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Vital Signs:
Rhythm, Image, and Voice in Russian Modernist Poetry and Theory 1905-1924

by

Isobel Margaret Jane Palmer

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requirements for the degree of

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in

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Committee in Charge:

Professor Harsha Ram, Chair
Professor Luba Golburt
Professor Eric Falci

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Abstract

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This dissertation focuses new critical attention on Russian modernism's engagement with poetic form. Placing close-readings of poetic and theoretical texts in the context of rapid urbanization, the emergence of new technologies, and socialist revolution, it argues that it is precisely where modernist poets (Alexander Blok, Boris Pasternak, and Vladimir Mayakovsky) and formalist theorists (Boris Eikhenbaum, Viktor Shklovsky, and Yury Tynianov) are most interested in the nature and functioning of poetic language that they respond most urgently to the dramatic changes occurring in early-twentieth-century Russian society and public discourse. Contrary to common approaches to Russian modernism that view it primarily in terms of competing poetic schools and distinct periods, the three chapters of this dissertation aim to think across the theory/practice divide, highlighting the common impulses behind the diverse output of its central figures in order to arrive at a definition of modernism not through periodization or literary school but instead as a certain way of thinking about and through poetic form and its relation to society. Bringing Russian modernism into dialogue with contemporary Western theories of the lyric, old/new media, and the urban environment, the dissertation asks what the poetic and theoretical output of this period has to tell us about the functioning of poetry and its role in the world today.

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A Note on Transliteration

Transliterations follow the Library of Congress system, except when an anglicized name has been well established (e.g. Mayakovsky, Shklovsky, Yury). The scholarly apparatus, however, follows the LOC system.

INTRODUCTION

In June 1920, literary scholar Sergei Bernshtein (1892-1970) recorded the modernist poet Aleksandr Blok (1880-1921) reading sixteen of his own poems aloud. Bernshtein was a founding member of the "Institute of the Living Word" [*Institut zhivogo slova*], established in Petrograd in 1918, where he worked alongside scholars, poets, and actors to promote the study and teaching of the spoken word. The Institute of the Living Word revived an idea that had first been suggested in 1914, when Iurii Ozarovskii, the director of St. Petersburg's Aleksandrinskii Theatre, sought to bring together in person the diverse contributors to the journal "Voice and Speech" [*Golos i rech'*], a venture that had flourished briefly in 1913-14 in conjunction with a series of declamation workshops headed by Ozarovskii beginning in 1910.[1] When the Institute finally became a reality, it gathered a range of well-known scholars and artists in what was explicitly intended as a multidisciplinary space in which specialists with a broad range of expertise would study the spoken word both in theory and in practice to academic and applied ends. Courses offered by the Institute ranged from the practical study of declamation to the theory and history of the lyric, oratory, the novel, children's literature, and music, from philosophy and aesthetics to physiology and sociolinguistics.[2]

While the Institute had included an "otophonetic" laboratory from the start, a studio equipped with the most recent audio equipment that was designed to allow students to make and listen back to recordings of themselves practicing vocal exercises, Bernshtein's recordings of Blok were part of a new initiative, spearheaded by Bernshtein himself, to use the premises to record the voices of the foremost poets of the period.[3] The immediate purpose of these

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[1] Ozarovskii's plans were thwarted by financial and political difficulties caused by the outbreak of the First World War. The Institute was eventually founded on the initiative of V.N. Vsevolodskii-Gerngross (1882–1962). Vsevolodskii-Gerngross had been a student of Iu. E. Ozarovskii. See M.P. Ossovskaia, "Sviaz vremen. Mezhdistsiplinarnaia integratsiia," *Golos i rech'*, No. 1 (2010), 8-13 (p. 9). *Golos i rech'* is the current journal of the Russian Academy of the Voice [*Rossiiskaia obshchestvennaia akademiia golosa*], established in 2007 after the publication of archival documents related to the Institute of the Living Word in 2007 (See Craig Brandist and Ekaterina Choun, "Iz predystorii Instituta zhivogo slova: protokoly zasedanii kursov khudozhestvennogo slova," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, No. 4 (August 2007), 96-106). The Academy is explicitly fashioned after the earlier Institute, and aims to further research on the voice by bringing together specialists from a wide variety of fields; the goals of this research are both theoretical and practical, ranging from historical-linguistic research to advances in medical treatment for vocal and aural disorders. The Academy also engages in educational initiatives, such as vocal training. See *Golos i rech'*, No. 1 (2010) for a representative sample of work produced under its auspices.
[2] A short list of participants in the Institute's activities includes the Formalist theorists, Boris Eikhenbaum, Lev Jakubinsky, Viktor Shklovsky, and Yury Tynianov; the philosopher, Ivan Lapshin; the opera singer, Fedor Shaliapin; the writers, Evgeny Zamiatin, Kornei Chukovsky, and Aleksei Remisov; the director, Vsevolod Meyerhold; and the poets Anna Akhmatova, Andrei Bely, Zinaida Gippius, Nikolai Gumilev (who taught courses in declamation and the history and theory of verse), and Viacheslav Ivanov. Rafaella Vassena, "K rekonstruktsii istorii deiatel'nosti Instituta zhivogo slova (1918-1924)," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, No. 4 (August 2007), 79-95 (pp. 81-2). Among the Institute's interests, Vassena lists philology, declamation, linguistics, music, physiology, psychology, and sociology (ibid., p. 82).
[3] The idea seems to have originated with Nikolai Gumilev, the modernist poet, who was active in the Institute's affairs. See Vassena, "K rekonstruktsii," p. 81. Bernshtein had been invited, along with the Formalist Boris

recordings was to aid the systematic study of poetry and its devices. Researchers at the Institute worked with recordings such as Blok's, comparing them to live performances by poets or actors (onsite and in public settings) and to recordings of political speeches in order to identify and analyze the relationship between the intonational, rhythmic, and affective qualities of poetry and the declamation of verse.[4] Contrary to critical and artistic traditions that have situated poetry in opposition to all forms of technological mediation, Bernshtein and his colleagues at the Institute saw modern technology as a means by which better to understand poetry's own nascent technological apparatus. Carried out under the multidisciplinary and practice-oriented auspices of the Institute of the Living Word, moreover, this return to poetic form was intended precisely to test and amplify the specificities of poetry as a medium capable of actively intervening in the social, political, and historical circumstances of their time. Though Bernshtein's collection of poets' voices would eventually come to be regarded as an invaluable connection with a bygone era, in other words, these recordings were initially inspired by a concern with the presence not so much of the poet as of the poem: in the Institute of the Living Word, recordings of live performances were valued insofar as they seemed to hold the key to what made poetry itself live.[5]

Several recent studies have detailed the importance of the newly technologized urban environment for the Russian and early-Soviet avant-garde.[6] These studies emphasize the ways in which urban themes and technological advances entered literature and the arts by suggesting to practitioners new content as well as new artistic techniques. My own study approaches the relationship between poetry and modern life from the direction suggested by Bernstein's work, which I take to be representative of the period more broadly. Embedding its objects of study in the modernizing urban environment of late imperial and early Soviet Russia, the three chapters of this dissertation argue that the most profound effects of these changing circumstances on poetry are to be found in those places where poetic practice and theory reflected most intently on the traditional mechanisms of poetic form—mechanisms that the proliferation of new media and

Eikhenbaum, to join Vsevolodskii-Gerngross's research project, "The Melody of Speech" in 1919, the goal of which was to analyze the melodic structure of speech using recordings of actors and performers [*artisty*]. Inspired by Eikhenbaum's work on "the melodics of verse" (later published as a book of the same name), Bernshtein proposed recording the voices of poets in March 1920 ("K rekonstruktsii," p. 83). For more on Bernshtein's activities, see Chapter Three of this dissertation. See also: L. A. Shilov, "Istoriia odnoi kollektsii," *Zvuchashchii mir. Kniga o zvukovoi dokumentalistike. Sbornik statei*, ed. V. M. Voznichkov (Moskva, 1979), pp. 121-145; S. Bogatyreva, "Kratkoe zhizneopisanie professora Sergeia Bernshteina, uchenogo-lingvista, v vospominaniiakh i 43-kh dokumentakh," *Voprosy literatury*, No. 6 (December 2013), 161-228.

[4] Vassena, "K rekonstruktsii," p. 83. Bernshtein's work progressed at a remarkable pace; by 1922, he had already recorded more than 6000 poems, performed by 30 different poets and actors (Vassena, "K rekonstruktsii," p. 90).

[5] Bernstein remained in charge of the collection through the 1920s, but in 1930 he was suddenly fired from the his post in the Cabinet for the Study of Artistic Speech [*Kabinet izucheniia khudozhestvennoi rechi (KIKhR)*] which he had helped to establish in the Institute of the History of the Arts after the closure of the Institute of the Living Word. The collection was declared the property of the Institute and thrown into storage, where it remained until 1938 when the archivist Viktor Duvakin transferred it to the State Museum of Literature in Moscow. A third of the discs had been damaged beyond repair by their time in storage; the rest were discovered and restored by Lev Shilov in the late 1950s. See Bogatyreva, "Kratkoe zhizneopisanie Bernshteina" and Lev Shilov, *Golosa, zazvuchashchie vnov'* (Moskva: Al'daon, 2004).

[6] See e.g. Tim Harte, *Fast Forward: The Aesthetics of Speed in Russian Avant-Garde Culture, 1910-1930* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009); Martha Weitzel Hickey, *The Writer in Petrograd and the House of Arts* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009); Julia Vaingurt, *Wonderlands of the Avant-Garde: Technology and the Arts in Russia of the 1920s* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2013); Julia Bekman Chadaga, *Optical Play: Glass, Vision, and Spectacle in Russian Culture* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2014).

technologies made both newly perceptible and newly available for study. This return to form was precisely an effort to think through the capabilities and potential of poetry as an active participant in an era of dramatic technological and social change.

The dissertation's three chapters focus, in turn, on the work of Aleksandr Blok (1880-1921), Boris Pasternak (1890-1960), and Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893-1930). Recognized in their own time and today as among the most innovative practitioners of modernist poetry, these poets are seldom brought together as representatives of a shared set of concerns.[7] This is due in part to the often polemical nature of their poetic differences but, as time has passed, is increasingly the result of efforts to plot clear lines of development from Symbolism to post-symbolist groupings such as Acmeism and Futurism.[8] By placing these poets in the context of the revolutionary and technologizing city, I argue for an alternative way of conceiving their relation one to the other, one that foregrounds the similar motivations behind their experiments with lyric form.

