

# **The River of Time**

**Time-Space, History, and Language in  
Avant-Garde, Modernist, and Contemporary  
Russian and Anglo-American Poetry**

## **Jews of Russia & Eastern Europe and Their Legacy**

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# **The River of Time**

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Anglo-American Poetry

Ian Probst

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My translations of Osip Mandelstam's poems "The Horseshoe Finder," "The Age," and "January 1, 1924" were finalists for the Gabo (Gabriel Marquez) Prize for translation and multilingual texts. They appeared in *Lunch Ticket* (Summer/Fall 2016), a literary and art journal published by Antioch University's MFA program.

My translation of Velimir Khlebnikov's poems "O *dostoyevskim* might of a rushing cloud," "City of the Future," "Kruchonykh," "A police precinct is a great thing! . . .," and "To All," appeared first in *Four Centuries of Russian Poetry in Translation* 14 (2006): 10-16.

“Fear and Awe: On Osip Mandelstam’s ‘The Slate Ode’” and my translation of “The Slate Ode” into English appeared in *Brooklyn Rail: In Translation* (March 2011).

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## **Note on Transliteration and Translation**

**A**ll translations from books published in Russia and in the former Soviet Union, if not otherwise mentioned, are mine. Transliterations of names of foreign authors are as they appear in the books cited in this work; otherwise, they follow the Library of Congress transliteration system for Russian.

# Introduction

## Forms of Time-Space (Chronotope) in Poetry

*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.  
And the earth was without form, and void;  
And darkness was upon the face of the deep  
And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.  
And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.  
And God saw the light, that it was good:  
And God divided the light from the darkness.  
And God called the light Day,  
And the darkness he called Night.  
And the evening and the morning were the first day.*

**Genesis 1:1-5**

*Hear the voice of the Bard!  
Who Present, Past, and Future sees  
Whose ears have heard,  
The Holy Word,  
That walk'd among the ancient trees.*

**William Blake**

**T**his book explores the changing perception of time and space in avant-garde, modernist, and contemporary poetry. I seek to characterize the works of modern Russian, French, and Anglo-American poets based on the attitudes towards reality, time, space, and history revealed in their poetics. I also aim to identify crucial differences between poets from the same artistic movement (for example, the Italian and Russian futurists, especially the major

Russian futurists Velimir Khlebnikov and Vladimir Mayakovsky). In my approach, I use Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of the chronotope and apply it to poetry. Although Bakhtin in his seminal work *The Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel* applies the chronotope only to prose, disregarding other genres or arts, or even culture in general,<sup>1</sup> it is my contention that time and space play a more crucial role in poetry, even in lyric poetry, since poetry can be defined as time and space condensed in images.

The idea of time and space is associated in human consciousness with the mythic separation of "the light from the darkness" and of "the waters from the waters." We can trace the development of time-space relations from the book of Genesis, *Gilgamesh*, *The Elder Edda*, and the Homeric epics, through Dante and Milton, and finally to modern poetry.

Time and language are closely connected. As George Steiner asserts in *After Babel*,

Every language-act has a temporal determinant. No semantic form is timeless. When using a word we wake into resonance, as it were, its entire previous history. A text is embedded in specific historical time; it has what linguists call a diachronic structure. To read fully is to restore all that one can of the immediacies of value and intent in which speech actually occurs.<sup>2</sup>

Combining what one might call the synchronic and diachronic approaches in modern literary theory, Steiner summarizes: "Language itself [. . .] is the most salient model of Heraclitean flux. It alters at every moment in perceived time."<sup>3</sup> Steiner's examples reveal the crucial interrelations between language, time, and history: "The grammar of

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1 Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84–258.

2 George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 24.

3 Steiner, *After Babel*, 18.

the Prophets in Isaiah enacts a profound metaphysical scandal—the enforcement of the future tense, the extension of language over time. A reverse discovery animates Thucydides; his was the explicit realization that the past is a language-construct, that the past tense of the verb is the sole guarantor of history.”<sup>4</sup>

Time, one of the most important philosophical ideas of humanity, serves as a powerful poetic motive in the history of world literature and is always a potent device in the structural formation of a literary work. In his book *The Culture of Time and Space*, Stephen Kern shows how the introduction of the wireless, the telephone, and other technological inventions, as well as the increase of speed and the appearance of Einstein’s special (1905) and general (1916) theories of relativity, changed the human perception of time and space.<sup>5</sup>

Another impact on human consciousness of technological inventions such as the telegraph, telephone, and airplane was that a resident of a big European city realized that there were five billion people on earth, and the sense of multitude was reflected by individual consciousness: a person felt that one was dissolved in that multitude and lost one’s “ego” and privacy. The Russian critic Leonid Dolgopolov wrote in his essay on Andrei Bely’s novel *Petersburg*, “in Gogol’s and, especially, in Dostoyevsky’s novels man began to lose himself and dissolved the uniqueness of his ‘ego’ in the life that surrounded him.”<sup>6</sup> Raskolnikov’s life was already the “life of the street, of the city, of the whole mankind: the boundary between his room without a lounge and the street was conventional.”<sup>7</sup>

The idea of relativism was already present in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century: the separation between time and space was being smothered, dissolved in the consciousness of people who lived in big Russian cities, to say nothing of those who lived in Western

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4 Ibid., 22.

