Rhythmik*, KGA II3, p. 113, my trans.)

The notion of "rhythmic dissonance" acquires little by little a greater importance in Nietzsche's reflection. To elaborate it, he first relies on Aristoxenus and Böckh to raise the problem of the spondee duration within an iambic trimeter.

The light [*leichte*] part of the measure is lengthened by a little. Aristoxenus reports the occurrence of such measures. The irrational $\text{ᾶ}^{-}\text{ᾷ}^{-}\text{Ᾱ}^{-}\text{Ὰ}^{-}$ [trísêmoi], as Boeckh has recognized, are identical with the spondee, which appear in the iambic meters in the uneven [places] and in the trochaic in the even places, instead of the iamb and trochee. E.g. trimeter (*Griechische Rhythmik*, KGA II3, p. 114, my trans.)



The initial long and the second long of the spondee in the fourth foot are transcribed as dotted eighth note. Two long syllables may thus have different durations. Similarly, the duration of a long syllable is not always equivalent to that of two shorts.

is not quite as long as á.á

(*Griechische Rhythmik*, KGA II3, p. 195, my trans.)

Then Nietzsche generalizes his finding. "Rhythmic dissonance" was commonplace in Greek poetry.

Important that in the main meters in hexameter and iamb the $\gg \zeta^{3\pm}$ [alogía - irrational] had an important place.

Perhaps the following is to be distinguished in the trimeter:

á á and á á *real* $\gg \zeta^{3\pm 1}$ [alogíai - irrationals]

rational measure.

Thus the dissonance with $\gg \zeta^{3\pm 1}$ was stronger than with á á and á á (*Rhythmische Untersuchungen*, KGA II/3, p. 337, my trans.)

According to this rule, an irrational spondee () has not always exactly the same duration as a dactyl (á á) or an anapest (á á). Hence the substitution of two short syllables with a long one modifies the temporal proportions within the dactylic hexameter or the iambic trimeter. Nietzsche's conclusion is that this phenomenon introduces in Greek poetry "a lot of fine [rhythmic] dissonances."

Thus, we see that both first and second places of the 1, 3, 5 feet can be irrational. must be understood either as ± or ±. This results in a lot of fine dissonances. (*Rhythmische Untersuchungen*, KGA II3, p. 337, my trans.)

The question naturally arises as how much this kind of "irrationality" changes the tempo. In ancient Greek tempo is called ἀγὼγή - *agôgê*. But Nietzsche remarks that this term actually denotes a difference $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ μ, ζ ἄ - *katá mégethos*, viz. according to the magnitude or the loudness of sound.

ἀγὼγή does not mean tempo in Aristoxenus. It is the ἄγος ἄγος ἄγος ἄγος. (*Griechische Rhythmik*, KGA II3, p. 146, my trans.)

One cannot therefore assimilate the *alogía* to a modification of the pulsation: the introduction of irrational short and long syllables does not induce any change in tempo as in 19th century music. Acceleration is not here a relevant category and is substituted with a subtle play between syllable durations modified by the process of *alogía*.

Acceleration is expressed only by long and short syllables [*durch Längen und Kürzen*]. A tempo difference did not exist. (*Griechische Rhythmik*, KGA II3, p. 146, my trans.)

In a fragment entitled "Tactwechsel und Tactgleichheit" - "Measure change and measure regularity," Nietzsche emphasizes the variability of the *agôgê* in ancient Greek dance, poetry and music. Each piece had no fixed and regular tempo, rather each particular content determined the specific speed to be adopted. Thus poet-musicians could reconcile at will the regularity of the rational meters with the irregularity of the irrational meters.

The mathematical equality of measures was sought in the ἄπλο ῥυθμοί [*aplo rhuthmoí* - simple rhythms]. In the others it was on the contrary (neglected) repealed [*aufgehoben*]. (*Griechische Rhythmik*, KGA II3, p. 171, my trans.)

Contrary to what modern metricians as Westphal or Rossbach asserted, the Greek performing arts were not subject to arithmetic nor based, as most 19th century thinkers believed, on purely symmetrical architecture. Nietzsche severely criticizes modern specialists who cut Greek lines of verse into equal measures following the rule of quadrature.

The trimeters are measured according to dipods. The metricians grasp the measures as whole and full four-timed measure. On this the ancient Greek had a finer judgment. (*Rhythmische Untersuchungen*, KGA II3, p. 334, my trans.)

This error entirely obliterates both subtle and powerful effects of Greek rhythmic, which the poet-musicians obtained thanks to the unevenness of the measures and the asymmetry of the periods. One cannot help but think about the argument against symmetry, evenness and regularity developed a few years later by Verlaine and the Symbolists.

In another fragment entitled "Tactgleichheit," Nietzsche emphasizes the opposition between a narrow conception of rhythm, reduced to a regular, symmetrical and mathematical pendulum movement, and a broader conception which calls on the "psychological knowledge" of the interpreter and places great importance on irregularity and dissymmetry.