Where formal concerns have tended to be sidelined by discussions of the thematic and philosophical aspects of these poets' work, they have been at the center of work on Russian formalism. This is unsurprising, given Russian formalism's efforts to systematize the study of the literary text as a psycho-social fact defined by discoverable general principles, rather than the unique creation of the artist-genius or a reflection of his psychology. As a series of programmatic articles declared, formalist literary scholarship would attend to the work as a collection of "devices" and concern itself not with the philosophical or religious dogma attached to art by the Symbolists but with "how" the work was "made."[9] In parallel, scholarship on Russian formalism has tended to focus on the 'devices' of their theory, their highly influential postulates regarding the structure of literary texts, tending to discuss the movement in the context of the two scholarly societies with which it was associated, the Petersburg-based Society for the Study of Poetic Language, or OPOIaZ [*Obshchestvo izucheniia poeticheskogo iazyka*], as it is better known, and

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[7] These poets have occasionally been discussed as contrasting pairs. See, e.g., Boris Eikhenbaum's comments regarding Mayakovsky's influence on Blok ("Trubnyi glas," *Knizhnyi ugol,* No. 1 (1918), 3-5); Marina Tsvetaeva's essay comparing Mayakovsky and Pasternak ("Epos i lirika sovremennoi Rossii (Vladimir Maiakovskii i Boris Pasternak)," in Marina Tsvetaeva, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 2 vols. (Moskva: Khudozhestvannaia literatura, 1980 [1932]) 2: 399-423); or Roman Jakobson's famous article on Pasternak and Mayakovsky ("Randbemerkungen zur Proza des Dichters Pasternak," *Slavische Rundschau*, Vol. 7 (1935), 357-374).

[8] Pasternak, reluctant to align himself fully with any poetic school, proves particularly recalcitrant for scholarship; I resist the tendency to insist upon labeling him either a Symbolist or a Futurist and will use the appellation post-symbolist to describe his work.

[9] See e.g. Viktor Shklovsky's foundational "Art as Device" [*Iskusstvo kak priem*] (1917), discussed in Chapter Two, Boris Eikhenbaum's "How Gogol's "Overcoat" is Made" [*Kak sdelana "Shinel'" Gogolia*] (1919), or Shklovsky's "How *Don Quixote* is Made" [*Kak sdelan 'Don Kikhot'*] (1919).

the Moscow Linguistic Circle [*Moskovskii lingvisticheskii kruzhok*],[10] and to position it as an early iteration of Czech, and later French, Structuralism.[11]

By contrast, I return to the beginnings of Russian formalism and focus largely on OPOIaZ and its most constant and prominent members: Viktor Shklovsky (1893-1984), Boris Eikhenbaum (1886-1959), and Yury Tynianov (1894-1943). I offer not a historical account of Formalism's methodological development but a series of contextualized readings of early formalist theories of rhythm, image, and voice. These readings work to complicate the stark binaries through which Russian formalism's theory and methodology have come to be defined, addressing the (supposedly absolute) distinctions between form and content, in the first chapter; between poetic and practical language, in the second; and between text and biography, in the last. This approach understands Russian formalism not as a fixed doctrine but as an evolving set of methods that were not only shaped by specific circumstances of late imperial and early Soviet culture (the ubiquity of oral performance, for example) but also alert to poetry's own effects and potential in the immediate context of its reception.

Bringing these poets and theorists together on its pages, the dissertation aims to think across the theory/practice divide, highlighting the common impulses behind the diverse output of these figures in order to arrive at a definition of modernism not through periodization or literary school but instead as a certain way of thinking about and through poetic form and its relation to society. My use of the broad term "modernist" throughout—rather than, where appropriate, "avant-garde"—is intended to emphasize this claim and its origins in my focus on these figures' relation to the modern age. I turn now to a brief survey of the theoretical background to this dissertation, before turning to a detailed overview of its chapters.

Modernism and Technology: Toward a Poetic Medium

Rigidly polarized approaches to modernist works as either antithetical to modernity or unreservedly embracing it have been subject to significant revision. The apparent flight of modernists from the world of industrial modernity to the subjective worlds of their own esoteric texts—or, equally, the opposite movement of those who resolutely renounced subjectivity and

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[10] While personal contacts led to an active exchange of ideas between the two groups, they remained distinct entities with somewhat divergent methods and aims. The Moscow Linguistic Circle formed in 1915 at Moscow University. In general, as its name implies, the work of the Circle adopted a more strictly linguistic approach than their Petersburg counterparts. Roman Jakobson was the main figure; other founding members include F. N. Afremov, P. G. Bogatyrev, A. A. Buslaev, S. I. Ragozin, P. P. Sveshnikov, and N. F. Jakovlev. Osip Brik was also an active member of the MLC after moving to Moscow in 1919. For a detailed history of the MLC, see M. I. Shapir's publication of Jakobson, "Moskovskii lingvisticheskii kruzhok," *Philologica* 3 (1996), 361-379. For a detailed history of the ideas and methods of both the MLC and OPOIaz, see Jessica Evans Merrill, "The Role of Folklore Study in the Rise of Russian Formalist and Czech Structuralist Literary Theory" (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 2012).

[11] See Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism, History, Doctrine* (Mouton, 1955). Corrections to this tendency include Aage Hansen-Löwe, *Russkii Formalizm. Metodologicheskaia rekonstruktsiia razvitiia na osnove printsipa otstraneniia* (Moskva: Iazyki russkoi kul'tury, 2001); Peter Steiner, *Russian Formalism: A Metapoetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984). My own work follows recent efforts to situate the Formalists' early work in its context. A representative sample of such work is gathered in *Epokha 'ostraneniia'. Russkii formalizm i sovremennoe gumanitarnoe znanie. Kollektivnaia monografiia*, ed. by Ia. Levchenko and I. Pil'shchikov (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2017). See also Jessica Merrill, "Historical Poetics and Poetic Language: Rethinking the Concept of Autonomy for Modern Literary Theory," *Poetics Today*, Vol. 38, Issue 3 (2017), 519-548.

strove to become one with the machine—has been shown to belie the more complex ways in which modernists were both shaped by and engaged consciously with an increasingly technologized world and the forms taken by social life within it.

In the Russian context, such discussions have tended to focus on the early Soviet era, a period that saw many artists embracing modern themes and technologies in their enthusiasm for building a new society. Since the publication of Boris Groys' provocative 1988 study, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, the Russian and Soviet avant-garde's relationship to technology and the "myth of the innocent avant-garde" has been the subject of significant debate.[12] Groys replaced the prevailing narrative of an idealistic group of artists who strove for a better world only to be maligned and ultimately destroyed by a cruel state with a Nietzschean picture of artist-demiurges displaced by a dictatorship that resembled them all too closely. Starting his discussion at the "absolute zero" marked by the October revolution of 1917, Groys contends that avant-garde artists embraced technology because they conceived of it in the same instrumental terms as the Soviet state and modernity at large.[13] Driven by their desire to "conquer the material that was the world,"[14] Groys argues, these artists sought in technologies a means by which to control and completely reshape their environment; defined by a will to power much like that of the state, the aesthetic utopia for which these artists strove was ultimately annexed and achieved by Stalinist culture itself.

In recent years, this interpretation has been challenged. Julia Vaingurt, for example, has argued that the avant-garde's interest in technology was not instrumental but "imaginative," a view that is shared by Susan Buck-Morss. Whereas the Soviet state regarded technology in narrowly utilitarian terms, as "an instrument for transforming and controlling the environment," these scholars contend, avant-garde artists sought "not to exploit nature but to enhance human existence within it."[15] In opposition to Groys' insistence on the avant-garde's purely instrumental relationship with technology, Vaingurt points to the contemplative fascination evinced by their technological fantasies, which reveal above all a preoccupation with "estimations of the possible," "creative self-expression and introspection," and, most importantly, "wonder."[16]

The debate thus centers upon the question of avant-garde art's relation to society, a matter seminally taken up by Peter Bürger in his 1974 *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Against the view of the avant-garde as extending and taking to its ultimate extreme the tendency toward rupture with society that began with Romanticism, Bürger argues that these artists reacted precisely against the increasing separation of art as an institution from society, striving instead to restore art's relation to social practice.[17] This is the model at the heart of Groys' reading of the Soviet avant-garde, and which Vaingurt, by contrast, works to complicate. Without returning to a conception of art as an autonomous sphere separate from and untainted by social and political life, Vaingurt nonetheless contests the notion of its straightforward submission to them.

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[12] Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, trans. Charles Rougle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p8. Originally published in German as *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1988).

[13] Vaingurt, *Wonderlands of the Avant-Garde*, p19.

[14] ibid., p. 22.

[15] Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), p. 64.

[16] Vaingurt, *Wonderlands of the Avant-Garde*, pp. 12-13.

[17] The former argument is that made by Renato Poggioli in his *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968). Originally published in Italian as *Teoria dell'arte d'avanguardia* (Società editrice il Mulino, 1962).

Vaingurt bases her claim upon the German philosopher Martin Heidegger's distinction between the modern conception of technology as a tool for mastery and control and the Aristotelian view of *techne* as "a mode of cognition through making."[18] Writing in *The Question Concerning Technology*, Heidegger argues that poetry, while opposed to technology in its modern form, is inseparable from technology in its Greek conception, the essence of which lies not in manufacturing but in "revealing" the deep ontological truths of authentic being.[19] Despite many avant-garde artists' avowed intention "to blend the borders between art and life [and to turn] life into an artistically harmonious whole," their engagement with social life was always infused with an aesthetic delight that precluded a straightforward submission to instrumental purpose. As Vaingurt concludes, these artists were never able to "substitut[e] the narrow technical values of efficiency and productivity for aesthetic ones."[20]

Still, for Vaingurt, as for Heidegger, modern technology remains fundamentally alien to art, and particularly to poetry, which must subvert the instrumental imperatives of technological civilization if it is to survive undisfigured. The German media theorist Friedrich Kittler takes this threat quite literally when he writes that recording technologies render rhythm and rhyme "superfluous," as "technology triumphs over mnemotechnology" and "the death bell tolls for poetry, which for long had been the love of so many."[21] Technology's "talking machines" cause poetry's own voice to ring hollow, sounding now like nothing more than an illusory presence conjured by poetry's own imperfect and primitive recording devices; no wonder, then, that Heidegger enlists poetry to expose the deceptions of technology in turn.