5 Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1983), 19.

6 Leonid Dolgopolov, “Roman Andreia Belogo ‘Peterburg,’” in *Peterburg*, by Andrei Belyi (Moscow: Nauka Publishing House, 1981), 588.

7 Ibid.

Europe. Time is the fourth dimension of space, as Stephen Kern asserts in *The Culture of Time and Space*.<sup>8</sup>

In *The Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel*, Mikhail Bakhtin proposes the term “chronotope.” As he puts it, “this term [time-space, or, chronotope] is employed in mathematics, and was introduced as part of Einstein’s Theory of Relativity.”<sup>9</sup> Bakhtin applied this term to literary theory as a metaphor (he himself mentions in parentheses that it is “almost, but not entirely” a metaphor for him<sup>10</sup>). The idea of the unity of time and space—time as the fourth dimension of space—was most relevant for him. Bakhtin understood the chronotope as a “category of literature with its own significance in form and content.”<sup>11</sup>

Bakhtin discusses the time-space relationship and applies the chronotope only to prose, not to other genres, or to arts or culture in general. Time in literature is condensed, and therefore becomes more artistically vivid and notable; space, in turn, is intensified as it becomes a deeper part of the movement of time, plot, and history.<sup>12</sup> (This phenomenon was noticed by Viktor Shklovsky much earlier than by Bakhtin.)<sup>13</sup> The features and images of time are revealed through space, and space, in turn, is comprehended and measured by time. The chronotope in literature is thus characterized by this intersection and interrelation of sequences and by the junction of these features (time and space). Bakhtin states that “genre and generic distinctions [varieties]”<sup>14</sup> are defined by the chronotope: “the chronotope as a formal constitutive category determines to a

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8 Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space*, 145, 206.

9 Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope,” 84.

10 Ibid.

11 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Voprosy literatury i estetiki* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1975), 235. Translation is mine.

12 Bakhtin, *Voprosy*, 235.

13 Viktor Shklovsky, “The Connection between Devices of Syuzhet Construction and the General Stylistic Devices,” in *Russian Formalism*, ed. Stephen Bann and John Bowl, trans. Jane Knox (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1973), 58–61.

14 Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope,” 85.

significant degree the image of man in literature as well. The image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic.”<sup>15</sup>

Bakhtin extends the meaning of the chronotope and applies it to such categories as the chronotope of reality, the chronotope of the road, the chronotope of love, and so on. He shows the development of the forms of the chronotope only in the novel, but, as was stated by Roman Jakobson in “Dialogue on Time in Language and Literature” with Krystyna Pomorska, the notion of time is one of the most relevant and dominant features in poetry. Discussing the heritage of the Polish classical philologist Tadeusz Zielinski (1859–1944), who revealed essential instances of time-space relations in the *Iliad*, Jakobson comes to the conclusion that “*the most effective experience of verbal time occurs in verse* [. . .] which simultaneously carries within it both linguistic varieties of time: the time of the speech event and that of the narrated event” (my emphasis).<sup>16</sup>

It is my contention that the chronotope is crucial to our understanding of literary movements and of individual poets, and we can trace it from ancient to modern poetry. Tracing the chronotope and connecting it with history are the objectives of this book.

In neoclassical poetry, the flux of time is a more or less successive movement with a beginning, past, present, and future (though time may be condensed or reversed). In the poetry of the younger romantics, however, especially Shelley, we have, using the metaphors of Bergson, “the invisible progress of the past gnawing into the future, [. . .] the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances.”<sup>17</sup> In Shelley’s “Mont Blanc” (1816), where “primaeval mountains / Teach the adverting mind,”<sup>18</sup> the primeval past leaves its footprint on nature. Shelley can see the primeval past in the present time, which for him

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>16</sup> Roman Jakobson, *Verbal Art, Verbal Sign, Verbal Time* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 21–22.

<sup>17</sup> Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 52–53.