Mathematically, two measures [*Takte*] are never equal: the more spiritually the representation is apprehended, the more delicately individualized is the measure [*Takt*], first by its duration ($\text{É}^3\text{®}$), then by its ictuses (by its declamation), and thirdly, by the duration of its individual parts. In lines and periods, this individuality now increases, the architectural stiffness is the death of performance. For this reason the conductor must not be a machine or a chronometer. The correct apprehension of the tempo of a subsequent piece of music is a psychological knowledge: the innermost essence of two successive pieces of music is expressed through the feeling produced by the differently chosen measures [*Takte*]. Just as the form of the leaf is always the same according to the idea, and in reality never the same, it is a similar situation with the equality of measures, periods, and strophes. The pendulum hits us painfully: it gives the mathematical skeleton. How will this be now stuffed with meat? (*Aufzeichnungen zur Rhythmik und Metrik*, KGA II/3, p. 205, my trans.)

All evidence gathered by Nietzsche challenge the whole European classical and Vitruvian tradition. The eurhythmic symbolization of the affects does not result any more from due proportion and symmetry, i.e. from a Platonic rhythm which would replicate an abstract and fixed Form as if performing arts should conform to the rules of architecture. Rather, the former regain their aesthetic autonomy, architecture is not considered a model any more, and eurhythmy appears from "the feeling produced by the differently chosen measures," that is from the organization of the performance, its particular ways of flowing. Greek poetry, far from being a rigid a regular structure, becomes a fluid medium which is to be shaped each time eurhythmically by the performer. It is much closer to the pre-Platonic Democritus' and Xenophon's *rhuthmís*, than to its Platonic conception.

As a matter of fact, in 1875 Nietzsche draws the logical conclusion from this reversal of perspective by transposing the rhythmic freedom of Greek performing arts into architecture. Actually, he claims now, even the most rigid art of all is subject to that kind of fluid eurhythmy which is endowed with "animatedness instead of a mechanical movement."

The unmathematical oscillation of the column in Paestum, for instance, is an analogue to the modification of the tempo: animatedness instead of a mechanical movement. (eKGWB/NF-1875,5[86] Spring-Summer 1875)

If we now look from the *Notes on Rhythm* back at *The Birth of Tragedy*, we see that Nietzsche in his early years did not only assert the existence in ancient Greek art of two metaphysical principles, but that he philologically, linguistically and poetically showed how these two blended into one *complex* rhythmic.

Yet I do not agree with Christophe Corbier, to whom I am indebted for a lot of these examples, when he claims at the end of his survey that eurhythmy is conceived by Nietzsche as a mere opposite to *alogía*, therefore composing with

the latter a pair of principles analogous for performed poetry, music and dance, to those governing them at the metaphysical level.

From his study of Aristoxenian rhythm, Nietzsche deduces an essential rule of Hellenic art: Greek art, in its apogee, does not rest on an absolute regularity, on an infrangible symmetry, but on the indissoluble union of eurhythmia and its opposite, *alogia*, as indicated by a fragment of 1870-1871: "The genial sense of proportion, developed in the Greek language, and music and sculpture, is revealed in the moral law [*Sittengesetz*] of the measure [*des Maaßes*]. The dionysian cult adds the » $\epsilon^3\pm$ to it." (eKGWB/NF-1870,7[2] End 1870-April 1871, my trans.) (Corbier, 2009)

In this fragment, Nietzsche does indeed allude to the Greek "genial sense of proportion" as revealed "in the moral law of the measure." And he contrasts "*Maaß - measure*," which in German as in English means quantity, dimension and moderation, with *alogia* thus implicitly referred to quality, modulation and excess. But this is a very early statement and a rather isolated one. It is, in my opinion, misleading to reduce it to a simplistic embitterment of a too sweet and gentle classicist aesthetics by a romantic drop of frenzy and excess.

I would rather think, based on the very pieces of evidence which Christophe Corbier helped to collect, that Nietzsche proposes an entirely new conception of eurhythmia which has nothing to do any more with the Platonic conception be it ancient or modern (chap. 2 and previous section in this chap.) and a lot with what we began to emerge while studying Diderot (chap. 3), the German Romantics (chap. 4), and the greatest poets of the second half of the 19th century (chap. 7).

Whereas in traditional art theories *eurhythmia* entailed due proportion, symmetry and fixity, i.e. a translation of heavenly perfection into the earthly world, Nietzsche describes it as produced by a wealth of intertwined measures, a succession of seemingly regular meters which are actually deeply affected by irregularities, *contre-accents* and rhythmic dissonances, in short by a set of dynamic relations that are to be woven together each time anew during performance. Hence instead of a Platonic fixed eurhythmia, Nietzsche suggests a concept which is closer to what it probably was before Plato and which is also reminiscent of what Hölderlin had in mind when he tried to give an account of the dynamics of tragedy (chap. 4). It reflects an *inexhaustible rhythmic system of tensions* that is *available to any new performer, listener or viewer* and that allows him/her to develop his/her performance, audition and vision each time in a new way, i.e. that entails an *infinite meaning power* deeply engrained in each work of art and therefore ensures a *successful symbolization* of the performers' as much as the audience's affects.

[Next chapter](#)

[1] I will use for the next paragraphs the remarkable study by Christophe Corbier, 2009, and the not less helpful book by James Porter 2000a.