Productive alternatives to this binary approach have focused on the multiple ways in which poets "celebrate—and even anticipate—the possibilities [advanced technologies] offer," seeking from phonographic technologies "not an accurate registration of the lyric voice (*pace* Kittler) but rather a revelation of sounds not formerly considered poetic."[22] This adoption and adaptation of technological means for poetic experiment is, Carrie Noland finds, arguably the avant-garde's "most significant contribution to poetry," the unique potential of which is not deformed but exhilaratingly expanded by its contact with the modern world.[23]

With the exception of the radical *zaum'* poetry of Russian Futurists Velimir Khlebnikov and Aleksei Kruchenych, such scholarly recuperations of the technological in relation to the poetic have typically neglected pre-revolutionary modernist and avant-garde poetry in Russia. This seems largely due to its continued allegiance to the most traditional structures of verse; far from "superfluous," rhythm, rhyme, stanzaic organization, and poetic syntax became topics of intense theoretical interest in Russian culture of the early decades of the twentieth century. Following Noland, this dissertation argues that this sudden resurgence of interest in formal matters signals not a reactive retreat from the modern world and into a purely aesthetic realm of art for art's sake but an energetic response to the new conditions of modern life. Whereas the

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[18] Vaingurt, *Wonderlands of the Avant-Garde*, p. 6.
[19] *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Levitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977). Originally published in German as "Die Frage nach der Technik" in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (1954).
[20] Vaingurt, *Wonderlands of the Avant-Garde*, p. 10.
[21] *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999 [1986]), p. 80.
[22] Carrie Noland, "Technology and Poetry," *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics: Fourth Edition*, ed. Roland Greene, Stephen Cushman, Clare Cavanagh, Jahan Ramazani, and Paul Rouzer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 1415.
[23] ibid. See also Carrie Noland, *Poetry at Stake: Lyric Aesthetics and the Challenge of Technology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

French poetry with which Noland is concerned thrives by expanding to incorporate the new possibilities suggested by technology, for the Russian examples that are my own focus, new technologies reveal not *novel* forms but the possibilities latent in the traditional structures of poetry itself. If the avant-garde artists of the Soviet 1920s discussed in Vaingurt's study repeatedly expose the poetic potential latent in technological machinery, the poets and theorists who feature in this dissertation are interested above all in the mechanical aspects of verse itself—in poetry as a medium.

As John Guillory has argued, a similar process of "remediation" can be traced throughout the history of media; as he writes, "it is much easier to see what a medium does—the possibilities inherent in the material form of an art—when the expressive or communicative contents are transposed from one medium to another. Remediation makes the medium as such *visible*."[24] This process is enacted in real time in Bernstein's study, discussed at the beginning of this introduction, but it is one that defines the whole of the modernist period, in Russia as elsewhere.[25]

Modernism's connection with the concept of medium specificity is not new. As early as 1939, in essays such as "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" and "Towards a New Laocoön", Clement Greenberg defined modernism *as* medium specificity when he connected modernist abstraction with the desire to distance painting from the imitation of nature and the illusion of three-dimensional space and instead to focus on the materiality of the painted surface itself; as he writes, "the unique and proper area of competence of each art coincided with all that was unique in the nature of its medium."[26] Recent discussions of the modernist period, echoing Noland's account, reject the evaluative, purist undertones of Greenburg's statement along with the isolationist position it implies to emphasize the inevitable connections between modernism and new media, both of which strove after new modes and new methods in their attempts "not just to change the old…but to invent [the] new and unrecognizable."[27] These studies thus recast modernism's fascination with medium as a preoccupation with communication and dissemination—as stemming precisely from a desire to reach beyond the bounds of the canvas or the page. New modes of technological communication extended lyric's immanent concerns to catalyze radical and profound experimentation with poetry's own communicatory powers.[28]

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[24] John Guillory, "Genesis of the Media Concept," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Winter 2010), 321-362 (p. 324). For more on the concept of remediation, see Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999). As Guillory comments, the notion has its origins in Marshall McLuhan's famous claim, "the 'content' of any medium is always another medium" (*Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), p. 19). A similar process is at work in Heidegger's insight regarding *techne*, where it is modern industrial technologies that reveal the essence of technology and thus make visible the way through technology and away from technology's hegemony; in the words of Friedrich Hölderlin, frequently cited by Heidegger himself, "Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst / Das Rettende auch" [*But where the danger is, there grows / also what saves*].

[25] For interesting discussions of this issue, see Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006); Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking about Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[26] Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," *Modern Art And Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Francis Frascina, Charles Harrison and Deirdre Paul (Westview Press, 2008 [1960]), p. 5. See also "Avant-Garde and Kitsch", *Partisan Review*, Vol. 6, No. 5 (Fall 1939), 34-49; "Towards a New Laocoön", *Partisan Review*, Vol 7, No. 4 (July-August 1940), 296-310.

[27] Michael North, *Camera Works: Photography and the Twentieth-Century Word* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. v.

[28] Compare the modernists to Sappho, who was also writing at a moment of transition—a period of emerging literacy that saw a move from oral poetry to written verse. Her poetry's interest in communication and voice can be

What tends to be missing from such accounts, though it is implied, is careful reflection upon the difficult question of what, precisely, constitutes the poetic medium; for if medium specificity emphasizes the distinct materiality of artistic media, the matter of what the poetic medium's material is, and thus where its specificity might lie, has remained under-theorized.[29] It is my contention in this dissertation that these were questions that Russian modernist poets and theorists themselves asked and began to answer. As its three chapters will demonstrate, the corrective to Greenberg's model suggested by these efforts is that remediation, turning new attention to the media of art, brought these artists and scholars face-to-face with what poetry, as a medium, could *do.* In this sense, the more appropriate media-cliché is that of Marshall McLuhan, whose famous 1964 declaration, "[t]he medium is the message," moves beyond Greenberg's interest in the *perceptibility* of the medium to make an *infrastructural* claim about how media intervene in and shape perceptual processes, social dynamics, and the environment.[30]

The Russian context thus provides the ground for an extension of recent discussions regarding the connections between modernism and new media, with a shift of emphasis that highlights not simply the rush towards the new but a profound reflection upon the precise role of poetry, alongside other media and new technologies, in shaping that new. We return, then, to the question of art and society, and to the conflict of the instrumental and the imaginative around which Vaingurt's study is structured. The tendency traced by this dissertation is, I argue, the product of the same distinctive feature of the Russian and Soviet context that her work identifies, namely, the fact that the autonomy of art never developed strong institutional foundations in Russia.[31] Even as modernist artists broke with nineteenth-century realism's explicit and, in many ways, defining commitment to social themes and turned instead to artistic technique, their work remained social in orientation; as Harsha Ram notes, its authority "remained tied to its capacity for social critique and spiritual renewal."[32] In this sense, the imaginative in Russian literature has always been instrumental; as this dissertation will suggest, the modernist conception of art-as-imaginative-instrument was directed not at transforming or controlling the environment but at attuning readers to the processes by which this environment is shaped.

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read as a reflection on the violence done to voice in the act of transcription; as Jesper Svenbro comments, "Sappho understands that, as a consequence of writing, she will be absent, even dead. For although her poem takes the form of a transcription of a living voice, that voice "breaks" even as she transcribes it. She loses her voice as she writes the poem." As such, Sappho provides an instructive parallel case for thinking about modernism, which is also crucially informed by its own status as the literature of a period of fundamental shifts in the media landscape. Jesper Svenbro, *Phrasikleia: An Anthropology of Reading in Ancient Greece,* trans. by Janet Lloyd (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 152.

[29] Greenberg's earliest article on the topic discusses Lessing's *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Genre* (1766), which is explicitly concerned with the specificity of poetry in contrast to painting (see below). Nonetheless, discussions surrounding medium specificity have focused largely on visual art, film, and photography. Tellingly, *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* does not include an entry on the topic.

[30] McLuhan's argument is that we can only know the nature and characteristics of a medium by virtue of the changes—often unobtrusive and unnoticed—that they effect, the message. See *Understanding Media.* For a useful overview of the concept of media as infrastructure, see John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), pp. 13-52.

[31] See Clare Cavanagh's insightful discussion of this matter in *Lyric Poetry and Modern Politics: Russia, Poland, and the West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

[32] "Futurist Geographies: Uneven Modernities and the Struggle for Aesthetic Autonomy: Paris, Italy, Russia, 1909–1914," *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, ed. by Mark Wollaeger and Matt Eatough (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 317.

What is the Poetic Medium?

My claim that Russian modernist poets became newly sensitive to poetry as a medium is, as I have shown, intimately connected with the specific time and place in which these poets worked. The parallel argument that this dissertation makes, however, reaches across historical periods to suggest something larger about the nature and functioning of lyric poetry at large. In so doing, it intervenes in current debates regarding the historical and generic limits of "this thing called lyric" (as the title of one recent article has it).[33] Where these discussions have focused on the question of genre, it will be my suggestion in the following that the lens of medium offers an alternative approach to the issues at stake. Thinking instead about what the devices of poetry do and how they do it, I aim to produce not a transhistorical definition of the lyric as such but rather a *set* of definitions that begin to catalogue the functions that the lyric has seemed to perform, and to perform well, to many and at many different stages in the Western literary tradition. Such a framework is tentative at best, for counter-examples will surely be found when anything so grand as a transhistorical definition is attempted; it is, however, intended precisely to be flexible, and to serve as an illustration of some of the limits and constraints within and against which any historically-situated incarnation of the lyric works.