<sup>18</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, “Mont Blanc,” in *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (New York: Norton, 1977), 92.

is prolonged into space and the universe. The boundaries of time and space do not exist for him: they are like a multi-folded fan. He easily travels from one reality to another (here Shelley anticipates both the theory of relativity and José Ortega y Gasset's perspectivism) and can see how "the old Earthquake-daemon taught her young Ruin."<sup>19</sup> As Shelley himself writes in "A Defence of Poetry," quoting Francis Bacon, "the same footsteps of nature impressed upon the various subjects of the world."<sup>20</sup> For Shelley, a poet "*not only beholds the present as it is, and discovers those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germs of the flower and the fruit of latest time*" (my emphasis).<sup>21</sup>

In emphasizing this anticipation of the future, both Ortega y Gasset<sup>22</sup> and Renato Poggioli<sup>23</sup> called the romantics the predecessors of modernism. As Jakobson stated, "the romantics are often described as explorers of man's spiritual realm and poets of emotional experience, but as a matter of fact the contemporaries of the romantics thought of the movement exclusively in terms of its formal innovations. They observed first of all the destruction of the classical unities."<sup>24</sup> In the poetry of the romantics, the relations between art and life were forever changed. They made time, space, and reality palpable by breaking with the classical tradition of personifying abstract ideas, human virtues, and evils, and by turning to subjective reality: the micro-world of feelings, not only of the past, but also of the present and the future. Along with this revolution against accepted ideas, the romantics broke the old forms as well, the exhausted intonational

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19 Shelley, "Mont Blanc," 91.

20 Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry," in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, 482.

21 Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry," 482–83.

22 See José Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).

23 See Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968).

24 Roman Jakobson, "Modern Russian Poetry: Velimir Khlebnikov," in *Major Soviet Writers*, ed. Edward J. Brown (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 63.

and lexical-semantic structures that had been automatized by the epigones. They shook the old rhythms and used old forms to express new content.

A similar revolution took place in avant-garde and modernist literature at the beginning of the twentieth century. Both Stephen Kern and Marjorie Perloff write about this new perception of time and space in twentieth century literature. It is crucial, in my view, that both the French avant-garde poets and the Russian futurists eliminated the separation between the past, the present, and the future as well as between space and time.

In his otherwise brilliant book *The Culture of Time and Space*, Stephen Kern is mostly concerned with ideas, and he uses literature, including poetry, mainly to illustrate his point of view. For Kern, there is little difference between the works of Apollinaire, Cendrars, and Barzun, since for him they all put forth fascinating ideas like simultaneity, as will be discussed in the following chapter. Marjorie Perloff in her illuminating book *The Futurist Moment* is mainly concerned with the problem of form, but the differences between the works of two innovators, Aleksei Kruchonykh (1886–1968) and Velimir Khlebnikov (1885–1922), who both put forward the idea of *zaum'* or beyonsense (trans-sense) language,<sup>25</sup> are unclear, as is the reason why Kruchonykh, who lived on for forty-six years after the death of Khlebnikov, never created anything equally innovative. I presume it was due to the fact that Kruchonych was concerned mostly with form, limiting his search to philology and unable to go beyond it. In contrast, the greatness of Khlebnikov's genius eventually became clear even to the average reader.

I believe that the interpretation of literature should be neither reduced to the analysis of form nor to hermeneutics alone. The interpretation of what is hidden behind the word of an image-picture should go alongside analyses of the intonational systems of different

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25 Velimir Khlebnikov, *Collected Works*, ed. Charlotte Douglas and trans. Paul Schmidt, vol. 1, *Letters and Theoretical Writings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 147.

poets, their stylistic devices, diction, and so on. In other words, I advocate an approach that interprets the poetic motives rather than the meaning or the form of the poems. These analyses of poets' views of reality, history, and time-space relations should ideally include analyses of artistic personalities.

The notion of "poetic motive" has been developed in Russian literary theory by Alexander Veselovsky, Boris Tomashevsky, and Boris Gasparov.<sup>26</sup> Vladimir Toporov's and Eleazar Meletinsky's works should be also added to this list.<sup>27</sup> In his first known article of 1919, "Iskusstvo i otvetstvennost'" ("Art and Responsibility"), Mikhail Bakhtin states, "the three spheres of human culture—science, art, and life—are unified only by the personality of the artist that joins them together in the union."<sup>28</sup> Bakhtin further discusses the discrepancy between the personality of the artist in art and in life and concludes that "it is solely the unity of responsibility" that guarantees the intrinsic unity of the artistic personality: "I have to be accountable with my entire life for everything that I have experienced and understood in art, so that it [everything that I realized and experienced] should not be wasted."<sup>29</sup>