For a form so often characterized by its brevity, the lyric has been called upon to perform some large tasks, charged with providing an escape from the confines of the everyday, a passage out of time, and a means by which to transcend the human and the finite. At the other extreme lie recent historical critiques that question the viability of 'lyric' as a category at all. According to this argument (most recently and comprehensively made by Virginia Jackson's and Yopie Prins' 2013 anthology, *The Lyric Theory Reader*), "what we took for an enduring genre is actually a product of deeply codified […] reading practices."[34] The lyric as it is currently conceived—as subjective poetry expressing intimate feeling—is a category that arose only in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when a complex of changes in the nature of poetic production, consumption, and criticism led to the gradual 'lyricization' of poetry—to a gradual broadening of the term lyric, which has now become essentially synonymous with poetry at large. This originates, Jackson and Prins argue, in a late-Romantic desire to reach beyond concrete instantiations of poetic practice to a utopian lyric mode that would "represent both perfect expression and the dialectical accomplishment of historical progress."[35] In the twentieth-century, the term has become little more than a fiction that serves chiefly as a convenient category for modern critical thought, and the continuing usefulness of which as a term of poetic analysis is open to serious debate.

This argument arises, I would contend, from the larger suspicion that has surrounded the lyric since the rise of so-called critique, the broad field of late twentieth-century literary critical practice that has worked to counter what is often viewed as the "aestheticism, formalism,

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[33] Stephen Burt, "What Is This Thing Called Lyric?" *Modern Philology* Vol. 113, Issue 3 (February 2016), 422–440.
[34] Matt Kilbane, "An Indexical Lyric," *Jacket 2*, December 9, 2016 (https://jacket2.org/article/indexical-lyric, accessed 4/24/18). See also Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins (eds.), *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).
[35] *Lyric Theory Reader,* p. 3. Other studies that pursue this line of argument include Heather Dubrow, *The Challenges of Orpheus: Lyric Poetry and Early Modern England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Virginia Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Virginia Jackson, "Lyric", in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th edn., ed. by Roland Greene, Stephen Cushman, Clare Cavanagh, Jahan Ramazani, Paul Rowser (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 827-34.

antihistoricism, and apoliticism common among the dominant postwar methods of academic literary criticism."[36] When literary scholars such as the New Critics define the lyric as an art of formal achievements, a self-contained and self-sustaining linguistic artifact whose "very form [...] is an inherent and the strongest part of its aesthetic power," their efforts to set the lyric apart from history and social life have left the lyric standing accused of a willful and even malevolent myopia, whereby "poetry does not merely mirror the larger evils of the society it works so assiduously to exclude. It actively supports the social structures that share its own hegemonic propensities."[37] To dismantle the lyric as a genre is the final step in dismantling this hegemony itself.

The lyric is not, though, without its defenders. Critics such as Jonathan Culler contend that the term lyric remains a useful shorthand for the multitude of short poetic genres that exist in the Western tradition; moreover, these genres make use of a set of devices that is more or less constant in different periods or traditions. Such arguments, against assertions of the lyric genre's historical situatedness, have been labeled "transhistorical". This label does not do justice to the careful attention paid by these critics to the concrete qualities of lyric structures such as rhythm, rhyme and poetic address as they appear in each specific case with which they are concerned. Such attentiveness alone is ample proof that they remain alert to the lyric as material object and not simply idealized quality.[38]

However, these studies by no means neglect the question of the lyric's relation to society and the context in which it was written and originally read. Indeed, their fundamental assumption is that lyric language is something that exists and works precisely in concrete situations, whether it be that of the individual's encounter with poetic structures when reading, the local or, yes, a transhistorical poetic tradition, or social life at large. In other words, this approach—which is that of Russian Formalism, too—shifts attention to what I am calling the poetic medium: to the language, structures, and, importantly, effects which together constitute what some may call lyric and others poetry, but which remains identifiable by whatever label is applied to it because of what it does and how it does it.

Rhythm, Image, and Voice in Theory and Practice

Emulating the model of Culler and other scholars like him, the dissertation is structured around three of poetry's most distinctive but elusive devices—rhythm, image, and voice. These aspects of poetic form are chosen precisely for their ambiguity: referring both to experience in the *world* ("The rhythm of life has changed") and to *structures* of poetic texts ("To define rhythm [...] is

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[36] Vincent B. Leitch, "Cultural Criticism," *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Michael Groden and Martin Kreiswirth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), p. 181.

[37] Clare Cavanagh, summarizing the criticism of Mikhail Bakhtin, *Lyric Poetry and Modern Politics*, p. 14. Though Bakhtin was writing during the 1930s, his enormous popularity in the latter decades of the twentieth century is not coincidental.

[38] Jonathan Culler's *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015) is a case in point. Other studies in this vein include Amittai Aviram, *Telling Rhythm: Body and Meaning in Poetry* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994); Mutlu Konuk Blasing, Lyric Poetry: The Pain and Pleasure of Words (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Roland Greene, *Post-Petrarchism: Origins and Innovations of the Western Lyric Sequence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); and Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).

the most urgent task facing researchers in the area of Russian poetry"),[39] they provide a lens through which to examine Russian modernism's various attempts to think about texts in context and to explore avenues of exchange between these two spheres. Each chapter offers a detailed set of readings of existing theory, the work of one modernist poet, and the work of the Formalists. My goal is both to reveal new facets of the work of the Russian modernists by looking at them through the lens provided by Western theory and to ask what the practice and theory of this fraught but remarkably inventive and productive period might have to tell contemporary theory in turn.

The first chapter centers on *City* (1904-08), a cycle of poetry written by the Symbolist poet Alexander Blok during the years of the 1905 revolution. In it, the speaker wanders the streets of working-class St. Petersburg, his search for divine enlightenment repeatedly interrupted by the chaos of the revolutionary streets. While the dramatic events and moments of crisis that result are repeatedly elided or made otherwise anticlimactic, the poems themselves are striking for their metrical variety and rhythmic originality. I argue that the sustained disjuncture between the elusiveness of narrated events, on the one hand, and the conspicuousness of each event of poetic language, on the other, makes of the cycle an urgent reflection on poetry's role in the context of historical upheaval. Where the decadent aspect of Blok's work of this period is typically treated separately from the poems in the cycle that deal directly with the strikes, protests, and state-sponsored violence that marked these years, my interest is precisely in the cycle's negotiations between the aesthetic and the historical. Acknowledging the fundamental distance between the ephemeral time of lyric and that of history, these poems ultimately ask whether the something that happens in poetry might nonetheless *matter*—whether rhythm's repetitions with difference might *make* a difference.

The chapter's first part addresses the broader discourses that emerged around rhythm in Western European modernism as increasing numbers of poets abandoned the "chains" of metrical verse in favor of free, "rhythmical" verse, verse without meter or rhyme. This turn away from prosodic convention was explicitly posed as a rejection of the rationalized, standardized time of capitalist modernity. Unlike meter's monotonous "metronome," rhythm for these poets spoke to and of those nuances of human experience that were immune to the demands of technological modernity. This tendency is largely absent in the Russian context, where one of modernist poetry's most remarkable features is its sustained and intense engagement with metrical structure. Where Western European experiments with free verse issued a bold *challenge* to technological modernity, Russian loyalty to the traditional structures of verse appears to represent a conservative *retreat* from it. As I argue, however, via a reading of the first poem in Blok's cycle, taking Russian modernism on its own terms reveals its allegiance to metrical verse to be not regressive but intimately tied to the specific coordinates of Russia's entry into modernity. Metrical verse becomes for Blok a means by which not only to understand the passing of time, but also to lay claim to one's own experience of it.

In the second part of the chapter, I detail the twentieth-century prosodic tradition that has emerged from modernism's dichotomous approach to meter and rhythm. Returning to the Russian Formalists, I argue, alongside Yury Tynianov, that a more cogent account of rhythm's functioning emerges when it is viewed precisely as the product of meter's constraints. In contrast to the statistical analysis that has dominated in Russian prosody, I propose a purposefully

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[39] These are statements made by two poets who will feature frequently in the pages to come: Vladimir Mayakovsky and Andrei Bely. The latter was also a leading theorist of the Symbolist school; his work exerted a significant influence on that of the Russian Formalists, the theorists at the center of this dissertation.

expansive approach to rhythm that attempts to close the gap between text and rhythmic experience opened up by diagrams and abstract schema. The final part of the chapter applies this approach to Blok's *City*, reading a sequence of poems composed at the peak of the 1905 revolution. While these poems seem to bear only scant relation to the historical events, close analysis of their rhythmic structure demonstrates that Blok's central concern during these years was the question not only of how the contained brevity of the lyric was to register large-scale historical processes, but also of how the very density of lyric temporality might intervene in these processes by reawakening its readers' sense of time.

The second chapter is devoted to Pasternak and the image. It focuses on an early collection, *Over the Barriers* [*Poverkh bar'erov*], written between 1914 and 1916 and published, on the eve of the February revolution, in January 1917. The collection has often been treated as an, at best, uneven precursor the poetic mastery of Pasternak's next book, *My Sister—Life* [*Sestra moia—zhizn'*], criticized by contemporaries and, later, Pasternak himself for the overwhelming number and excessive complexity of its images. At the same time, the collection has been praised for its strikingly "visual" quality, which imbues its poems with the same "thingness" [*veshchnost'*] as Pasternak's poetic world more generally. While critical approaches to the collection, and to Pasternak's work at large, have tended to emphasize the immediacy that is the result of this latter quality—the direct relationship of his images to the reality they depict—my own approach argues that Pasternak is interested precisely in poetry's *distance* from the world of experience it describes. This distance is crystallized in the image, whose claim to capture a portion of the world is always tempered by its own assertion of the material constraints of the written medium. Fascinated with the limits imposed by linguistic and poetic convention, Pasternak's work looks not to resemble reality but to draw attention to the structures through which we perceive and organize it. It is precisely in so doing that art brings us into closest contact with life.

The chapter's first part reflects at length on approaches to the image in the Anglo-American tradition, where the image has long been attached to notions of the referential capacity of language. Defined in terms of verisimilitude and viewed in relation to the human mind, the image in this tradition is treated primarily in connection with its (in)ability to bring inner life into contact with reality. I then turn to a counter-tradition that thinks about the image not in terms of its inevitably futile attempts to capture part of the world but as a means of creating a new reality—one that flows from reality but which ultimately generates its own, establishing new relationships between words and elements of the poem's own material to open up new possibilities. My discussion focuses on what I identify as the poetic image's position on the boundary between what Nelson Goodman has identified as verbal and visual modes of representation and understanding. This refers to the difference between sign-systems made up of distinct, portable characters (an alphabet) and those in which signs are not differentiated and only have meaning in relation to their immediate context (the marks on a painting). This approach locates the materiality of the image at the intersection of the material constraints of the linguistic medium and our interpretive encounter with these constraints.

In the second part of the chapter, I elaborate upon these statements by turning to three poems from *Over the Barriers*, "Dedication" [*Posviashchenie*], "A Bad Dream" [*Durnoi son*], and "Marburg" [*Marburg*]. Each reading highlights a different method by which the image draws attention to the materiality of language and to linguistic convention to demonstrate that it is precisely in emphasizing poetry's distance from reality that Pasternak looks to bridge the divide between world and text. I argue that Pasternak purposefully obscures the semantic meaning of

his work in order to activate instead, through the image, the vitality latent in the language as a material medium. Against interpretations of *Over the Barriers* that read it as an attempt to record the tumultuous reality of the years leading up to 1917, I argue that these poems propose a method by which precisely the inevitable and inherent distance of poetry from a reality it is incapable of recording become a means by which to apprehend it most fully. In this sense, Pasternak shares much with the Formalists, to whom the final section of this chapter turns. Returning to Viktor Shklovsky's disagreement with Alexander Potebnya, most famously elaborated upon in his seminal 1917 essay, "Art as Device," I show that the turn away from the referential function of language and toward poetic structure contained in Shklovsky's theory of *ostranenie* [enstrangement] was a turn towards the question of how poetry might shape our perception and experience of the world. Ending my discussion with a reading of Yury Tynianov's 1924 essay, "The Interval", I argue that Formalism's claims regarding the energy created by verse as a dynamic construction reveal their interest in the constructedness of poetic language to be an interest in how verse itself constructs the world.

The final chapter examines poetic voice in the prerevolutionary poetry of Vladimir Mayakovsky, a poet whose booming speaking voice finds its echo in the larger-than-life persona at the center of his work. Contrary to readings that focus on this speaker's self-aggrandizement, the poems at the heart of this chapter, composed during a period when Mayakovsky participated in the variety of debates, street happenings, and performances undertaken by the group of so-called Cubo-Futurists to which he belonged, illustrate that the importance of voice in Mayakovsky's poetry stems from an audience-centric effort to activate voice, both physical and metaphoric, as a poetic medium. I argue that these experiments are intimately tied to changes in public spaces of performance, debate, and social interaction between 1905 and 1917, when live poetry performance became a ubiquitous feature of the cultural landscape, as well as the new proliferation of communication technologies. Inviting readers to adopt his voice as their own (or goading them into it), Mayakovsky, like Blok and Pasternak, responds to the challenges of a rapidly changing world by amplifying the latent potential of traditional verse structures rather than by abandoning them.

The chapter begins with an overview of approaches to poetic voice. I identify two poles in critical approaches: on the one hand, the tendency to attach voice to a persona, and, on the other, the post-structuralist tendency to detach voice from any basis in the text at all, viewing it instead as a readerly projection based upon an illusory sense of presence. I argue instead for a reading that takes seriously the multiple concrete instances of voicing to which a poem is subject when it is read, either silently or aloud, to offer a more grounded vision of the encounter between poetic voice and the physical, sounding voice that is staged by every lyric poem. I focus not on the lyric subject but on the question of how the language of the poem seeks to engage the audience and in what ways it offers itself for reproduction by them. Affording the reader-auditor a central and active role in the function of lyric voice, this approach is interested above all in the dual status of the poem, which exists both in the individual moment of the unique performance and yet also in relation to its many other instantiations, both past and present.

The second part of the chapter applies these insights to detailed consideration of Mayakovsky's early poetry, and three poems in particular: "Eshche ia" [*Me Again*], "Poslushaite!" [*Listen!*], and "A vy mogli by?" [*But Could You?*]. I call these "performance poems" to emphasize the extent to which the practice of performance shaped their genesis and intent, and trace through them the concrete ways in which poetry performance shaped Mayakovsky's understanding of poetry's communicative possibilities during his early period of

public appearances. My focus is on the way in which shocking content is used to make readers think about their own position in the communicative exchange. Seeking to engage audiences as (inter)locutors and to make them active participants in poetry understood as exchange, Mayakovsky's pre-revolutionary performance poems and their concern with the interstices between utterance, speaker and hearer respond to the larger process of renegotiating the function and cultural status of public space during the pre-revolutionary period, one in which art institutions, audiences and norms of spectatorship were in drastic flux. The Futurists' enthusiasm for the medium of performance emerges from a desire to equip their audiences with alternative models for politically and socially engaged speech.

The final part of this chapter considers the category of reception with a focus on discourses of authenticity and sincerity that surrounded poetic voice and poet's voices in the 1910s. If the last part of this chapter argued for an understanding of lyric voice alert to those linguistic mechanisms of lyric designed to make it available for repeated enunciation—its reliance upon sound and the essential openness of its shifters—this part turns to the role of *emotion* in lyric's negotiation between the singularity of the fictional situation it posits (our important sense that lyric words are spoken by someone, to someone) and the iterability upon which it relies (its capacity to resonate and be repeatable in different contexts). Reading Mayakovsky's long 1915 poem, "A Cloud in Trousers" [*Oblako v shtanakh*], alongside Boris Eikhenbaum's theoretical work on poetry performance, I show that both emerged from a culture for which poetry, and in particular poetic voice, was viewed as an essential conduit for culture and the life it sustains.

Framing each chapter's discussion of Russian modernist poetry and theory with an overview of existing theoretical approaches to the device at hand, the dissertation looks to demonstrate not only how Russian modernism's contribution might expand or refine our understanding of specific devices, but also to point toward the larger implications of such debates—namely, their contribution to the larger question of defining poetry's specificity as a medium. As I conclude, the specificity of the poetic medium for Russian modernist poets and theorists lies in poetic form understood as that which is in equal parts structural and participatory—as that which is inherently medial, demanding and depending upon mediation between text, performance, and experience in the world. This dynamic offers one key to the paradox whereby that which Russian modernism held to be most "living" about literature was that which was most "formal."

CHAPTER ONE:

RHYTHM

Introduction

What is rhythm? The question is a deceptively simple one. Even the most basic definition of rhythm—as a regular recurrence or pattern in time—is problematic, for if such patterns mark a wide variety of natural and human activities, we do not mean exactly the same thing when we speak of the 'rhythms' of the seasons, the 'rhythm' of a piece of music, or the 'rhythm' of our breathing. Each of these 'rhythms' denotes a different kind of regularity, arises from a different rate of recurrence, involves a different logic of patterning, and implies a different relationship to time. Each, moreover, involves, to some greater or lesser degree, the psychology of the perceiver, who is actively involved in seeking out and reifying these patterns: a clock ticks and then it tocks, we think we know, but it is only habit that places the identical mechanical sounds of a timepiece's movement into this hierarchical relationship, much as our sense of the rhythmicity of a piece of music depends, in no small part, upon its conformance to established (Western) conventions of grouping, prolongation, and so on. To further complicate matters, the word 'rhythm' carries historical and cultural associations that interfere with any definition referring simply to regularity. Indeed, according to one modern understanding of rhythm, the more regularly signals recur, the less likely we are to describe such patterns as 'rhythmic.' It is precisely the *rhythms* of music, nature, and human life, vaguely defined, that are felt to distinguish these realms of experience from the monotonous repetition characteristic of clock time and the alienated time of the factory: rhythm is time lived and not time measured. In modern parlance, that is to say, rhythm *is* precisely that which eludes definition; intangible but innate, you can't get rhythm if you haven't already got it.[1]

Echoes of such sentiments continue to be heard in descriptions of poetic rhythm, typically defined in opposition to meter; as one introduction to the topic has it, "Metre is a blueprint, rhythm is the inhabited building. Metre is a skeleton; rhythm is the functioning body. Metre is a map; rhythm is the land."[2] Such statements quite unabashedly assert the inertia of meter and the vitality of rhythm.[3] "Inhabited," at one with the "body" and the "land," rhythm exceeds meter

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[1] See Émile Benveniste's commentary on the etymology of the Greek *rhuthmos*, which concludes: "It required a long consideration of the structure of things […] in order for the principle of cadenced motion to be recognized and given a name. Nothing is less 'natural' than this slow working, by the efforts of philosophers, of a notion which seems to us so necessarily inherent in the articulated forms of movement that we have difficulty in believing people were not aware of it from the very beginning" ("The Notion f 'Rhythm' in its Linguistic Expression" in *Problems of General Linguistics*, trans. by Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1971), pp. 287-8).
[2] Philip Hobsbaum, *Metre, Rhythm and Verse Form* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 7.
[3] Leaving aside for a moment the problematic propensity to call on the *authenticity* of nature and the body without regard for their own historical constructedness, muddled analogies such as these point to a further complication regarding the relationship between meter and rhythm: is meter prior to rhythm (a blueprint), entwined with it (a skeleton), or a retrospective attempt to plot it (a map)? The question of *what* rhythm is thus becomes also the

and achieves a liveliness that meter—the alternation of strong and weak syllables perceived "in conformity with a set of numerical constraints that has developed in the linguistic tradition in question"—cannot.[4] Taken to its extreme, this tendency results in the kinds of declaration made by Russian modernist poet and theorist, Andrei Bely (1880-1934), who scornfully refers to meter as the "sclerosis of the tissue," in contrast to rhythm, "the principle of metamorphosis and growth" (ironically, as we will see, given the tradition of statistical prosody of which Bely was the founding father).[5] Meter in this interpretation is an abstract schema that, imposed on the true energy of the poem, threatens to constrict it so far as to kill it completely.