The classical scholar Sergey Averintsev (1937–2004) differentiates between the notions of "the author ('auctor'—nomen agentis, i.e. denomination of the subject of an action)" and "auctoritas ('authority'—

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26 Alexander Veselovskii, *Istoricheskaya poetika* (Moscow: Vysshaya Shkola, 1989); Boris Tomashevskii, *Teoriya literatury: Poetika* (Moscow: Aspect Press, 1999); Boris Gasparov, *Literaturnye leitmotivy* (Moscow: Nauka, 1994) and *Poetika "Slova o polku Igoreve"* (Moscow: Agraf, 2000). In his otherwise thoughtful and insightful study of the *Poetics of the Tale of Igor's Campaign*, Boris Gasparov studies each motif separately as in Vladimir Propp's *Morfologiya skazki* (Leningrad: Academia, 1928).

27 Vladimir Toporov, *Mif. Ritual. Simvol. Obraz. Issledovaniia v oblasti mifopoeticheskogo* (Moscow: Progress, 1995); and Eleazar Meletinskii, *Poetika mifa* (Moscow: Nauka, 1976).

28 Mikhail Bakhtin, "Art and Responsibility," in *Literaturno-kriticheskie stat'i* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1986), 3. Translation is mine.

29 Bakhtin, "Art and Responsibility," 3. Translation is mine.

denomination of a certain quality of the subject).”<sup>30</sup> Mentioning the problem of identifying the real authors of *Psalms* and *Proverbs*, Averintsev claims that the former nevertheless bears the name of King David, while the latter that of King Solomon. In both cases, the authority of the king has been institutionalized as the author, and that authority allows him to speak in the name of God.<sup>31</sup> Averintsev also differentiates between Homer and Hesiod: although the latter spoke about himself in great detail in *Labors and Days* (633–40, 654–57), whereas very little is known about Homer’s life, their primary difference does not lie in the scope of their biographies. Rather, as Averintsev illustrates, Hesiod’s own words reveal the biggest distinction between the two: “We know enough to make up lies / Which are convincing, but we also have / The skill, when we’ve a mind, to speak the truth.”<sup>32</sup> Homer was an authority as a poet, an author; Hesiod pretended to utter the truth of the gods and of the community, not his own. Averintsev concludes that Hesiod shifted the epic from the heroic to the didactic.<sup>33</sup> In other words, based on a new poetic motive, Hesiod put forth a new poetic style (although, of course, this is not to suggest that Hesiod was a better poet than Homer).

In his work “Poetic Motive and Context”—which develops the notion of German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) that the motif is the poetic approach to life and reality in all its complexity—Russian scholar, poet, and translator Vladimir Mikushevich states, “art begins with an approach towards life, with a substance [. . .]. Yet we need a personality for the poetical comprehension of this relation. Personality and substance are the two sides of a poetic motive.”<sup>34</sup> I understand the motive of an artistic work as the integrity of the main theme—something

30 Sergei Averintsev, “Avtorstvo i avtoritet,” in *Istoricheskaiia poetika* (Moscow: Nasledie, 1994), 105. Translation is mine.

31 Averintsev, “Avtorstvo i avtoritet,” 109. Translation is mine.

32 Dorothea Wender, trans., *Hesiod and Theognis* (London: Penguin, 1973), 24.

33 Averintsev, “Avtorstvo i avtoritet,” 119.

34 Vladimir Mikushevich, “Poeticheskii motiv i kontekst,” in *Voprosy teorii hudozhestvennogo perevoda* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1971), 41.

that induces the artist to act—as well as the philosophical, ethical, and aesthetic approach of the artistic personality to reality.

It is crucial to trace the artistic realization of the poetic motive only in definite contexts. These two planes are united by the personality of the verbal artist who simultaneously belongs to life (reality A) and to art (reality B), which is not necessarily a “reflection” or mimetic representation, but is rather the creation of another reality with the help of artistic devices or *orudiinye sredstva* (weapons), as Osip Mandelstam put it.<sup>35</sup> The execution of a poetic motive is its lexical, syntactical, and rhythmical (or metrical, if we consider the traditional system of versification) realization in the specific context of the literary work. The poetic motive is evoked or realized only in this specific context, since words can acquire meanings only in contexts, not in the dictionary.

The context of a poetic work is the “speaking picture,” to quote Sir Philip Sidney,<sup>36</sup> or the “plastic space” in which a poetic motive is realized or evoked.<sup>37</sup> The Russian scholar Boris Eikhenbaum defines melodics as an intonational system, that is, “a combination of intonational figures or movements as they are revealed in a definite syntax.”<sup>38</sup> If we extend this definition, we come to the conclusion that the intonational system is the unity of the poet’s personal tone, rhythm, meter (in traditional systems of versification), diction, and stylistic devices realized in a definite syntax (including the composition of the piece) in the process of realization of the poetic motif in the context of a specific literary work.