This chapter locates one origin of this dichotomy between rhythm and meter in modernism.[6] In the Western European and Anglo-American contexts, the modernist rejection of prosodic convention coincides with the intense technological modernization and urbanization of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Unlike meter's monotonous "metronome," rhythm promised repetition without sameness, periodicity that was not entirely predictable;[7] "so long as we calculate, we cannot enjoy," as Nietzsche writes in one early piece on rhythm.[8] As modern discourses of progress placed a new emphasis on efficiency, the strict management of time, and the elimination of waste, the rejection of meter and its association with calculation, constraint, and arbitrary division reads as a rejection of the rationalized, standardized time of modernity.[9] The widespread belief that "to introduce rhythmical life into verse, one needed to depart to some degree from metrical norms"[10] and the rise of free verse (poetry without meter or rhyme) demonstrate the growing sense that rhythm, elusive and excessive, spoke to and of those nuances of human experience that were inaccessible to meter and immune to the demands of technological modernity.

As in Western Europe, later nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Russian discussions of poetry and its function are marked by an increased emphasis on rhythm. "Contemporary verse must be subordinated to the vibrations of the poet's soul and not to the count of syllables," the

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question of *when* rhythm is (particularly in relation to meter)—and *where*: on the page, in the body, or during the act of reading? I will return to these questions at more length below.

[4] Derek Attridge, 'Rhythm', in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics.* 4th edn., 2012, p. 1197.

[5] Andrei Bely, *Ritm kak dialektika i "Mednyi Vsadnik"* (Moskva: Federatsiia, 1929), p. 19.

[6] See Janina Wellmann, *The Form of Becoming: Embryology and the Epistemology of Rhythm, 1760-1830*, trans. by Kate Sturge (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2017) for a discussion of the changing discourse around rhythm during the Romantic period.

[7] "Compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome" (Ezra Pound, *The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. by T.S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1968), p. 3). It is in fact rather hard to write a "metronomic" line in English, given the varying degrees of secondary stress to which syllables other than that primarily stressed are subject in any complete articulation in English; to compose a line of perfectly equivalent altering weight is almost impossible. Pound's perception of English metrical poetry as 'metronomic' may stem from the late Victorian habit of reading lines of verse "in a pronounced and sing-song way to bring out their metrical identity," a pedagogical tool that, unhappily, seeped outward into Victorian poetic practice. "[T]he understandable hostility to the method came to be directed at meter itself." Timothy Steele, *Missing Measures. Modern Poetry and the Revolt Against Meter* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1990), pp. 59-62.

[8] *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, 15 vols. (Berlin and Munich: Walter de Gruyter and Deutscher Taschenbuch,1980) VII (1980), p. 38.

[9] For a full and insightful discussion of these tendencies, see Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002). Doane emphasizes in particular the simultaneous emergence of time's standardization and an increasingly pressing sense of the sovereignty of chance and accident—a new awareness of contingency that emerged in part as an effect of urban life, crowds and the apparently random and all-pervasive movement of people, machines, and capital and in part a result of advances in thermodynamics.

[10] Steele, *Missing Measures*, p. 8.

Symbolist poet and tireless experimenter, Valery Briusov (1873-1924), writes.[11] The most vivid example of this tendency seems to be Aleksandr Blok (1880-1921), a second-generation Symbolist and great admirer of Briusov. For Blok, the poet is above all a "carrier of rhythm." "[T]he loss of this [inner] rhythm" was in his opinion the "most dangerous" thing for the "Writer's Soul" (the title of one 1909 article by Blok on the topic).[12] In turn, Blok appears to have scorned systematic metrical analysis, "considering it dangerous for a poet to make a detailed study of the anatomy and physiology of his creative work," as Bely recalls.[13] Contemporaries also associated Blok with rhythm, repeatedly praising the poet's rhythmic capacity and the incantatory power of his lyrics: in the words of Kornei Chukovsky (1882-1969), "[h]e did with us what he pleased, because the power of his lyric verse had its root not so much in its words as its rhythm."[14]

Blok did not, however, actually reject meter, for all he may have abhorred the study of it; indeed, by many accounts, he was *the* modernist poet to bring metrical innovations into common usage, integrating them into a poetic practice that embraced both traditional measures and the new.[15] This continued allegiance to metrical verse is typical for the Russian context, where modernization coincided with a period of intensified metrical experiment in poetry and the birth of a 'scientific' prosody that, far from eschewing the countable patterns of metrical verse, gave rise to a whole branch of statistical metrics.[16] Blok is unusual, though, in that—unlike Briusov, Bely, and their European counterparts—the poet produced no theoretical work addressing rhythm in relation to meter in verse. Instead, Blok's frequent references to rhythm are made in

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[11] "Otvet g. Andreevskomu", *Mir iskusstva* 1901 (1-6), 247.

[12] *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* [henceforth, *PSS*], ed. by E. Iu. Zholud', 20 vols. (Moskva: 1997-) VIII (2010), pp. 101-103. Unless otherwise specified, all references to Blok are from this edition. Translations are my own except where indicated.

[13] *Vospominaniia o Bloke* (Moskva: Respublika, 1995 [1923]), p. 378. Bely is recounting Blok's visit to—and non-participation in—a session of Bely's "Rhythm Circle" [*Ritmicheskii kruzhok*] in Moscow in 1910. A similar sentiment is heard in Nina Berberova's assessment of Briusov's tireless prosodic explorations: "…the poetry died out of his verses, killed off by laboratory experiments. The only thing Briusov sought was a rare rhyme or unusual rhythm." (*Aleksandr Blok: A Life,* trans. by Robyn Marsack (New York: George Braziller, 1996), p. 86).

[14]*Kniga ob Aleksandre Bloke*, 2nd edn. (Berlin: Epokha, 1922), p. 65. Blok himself attached great weight to his poetry's rhythmic "power", as evidenced by his disappointment at the negative reception of early drafts of his incomplete narrative poem, *Retribution—*"my flop," as he refers to it on one occasion, conscious of "the poem's failure to enchant, to *disarm* all criticism" (Avril Pyman, *The Life of Aleksandr Blok*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978-1980) II (1980), p. 144; my emphasis).

[15] See Robin Kemball, *Alexander Blok: A Study in Rhythm and Metre* (London: Mouton, 1965).

[16] See e.g. Roman Jakobson, "Retrospect" for a discussion of the 'science of verse' that emerged during this period (*Selected Writings*, ed. by Stephen Rudy and Martha Taylor, 8 vols. (The Hague: Mouton, 1962-1988) V (1979), pp. 569-602). Even Briusov, who introduced *vers libre* to Russia and was quite taken with it in theory, used it only rarely in his own work (with the exception of a section in his 1912-18 collection*,* entitled, tellingly, *Experiments*). Briusov seems to have been inspired by both French and German examples (see Georgette Donchin, "French Influence on Russian Symbolist Versification," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 33, no. 80 (1954), 161-187; Mikhail Gasparov, "Briusov—stikhoved i Briusov—stikhotvorets (1910-1920-e gody)" in *Izbrannye stat'i* (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1995). Clearly, no definitive explanation for the tenacity of metrical verse in Russia can be given, although some may be ventured: the history of literary verse in Russia, for one, where poetry was from the outset defined first and foremost by its distinctness from prose (the syllabo-tonic metrical system was adopted largely because it differed more sharply from normal speech and prose than anything else. See e.g. Lomonosov's rules for the iambic tetrameter in "Pis'mo o pravilakh rossiiskogo stikhotvorstva" (1739) and Mikhail Gasparov's summary of this period in *Ocherk istorii russkogo stikha: Metrika, ritmika, rifma, strofika* (Moskva: Nauka, 1984), pp. 33-52). The dominance of prose in late nineteenth-century Russian letters may also have contributed to the eagerness of Russian modernists to embrace poetry's formal constraints in their rejection of the immediate past, rather than to abandon them.

connection with his growing conviction that the poet's responsibility lay in discerning the rhythms of history and communicating them in verse: "I believe not only that we have the right to consider the poet linked to his age," he writes in 1918, "but that we are obliged to do so."[17]

The focus of this chapter will be Blok's efforts to fulfill this obligation—to write poetry that would not simply record historical events but might actually participate in them. The poet conceived of this task in formal terms. Its main challenge proved to be the apparent incommensurability of large-scale historical processes and the contained temporality of the lyric.

Scholarly accounts have tended to focus on Blok's eventual solution to this formal challenge, namely, the trilogy of volumes into which he ultimately organized his entire lyric output—an idea that, despite his retrospective claims to the contrary, seems only to have taken on real contours in 1910.[18] Combining individual lyrics into cycles, cycles into books, and books into volumes, the epic structure and vision of this "trilogy of becoming human" [*trilogiia vochelovecheniia*], as Blok referred to the project, allows the poet to distill his personal experience into a multifaceted expression of modern man's experience within the broader flow of history.[19] Descending from the first volume's realm of primordial bliss into the "terrible world" [*strashnyi mir*] of material reality and the second volume, the trilogy's hero finally emerges as "'social' man, an artist who looks the world bravely in the face" and recognizes the spiritual aspect of earthly existence.[20]

It is hard to dispute these general coordinates of the trilogy's narrative arc. Nonetheless, the path such readings plot is rather too smooth, and retrospectively presents as a natural progression that which was worked out only in intense and often conflicted practice.[21] This chapter takes a narrower view to focus on Blok's earliest efforts to grapple with his sense of poetry's duty before history. To do so, it returns to the cycle *City* (1904-08), composed during

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[17] A.A. Blok *Sobranie sochinenii*, ed. by V.N. Orlov, A.A. Surkov, and K. I. Chukovsky (Moskva, 1960-63) VI (1962), p. 84. These were the terms in which Blok's contemporaries came to understand his work; as Mandelstam comments, "Long before he beseeched [us] to listen to the noise of the revolution, Blok was listening to the underground music of Russian history, there, where even the most strained ear only caught a syncopated pause" (*O poezii. Sbornik statei* (Leningrad, 1928), p. 58).

[18] This was also the year during which the so-called "crisis" of Russian Symbolism was declared; Blok's efforts to reorganize his poetic output have been interpreted as part of a general effort amongst Symbolists to make their work more accessible to a broader public. Rearranging his poems and adding dates, Blok turned away from the esoteric suggestiveness of symbolist poetics and offered readers instead a (relatively) clear narrative with recognizable characters. Jonathan Stone, "Aleksandr Blok and the Rise of Biographical Symbolism", *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (Winter 2010), 626-642.