In this book, I seek to characterize the works of modern poets based on their attitudes towards reality, time, space and history revealed in their poetics. In the following chapters I will show both similarities

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35 Osip Mandel'shtam, “Razgovor o Dante,” in *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, ed. Pavel Nerler (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1990), 2:214.

36 Sir Philip Sidney, “The Defense of Poesie,” in *Selections from Arcadia and Other Poetry and Prose*, ed. T. W. Craik (New York: Capricorn, 1966), 27.

37 This is the expression of the prominent Russian poet, artist, and the best translator of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* into Russian—Arkady Shteinberg (1907–1984).

38 Boris Eikhenbaum, *O poezii* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1969), 338. Translation is mine.

between the poets from different artistic movements (as for instance, the attitude towards time and space of Apollinaire and Mayakovsky) and crucial differences between the French avant-garde poets (Barzun, Cendrars, and Apollinaire), Italian and Russian futurists, or with the major Russian futurists Velimir Khlebnikov and Vladimir Mayakovsky. The attitude towards time, space, and history is equally important for W. B. Yeats, Osip Mandelstam, Ezra Pound, and T. S. Eliot—revealing both similarities and differences of the poets “sailing after knowledge” in their spiritual quest—and, in spite of the postmodernist “estrangement” of reality,<sup>39</sup> similar traces can be found in the work of contemporary American poets John Ashbery and Charles Bernstein.

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39 I will continue to use the term “estrangement” or “defamiliarization,” put forward by Victor Shklovsky (1893–1984) in his seminal “Iskusstvo kak priem” (“Art as Device” or “Art as Technique”), first published in volume 2 of *Sborniki po teorii poeticheskogo iazyka* (Collections [of Essays] on the Theory of Poetic Language) (Petrograd, 1917), 3–14. He considered “the device of defamiliarization” or estrangement as one of the main devices in literature aimed at a “shift” of meaning and perception in order to deautomatize them. It is possible that Gertrude Stein—who wrote, “A Rose is a rose is a rose”—and Ezra Pound, who drew his “make it new” from Chang Ti (the Chinese emperor of 1766 BC), came independently to the same idea. It will be most illuminating to see how Gertrude Stein’s and Ezra Pound’s ideas, merged with Shklovsky’s “defamiliarization,” were employed by the Language School of contemporary American poetry, discussed in the last chapter of the book.



## **Part One**

# **Beyond Barriers: Avant-Garde and Futurism**

## CHAPTER ONE

# Forms of Chronotope in Avant-Garde Poetry

*Je suis ivre d'avoir bu tout l'univers.*  
Apollinaire<sup>1</sup>

The futurist revolution began as a revolt against history, with fierce attacks on the past, adoration of the modern technological inventions of their time, the increasing speed of progress, and a craving for the future (a characteristic feature of the Russian futurists, especially of Mayakovsky). Some scholars like Ortega y Gasset call this tendency the “dehumanization of art,” while others like Poggioli see its democratic elements.<sup>2</sup> Stephen Kern brings up the manifestoes of the Italian futurists “that recommended burning the Louvre and filling the canals of Venice.”<sup>3</sup> He quotes Marinetti’s manifesto of February 1909, which “contained the essentials of an [. . .] antipasséiste project to destroy

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1 I’m drunk from having swallowed the entire universe (in French). Guillaume Apollinaire, “Vendémiaire,” in *The Banquet Years*, trans. Roger Shattuck (New York: Vintage, 1968), 313.

2 See Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art*; and Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*.

3 Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space*, 57.

the museums and the academies and to free the land from ‘its smelly gangrene of old professors, archeologists, ciceroni, and antiquarians.’”<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Marinetti not only sought to unleash energy but also praised war: “we will glorify war—the only hygiene of the world—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of anarchist, the beautiful ideas which kill, and the scorn of a woman.”<sup>5</sup> Following the mindsets of both Roger Shattuck<sup>6</sup> and Poggioli—who presumes in *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* that “the futurist movement belongs to all the avant-gardes, and not only to the one named for it”<sup>7</sup>—Marjorie Perloff consistently calls the avant-garde “the *avant guerre*” and states, “the revolution longed for by the poets and artists of the *avant guerre* never came, at least not in the form anticipated.”<sup>8</sup>

The French avant-garde artists Robert Delaunay and Henri Rousseau expressed their idea of the time-space relation on canvas, with the Eiffel Tower in the background symbolizing the reign of a new era. Different as they were in their aesthetic convictions, Henri-Martin Barzun, Blaise Cendrars, and Guillaume Apollinaire introduced simultaneous poetry, which involved either the uniting of remote places and distant times or the same characters acting simultaneously in disparate places. As Roger Shattuck summarized, “the aspiration of simultaneism is to grasp the moment in its total significance or, more ambitiously, to manufacture a moment which surpasses our usual perception of time and space.”<sup>9</sup> Barzun, Cendrars, and Apollinaire even argued about who was the first to introduce the new term.<sup>10</sup>

In 1912, Barzun founded a journal in which he intended to present his theory of simultaneity and to publish works that conformed to it.