[19] Ginzburg, *O lirike*. Dmitrii Maksimov was the first to trace the various permutations of the theme of the "path" in Blok's work, which he identified as the primary integrator of the three volumes ("Ideia puti v poeticheskom soznanii A Bloka," in *Blokovskii sbornik II* (Tartu, 1972), pp. 25-121). Scholars such as Zara Mints have further developed this notion of the "myth of the path" plotted by Blok's trilogy (*Poetika Aleksandra Bloka* (Sankt-Peterburg: Iskusstvo, 1999). Viktor Zhirmunsky ("Poeziia Aleksandra Bloka," in *Ob Aleksandre Bloke*, *Stat'i*, (Petrograd: Kartonnyi domik, 1922), pp. 77-80) and Vladimir Orlov (*Aleksandr Blok: Ocherk tvorchestva* (Moskva, 1956) also approach the three volumes of the trilogy as stages in Blok's development as an artist. See also David Sloane, *Aleksandr Blok and the Dynamics of the Lyric Cycle* (Columbus: Slavica, 1988). Sloane also provides a history of the lyric cycle in the Russian tradition (pp. 61-135).

[20] Blok cited Lydia Ginzburg, *O lirike* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1974), p. 278. *Terrible World* is the name of one of Blok's later cycles (which, included in the trilogy's third volume, indicates the difficulty of drawing a clean line through the three).

[21] Ginzburg is the notable exception. She describes the trilogy's structure as a complex in which themes and styles overlap, collide, and co-exist in an ongoing exchange; it is precisely this accretive but precisely not linear motion that renders the trilogy as a whole such a perfect expression of the experience of modern man. See *O lirike*.

the years of the 1905 revolution and Blok's first to take place in an exclusively urban setting.[22] In contrast to the mystical rural landscapes of Blok's early verse, *City* depicts a space drenched in blood-red sunsets and characterized by depravity—a space stained by the shocking violence of revolutionary events such as Bloody Sunday, when tsarist guards opened fire on a crowd of unarmed demonstrators, as well as the general air of lawlessness, confusion, and despair that came in their wake.[23] These were years that occasioned a decisive shift in Blok's political outlook and which represent, as Lydia Ginzburg has claimed, the moment when "epochal processes" first entered Blok's work.[24] This was also a period of intense metrical experiment in Blok's work.[25] As I will show, at this stage in his career Blok regarded metrical verse and the dense temporality particular to it as *the* means by which poetry could intervene in a historical moment marked in Russia by both frenetic activity and a strange apathy—a disconnectedness from time and a loss of faith in its ability to progress that poetic rhythm promised to counter.

Registering a parallel between events in the world and the multiple "events" of which rhythmic language consists, Blok's early poetry of this period suggests that the temporal awareness produced by rhythm can reawaken reader's sensitivity to history itself, a dynamic that I describe at more length in the reading that follows. Blok's attempts to make sense of his historical period from within the strictures and structures of traditional verse clear the path for an alternative approach to the analysis of poetic rhythm than that typically pursued in Russian metrics which builds upon arguments originally made by the Russian Formalists. This new perspective, in turn, opens up a fresh view on Blok's own poetry and its engagement with history. These two claims form the basis of this chapter, which is divided into two parts accordingly. Before turning to these arguments, I will introduce the concept of the 'event', of central importance to both rhythm and history and the bridge between them.

'A Time Without Time' and the (Poetic) Event

The concept of the event is an inherently ambivalent one; it implies both the accidental (a series of events "unfolds," we may be "overtaken" by them) and the constructed (we plan social "events"). The event thus straddles a divide similar to that established by modernists between rhythm and meter; indeed, the event became a particular point of philosophical debate during this same period.[26] Echoing modernist descriptions of rhythm as fundamentally excessive and ungraspable, not so much out-of-control as *outside* of it, twentieth-century debates in philosophy have viewed the event as primarily a source of rupture, "an uncontrolled happening" that is always absolutely unpredictable and absolutely singular.[27] Such discussions critique the event as

[22] The cycle is generally considered to be "unified by a topographical principle" and of little significance for the "plot" of Blok's trilogy as a whole. Sloane, *Lyric Cycle,* p. 250.
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[24] *O lirike*, p. 317. Blok himself includes "the events of 1904-5" in the short list of "events, phenomena, and tendencies [*sobytiia, iavleniia i veianiia*] that influenced [him] most strongly" with which his 1915 autobiography ends (*Sobranie sochinenii*, VII (1963), p. 16). 1915 was also the year in which the poems in *City* were first compiled as a cycle.
[25] Mikhail Gasparov, "1905 god i metricheskaia evoliutsiia Bloka, Briusova, Belogo", in *Izbrannye trudy,* 4 vols. (Moskva: Iazyki russkoi kul'tury, 1997), III (1997), pp. 469-75.
[26] I am thinking of its importance in the work of such thinkers as Friedrich Nietzsche, Henri Bergson, Edmund Husserl, and Martin Heidegger.
[27] See in particular the work of Maurice Blanchot, Gilles Deleuze, and Jacques Derrida. I am, of course, simplifying these deeply complex debates and drawing distinctions that are too neat (see fn29, below); for now, however, I find

it is conceived by traditional history, in which the notion of 'events' imposes order on the absolute disorder of historical experience, translating the chaos of experience in time into comprehensible units of sense.[28] If modernists embraced the prosodic equivalent of contingency in a revolt against the encroachment of standardized time, twentieth-century theorists of the event pitted themselves against those who sought to bring the absolute contingency of history under control.[29]

My discussion of poetic rhythm emerges from these debates without entering into them fully. This is, firstly, because I want to emphasize here that rhythm is the source not exclusively of a poem's "break-out moments" and its "uncontrolled happening[s],"[30] but, rather, of a poem's very combination of abandon and control.[31] Moreover, I suggest that it is precisely the absolute distinction between the traditional historical (constructed, metrical) event and the 'uncontrolled' (rhythmic) event with which Blok grapples in *City*. Blok's interest in the combination of surprise and structure promised by poetic rhythm's ephemeral eventfulness is inseparable from the peculiar historical bind in which his generation felt that Russia was caught.

"The Last Day" is the first poem in *City*. As the title's reference to the Book of Revelation implies, the city here is a space defined by a temporality of imminent crisis.[32] It is in this key that this poem and the ensuing cycle have most frequently been understood.[33] Read from the point of view of the event, however, the poem's main concern emerges as not the looming eschatological crisis *per se* but the crisis of temporality it occasions—not only on the spiritual-historical level but also on the level of poetic form:

Последний день	Last Day
Ранним утром, когда люди ленились шевелиться	Early in the morning, when people were lazy to shift
Серый сон предчувствуя последних дней зимы,	Anticipating the grey dream of the last winter days,
Пробудились в комнате мужчина и блудница,	A man and a whore awoke in a room,
Медленно очнулись среди угарной тьмы.	Slowly came to their senses in the choking gloom.
Утро копошилось. Безнадежно догорели свечи,	Morning stirred itself. Hopelessly candles burned their last,
Оплывший огарок маячил в оплывших глазах.	A guttering candle end loomed in guttering eyes.
За холодным окном дрожали женские плечи,	Behind the cold window female shoulders shuddered,

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it useful to do so to make clear the parallels between the dynamics of the event and the other binary (non-)oppositions with which this chapter is concerned.

[28] See Paul Ricoeur's insightful work on the circular exchange between temporal experience and narrative configuration in *Time and Narrative,* trans. by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

[29] Cf. the twentieth-century trend toward viewing history as "a tale of accidents, unforeseen events, frustration of conscious purposes" (Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 147).

[30] Ilai Rowner, *The Event: Literature and Theory* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), pp. 24-5.

[31] A similar productive ambivalence is at the center of Derrida's definition of the event, which he views as that which is absolutely singular but *which is such* only in the context of repetition ("A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (2007), 441-461). Cf. Benveniste's famous correction regarding the etymology of *rhuthmos*, which, he shows, means not simply "measure" but more precisely "form in the instant that it is assumed by what is moving, mobile, and fluid […] form as improvised, momentary, changeable" ("The Notion of 'Rhythm'", pp. 285-6).

[32] The poem's debt to Briusov's "The Pale Horse" [*Kon' bled*] (1903), another staging of the Apocalypse in the city street, is readily apparent.

[33] See e.g. P. Dalgard, "The City as Symbol and Metaphor: Analysis of Selected Urbanistic Poems by Brjusov, Blok and Majakovskij," *Slavica othiniensia*, No. 9 (1987), 3-22; Mints, *Poetika*.

Мужчина перед зеркалом расчёсывал пробор в волосах.	The man in front of the mirror combed a part in his hair.
Но серое утро уже не обмануло:	But the grey morning no longer deceived:
Сегодня была она, как смерть, бледна.	Today she was, like death, pale,
Ещё вечером у фонаря её лицо блеснуло,	In the evening her face had still shone under the street lamp,
В этой самой комнате была влюблена.	In this same room she had been in love.
Сегодня безобразно повисли складки рубашки,	Today the folds of the shirt hung disfigured,
На всём был серый постылый налёт.	A patina, grey and repellent, on everything
Углами торчала мебель, валялись окурки, бумажки,	In the corners furniture loomed, cigarette butts sprawled, papers,
Всех ужасней в комнате был красный комод.	Most terrifying in the room was the red commode.
И вдруг влетели звуки. Верба, раздувшая почки,	And suddenly sounds flew in. A willow, swelling its buds,
Раскачнулась под ветром, осыпая снег.	Set swaying in the wind, shedding snow.
В церкви ударил колокол. Распахнулись форто́чки,	In the church the bell struck. Ventilation windows flew open,
И внизу стал слышен торопливый бег.	And down below a hurried running became audible.
Люди суетливо выбегали за ворота	People hurriedly ran out beyond the gates
(Улицу скрывал дощатый забор).	(The street was hidden by a wooden fence).
Мальчишки, женщины, дворники заметили что-то,	Boys, women, janitors noticed something,
Махали руками, черта незнакомый узор.	They waved their hands, tracing an unknown pattern.
Бился колокол. Гудели крики, лай и ржанье.	A bell thrashed about. Shouts boomed out, barking and roaring,
Там, на грязной улице, где люди собрались,	There, on the dirty street, where people had gathered,
Женщина-блудница — от ложа пьяного желанья—	A woman-whore — from the bed of drunken desire —
На коленях, в рубашке, поднимала руки ввысь…	On her knees, in a shirt, raised her hands up high…
Высоко — над домами — в тумане снежной бури,	Up high—above the houses—in the fog of a snowstorm,
На месте полуденных туч и полунощных звезд,	In the place of midday clouds and midnight stars,
Розовым зигзагом в разверстой лазури	A pink zigzag in the gaping azure,
Тонкая рука распластала тонкий крест.[34]	A delicate hand spread out a delicate cross.