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4 Filippo Marinetti, “The Foundation and the Manifesto of Futurism,” in *Documents of 20th Century Art: Futurist Manifestos*, ed. Umbro Apollonio, trans. Robert Brain, R. W. Flint, J. C. Higgitt, and Caroline Tisdall (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 46.

5 Marinetti, “The Foundation and the Manifesto,” 46.

6 See Shattuck, *The Banquet Years*, 353.

7 Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*.

8 Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), xvii.

9 Shattuck, *The Banquet Years*, 345. Translated by Shattuck.

10 Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space*, 72, 329.

He proclaimed the age of democracy: of public crowds and public assemblies. He praised the age of aviation and the unification of the world by the wireless: “I radiate, invisible, from the summit of the Tower / Fluid carrying the hope of ships in distress / Enveloping the earth with my waves / Proclaiming the Word, the Time of the world.”<sup>11</sup>

The Eiffel Tower, the construction of which was finished in 1889, was considered by Barzun and others to be a modern Tower of Babel, through which the curse of Babel had been overcome. The new technological inventions, they believed, could not only help overcome time, space, and the physical separation of mankind, but would also help reunite mankind spiritually. “The Time of the world” meant the time of understanding, the time of breaking the barriers of superstition and prejudices. Barzun was convinced that song had to give up its monodic character and become polyphonic: “multiple lyricism must render the multiplicity of modern life.”<sup>12</sup>

In 1913, Blaise Cendrars published *La Prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jehanne de France* (*The Prose of the TransSiberian [Express] and the Little Joan [D’Arc] of France*), which was illustrated with Sonia Delaunay’s “couleurs simultanées.” For Sonia Delaunay the term of simultaneity, or “couleurs simultanées,” meant something different than for Cendrars or the other poets discussed above. As observed by Marjorie Perloff, for Delaunay the term refers to “M. E. Chevreul’s 1839 treatise *De la Loi du contraste simultané de couleurs* (On the law of the contrast of colors) from which Robert Delaunay derived his doctrine of ‘simultaneism’ as the dynamic counterpoint of otherwise dissonant colors when observed in complementarity.”<sup>13</sup> Hence another facet of simultaneity was added to that of Cendrars. Cendrars’s reader saw “simultaneous” colors, a map

11 Barzun’s poem from *Voix, Rythmes et Chants Simultanés* was published in his journal *Poème et Drame* 3 (March 1913): 54. Quoted in Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space*, 72. Interlinear translation by Kern.

12 Henri-Martin Barzun, “L’Ère du drame: Essai de synthèse poétique moderne” (Paris: E. Figuière, 1912), 15–35, quoted in Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space*, 72. Interlinear translation by Kern.

13 Arthur Cohen, ed. *New Art of Color: The Writings of Robert and Sonia Delaunay*, trans. David Shapiro and Arthur Cohen (New York: Viking, 1978), 202. Cited by Perloff, *The Futurist Moment*, 8.

of the trip, and a poem about it at the same time. No less significantly, Cendrars in this poem sought to unite synchronic and diachronic time (“I spent my childhood in the hanging gardens of Babylon”) with space, which could not separate him in the train racing across Russia from the other world. The poet simultaneously hears, “The big clapper of Notre Dame / The shrill ringing of the Louvre announcing Saint Bartholomew / The rusted bells of Bruges-la-morte / The electric bells of the New York Public Library / The city bells of Venice / And the bells of Moscow.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore, several types of simultaneity can be observed in this poem: remote places and times are united in one plane by the character traveling simultaneously in space and time. The poem also involves history: the Russian-Japanese war of 1904–1905, the Russian Revolution of 1905–1907 as witnessed by Cendrars, and the anticipation of the Great War. It is notable that the Swiss-born Cendrars (born Frédéric-Louis Sauser, 1887–1961) and the Italian-born Apollinaire of Polish origin (born Wilhelm Albert Włodzimierz Apolinary Kostrowicki, 1880–1918) welcomed World War I with enthusiasm, like Marinetti. Both Cendrars and Apollinaire volunteered. Both were wounded: Cendrars’s right arm was amputated; Apollinaire was gravely wounded in the head, never fully recovered, succumbed to the flu epidemic, and died.

With the exception of Mayakovsky—who at the beginning of World War I was overcome by patriotism and even chauvinism but then came to his senses and criticized the war—the Russian futurists never really praised violence, although they did welcome the revolution. Khlebnikov, who was drafted into the Russian army, depicted the atrocities of both World War I and the Civil War, but was mainly concerned with finding the laws of history, thus uniting all of time and space, as will be discussed below.

Apollinaire was also concerned with time and space. As he claimed in his “Les Peintres cubistes” (“The Cubist Painters,” 1913), “today scientists no longer limit themselves to the three dimensions of Euclid. The painters have been led quite naturally, one might say by intuition, to

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14 Blaise Cendrars, *La Prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jehanne de France*. Quoted in Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space*, 74. Kern’s interlinear translation.

preoccupy themselves with the new possibilities of spatial measurement which, in the language of the modern studios, are designated by the term: *the fourth dimension*.”<sup>15</sup> Kern notes that “Apollinaire’s poetry also included several aspects of simultaneity.”<sup>16</sup> *Zone* (1912), according to Kern, “sought to knit remote places and times into a single fabric of present experience—a zone between past and future, between near and remote.”<sup>17</sup> Equally important to his exploration of time and space is Apollinaire’s defamiliarization of myth:

Christ pupil of my eye  
 Pupil of twenty centuries he knows what he’s doing  
 And changed into a bird this century like Jesus soars in the air  
 Devils in abysses lift their heads to stare  
 Look they say he takes after Simon Magus of Judea  
 They say he can steal but can also steal away  
 The angels vault past the all-time greatest pole vaulters  
 Icarus Enoch Elijah Apollonius of Tyana  
 Gather around the first airplane  
 Or make way for the elevation of those who took communion  
 The priests rise eternally as they raise the host  
 And the airplane touches down at last its wings outstretched  
 From heaven come flying millions of swallows  
 Ibises flamingoes storks from Africa  
 The fabled Roc celebrated by storytellers and poets  
 With Adam’s skull in its claws the original skull  
 [. . .]  
 Here comes the dove immaculate spirit  
 Escorted by lyre-bird and vain peacock  
 And the phoenix engendering himself from the flames

15 Guillaume Apollinaire, *Les Peintres cubistes: Méditations esthétiques* (Paris: Figuière, 1913). English translation by Lionel Abel in Guillaume Apollinaire, *The Cubist Painters: Aesthetic Meditations* (New York: Wittenborn, 1944), 10. Cited by Herschel Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art: A Sourcebook by Artists and Critics* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 223.

16 Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space*, 75.

17 *Ibid.*

Veils everything for a moment with his sparkling cinders  
 The sirens leave the perilous seas  
 And sing beautifully when they get here all three of them  
 And all of them eagle phoenix and *pibi* of China  
 Befriend our flying machine<sup>18</sup>

In this poem, Daedalus and Icarus, alongside the Old Testament prophet Enoch—the great grandfather of Noah, are taken alive into heaven just like the prophet Elijah, who was elevated in a fiery chariot—are accompanied by Simon Magus, the first century AD gnostic philosopher and miracle worker, as well as Apollonius of Tyana (circa 15 to circa 100 AD), a charismatic teacher and miracle worker, whose life was described by Philostratus (170–247 AD). Both Simon Magus and Apollonius of Tyana were revered by the French symbolists. All these characters gather in the poem around the first airplane and are accompanied by birds—both real and mythological—from various parts of the world used by Apollinaire as metonymies of time, history, and humankind, like Khlebnikov’s gods in “Edinaia kniga” (“The One Book”) and in *Azy iz Uzy* (*As I Am Easy*), discussed below.

In *Ondes* (1913), Apollinaire describes the Eiffel Tower, “whose electronic waves carried the signals that made it possible to determine the simultaneous occurrence of distant events.”<sup>19</sup>

Apollinaire’s calligrammes, with words arranged to depict the poem’s content, unite lexical and visual images, thus creating a new form. As Roger Shattuck suggests in *The Banquet Years*, Apollinaire’s “most expressive ‘calligrams’ can be reduced to simple messages like lyric telegrams [. . .]. Because they exist in several dimensions of time and meaning, his poems suggest an infinity of human experience and represent the freedom which Apollinaire treasured as the most precious fulfillment of our nature.”<sup>20</sup>

18 Translation of Guillaume Apollinaire’s *Zone* in *Virginia Quarterly Review* 89, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 60–64. <http://www.vqronline.org/translations/apollinaires-zone>. Translated from the French by David Lehman.

19 Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space*, 75.

20 Shattuck, *The Banquet Years*, 315.

In Apollinaire's poetry we encounter various metamorphoses of the lyrical hero, his "self" and "the other": "I" is looking at "you," which becomes or is treated as another facet of "I":

You are in Paris summoned before a judge  
Arrested like a common criminal

You journeyed in joy and despair  
Before you encountered lies and old age  
Love made you suffer at twenty at thirty  
I've lived like a fool and wasted my time.<sup>21</sup>

Sometimes the poet's "I" bursts out of its limits as if his body were too small for him, like the lyrical hero of Mayakovsky (to be discussed in the following pages):

I'm drunk from having swallowed the entire universe  
On the quay from which I saw the darkness flow and  
the barges sleep  
Listen to me I am the throat of all Paris  
And I shall drink the universe again if I want  
Listen to my songs of universal drunkenness.<sup>22</sup>

Even the space of a page in Apollinaire's work differs from that of traditional poetry. In both *Zone* and "Vendémiaire" by Apollinaire, the absence of punctuation marks is, evidently, a self-conscious use of device, a kind of negative-positive space aimed at intensifying ambiguity.

Not only does the avant-garde thirst for the present and for simultaneity, but it also searches for new synthetic forms in order to reveal a new poetic motive in a new context. Russian futurism had similar poetic motives.

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21 Apollinaire, *Zone*. Translated from the French by David Lehman.

22 Apollinaire, "Vendémiaire," in *The Banquet Years*, 313. Shattuck's translation.

## CHAPTER TWO

# “The King of Time” and “The Slave of Time”: Velimir Khlebnikov and Vladimir Mayakovsky

*The sense of time disappears and time looks like a field  
before you and behind you, and, finally, times becomes  
a sort of space. . . .*

Khlebnikov<sup>1</sup>

*I flew off like a curse*

*My other foot was already in the next street.*

Mayakovsky<sup>2</sup>

Russian futurism began with “A Slap in the Face of Public Taste” (1912), a manifesto in which the authors called to “throw Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy etc., etc., overboard from the Ship of Modernity.”<sup>3</sup>

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1 Velimir Khlebnikov, “Pis'mo P. Miturichu,” in *Sobranie proizvedenii*, ed. Iurii Tynianov and Nikolai Stepanov (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo pisatelei, 1933), 5:324. Translation is mine.

2 Vladimir Mayakovsky, *Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Tragedy*. Cited by Roman Jakobson, “Modern Russian Poetry: Velimir Khlebnikov,” in *Major Soviet Writers*, 67. Translated by Edward J. Brown.

3 “A Slap in the Face of Public Taste,” in *Russian Futurism through Its Manifestoes, 1912–1928*, trans. and ed. Anna Lawton and Herbert Eagle (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), 51.

Besides the Bloomian “anxiety of influence,”<sup>4</sup> the aesthetic motivation for the futurist revolution combined with the denial of the classics, as well as of the past and of history itself, was different for Marinetti and for the Russian futurists. As Roman Jakobson assumed, “*the idea of parole in libertà* (the free word) [. . .] is a reform in the field of reportage, not in poetic language” (Jakobson’s emphasis).<sup>5</sup> The Russian futurists, as Jakobson asserted, were not so much concerned with praising new technological innovations; their motivation was not the need “to tell of new facts in the material and psychological worlds.”<sup>6</sup> The Russian futurists put forward a completely different poetic motive. Jakobson refers to the manifesto of Aleksei Kruchonykh in the collection *The Three*: “Once there is new form, it follows that there is new content: form thus conditions content. Our creative shaping of speech throws everything into a new light. It is not a new subject matter that defines genuine innovation. New light shed on the old world can yield the most fanciful play.”<sup>7</sup> Jakobson maintained that “the aim of poetry is here very clearly formulated, and it is precisely the Russian futurists who invented a poetry of the ‘self-developing, self-valuing word,’ as the established and clearly visible material of poetry.”<sup>8</sup>

However, the poetic motives of the Russian futurists, especially those of Mayakovsky and Khlebnikov, are drastically different from one other.<sup>9</sup> Their attitudes toward reality, in general, and toward time-space relations, in particular, vary greatly. This chapter is a comparison of Velimir Khlebnikov (1885–1922) and Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893–1930), the two principal figures of Russian futurism.

Velimir Khlebnikov was one of the creators and leaders of Russian futurism, and also its principal philosopher. He invented his own name

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4 Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

5 Jakobson, “Modern Russian Poetry,” 61.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 The use of the term “motive,” which is not limited to motif (a recurrent theme), and which includes the personality of the artist in all its complexity, was discussed in the introduction.