The poem's first four stanzas comprise a series of false starts that neutralize the heightened expectation induced by the poem's apocalyptic title. As each new stanza recedes further into memories of the evening just passed, the poem as it were casts about for direction: should it move forward or back, or stay here to gather dust along with the commode? The aimlessness of the *dol'nik*—a meter with a variable number of unstressed syllables between each stressed syllable—compounds this inability to progress, while each line's regular rising and falling cadence lulls the reader back into the sleep from which the poem's inhabitants struggle to rouse themselves.

It is only with the disruption of this regular motion by the intrusion of the outside world—which adds agitation to the *dol'nik*'s metrical unpredictability—that the poem revives. "Suddenly" sounds from the street enter through the window and, suddenly, the poem is filled with action: a church bell rings, windows are flung open, and a proliferation of "ras-" verbs, which signal the start of (dispersive) action, declares decisively that the poem has begun again. Shorter sentences and parenthetical statements establish a new, restless norm that re-energizes the poem precisely through its struggle against the continued regularity of rhyme and stanzaic

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[34] Aleksandr Blok, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, ed. by M.L. Gasparov, 20 vols. (1997-) 2: 100. Translation my own.

structure. We set off running for its end with the crowd. Even now, though, we are in a strange relation to beginnings and ends: something seems to have happened to cause the excitement, a beginning we do not discover until the very end of the poem—which, returning to the image of the prostitute, calls us to cast our minds back to its start. This is a möbius poem, in which the woman who is shaken out of her stupor by noise on the street seems to be the same woman who causes that noise; the decisive, if mysterious, action with which the poem ends is thus the harbinger of a disaster that is perpetually delayed by the strange loop of the poem's own action.

If our sense of the cyclicality of traditional verse inheres in its turn at the end of each line back to the beginning of the next and its repetition of the same pattern of strong and weak syllables (its "travel backwards and forwards restlessly over the same ground," as Sharon Cameron has it), it has also to do with the lyric's attempts "to bring time to a halt": by a process of vertical accumulation (rhyming couplets, syntactic echoes, etc.), a poem, Cameron claims, is a sequence of words that "collapse[s] its progressions," working to unite its lines by compressing its own past, present, and future into an integrated whole.[35] In this sense, Blok's poem, where the poem's title already declares its end, and the end turns us back to its start, is, rather than "prosaic," as Zara Mints suggests, exaggeratedly poetic.[36]

Indeed, thematizing the tension between repetition and progress that is traditionally at the heart of poetic time, "The Last Day" implicates poetry in the more general temporal concern behind its title. Russian society was on the brink of disaster, but it was also stuck, suspended, as the title of a 1906 article of Blok's has it, in a time of "bezvremen'e": a time of social and cultural stagnation, but literally the state of being timeless, a time *without time*.[37] Blok, in other words, is concerned not with the weight of time, like his Western European counterparts, but a suffocating lack of it.[38] The question that "The Last Day" leaves open is whether poetry may be in some way to blame: does the lack of time account for the suspension in which "The (A(nother)?) Last Day" is held, or is the poem responsible for time's inability to progress?

The poem answers 'yes' to both questions; at the same time, it asks a third, by way of the event. As Mary Ann Doane has argued, the ambivalence of the event is so absolute that it is best understood as simply a deictic marker of time, as primarily "an assurance of the real: 'something is happening'."[39] The insistent contradictions that define both form and content in Blok's poem—in which the predictability of rhyme and stanzaic form is in conflict with the poem's unpredictable meter, and the inevitability of the coming End is at odds with the uncertainty of the poem's own beginning(s) and end(s)—echo the radical ambivalence of the event, and point to

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[35] *Lyric Time: Dickinson and the Limits of Genre* (Baltimor: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), p. 241; p. 203.
[36] *Aleksandr Blok*, p. 799.
[37] See Mark Steinberg, *Petersburg Fin-de-Siècle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), pp. 264-267. The article (PSS VII: 21-26) shares many images and turns of phrase with the *City* cycle.
[38] On the weight of time, cf. Walter Benjamin's comment with regard to Baudelaire's poetry and modernity: "In the *spleen*, time becomes palpable: the minutes cover a man like snowflakes" ("On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn, ed. by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 184). Each minute light as a snowflake, but their sum is an avalanche: "Et le Temps m'engloutit minute par minute, / Comme la neige immense un corps pris de roideur […]Avalanche, veux-tu m'emporter dans ta chute?" (Baudelaire, "Le Goût de néant"). Blok's article shares a vocabulary with Western European discourses about modern urban life. Still, Baudelaire's avalanche amasses because time progresses; in Blok's article, by contrast, progress is emphatically denied: the "grey spider of ennui" and its circular web embody the "mechanical circle" into which Russian life has settled as it circulates in the wake of the endless circulars of the Russian bureaucratic machine (Blok PSS VII: 22).
[39] Doane, *Cinematic*, p. 140.

the poem's concern less with what is happening than with how to register that *something is*.[40] For while the event *in* Blok's poem—at the center of the poem yet oddly hard to place, temporally; cataclysmic yet also anticlimactic—is something of a non-event, this event has a significant effect on the poem's second temporality, that of reading. Forcing the reader to engage actively with the verse line, the event from the street does not put poetry into crisis but, on the contrary, revives one of its central qualities, that of making tangible the passing of time.

Part One: Rhythm in Theory

In "The Last Day", Blok acknowledges the essential timelessness of the lyric but he also problematizes it: if the events in the poem are brought to a halt, the event of the poem demands heightened attention to temporality in general and that of poetry in particular. In this sense, Blok's practice aligns with recent theoretical approaches to rhythm that view it as an *eventful* phenomenon which emerges not so much from its conflict with meter as an encounter with time.

    Before elaborating upon this approach more fully, I want to spend some time reviewing the methods that traditional prosody has applied to rhythm. Like the modernist poets discussed above, these studies distinguish strictly between rhythm and meter; unlike modernist poets, however, they are interested in quantifying precisely the sum of rhythm's deviations from an ideal metrical scheme.[41] The statistical approach has been especially dominant in the study of Russian verse, and I take advantage here of the rich data on the evolution of metrical norms that such analyses have produced, even where I point out the limitations of this approach. I then turn to early work on rhythm by the Russian Formalists, who rejected the metrical foot as a unit of analysis and were interested instead in rhythm as a process that is central to poetic meaning-making. It is this approach that will prove most productive when we return to Blok and the poetic encounters with historical events that are the subject of the last part of this chapter.

Statistical Analysis of Verse and "Satisfactory" Rhythm

To scan, or not to scan? That is, for prosodists, the question. The emphatic answer, particularly in Russia, has long been 'yes': adopting and adapting the rules of classical scansion, the traditional approach to prosody has been that of *foot substitution*, the practice of breaking the verse line into a series of metrical feet consisting of one stressed syllable and one or two unstressed syllables arranged according to normative parameters.[42] This seemingly straightforward definition and the approach it undergirds have been the subject of heated debate,

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[40] The *dol'nik* in this poem is unusual for the Russian canon and Blok's own oeuvre: in addition to the fluctuating number of unstressed syllables between each stressed syllable, the number of stressed syllables per line also varies.

[41] If free verse was one response to the modern paradox of standardization and all-pervasive contingency, the quantitative (often statistical) analysis of verse that gained traction in the early twentieth century was another. Statistics, which "emerged as a powerful new epistemological framework during the nineteenth century," not only "acknowledge[d] the intractability of the contingent […] it was based on and depended upon this affirmation." Doane, *Cinematic Time*, p. 18. See also Theodore Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking, 1820-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

[42] The most common Russian verse meters are iambic and trochaic (binary meters, i.e., with two syllables in each foot) and amphibrachic, anapestic, and dactylic (ternary meters, i.e., with three syllables in each foot).

and if it is almost obligatory, after a century or more of concerted prosodic effort, to find fault with the methods and assumptions of an approach focused on the metrical foot, it is also somewhat problematic—thanks to the same century or more of competing efforts—to jettison it completely: existing alternatives are so numerous and have invested so little in developing a shared vocabulary that the foot (and the descriptions of metrical features that are built upon it), even when it appears only as a point of negative comparison, occupies perhaps the only common ground in a bewilderingly fractured field. My own argument is less with the terminology and assumptions of this approach than with its tendency, by focusing on abstract schema, to divorce the study of versification from that of poetry.

The description of foot-substitution prosody's advantages and limitations attempted here focuses on one poem, "The Duel" [*Poedinok*] (1904). This is intended programmatically. Rather than select exemplary lines from a large body of works to illustrate certain prosodic features, as metrists tend to do, I want to use one poem to test what the sum of local prosodic observations might be. I have chosen to enter the fray that surrounds metrical analysis with this poem not only because it is about a fight, but also because, as the third poem in *City*, it will serve alongside "The Last Day" as a useful introduction to some of the concerns of the cycle as a whole. Here is "The Duel" in full:

Поединок	The Duel
Дни и ночи я безволен,	Days and nights I lack will
Жду чудес, дремлю без сна.	Wait for miracles, doze without sleep,
В песнях дальних колоколен	In the songs of distant church towers
Пробуждается весна.	Spring awakens.
Чутко веет над столицей	It breezes delicately above the capital
Угнетённого Петра.	Of oppressed Peter.
Вечерница льнёт к деннице,	Evening star clings to morning,
Несказанней вечера.	Each evening more ineffable.
И зарёй — очам усталым	And at sunrise— to tired eyes
Предстоит, озарена,	Appears, sun-bright,
За прозрачным покрывалом	Behind a translucent shawl,
Лучезарная Жена…	The Sun-radiant Woman…
Вдруг летит с отвагой ратной —	Suddenly flies with martial boldness —
В бранном шлеме голова —	Head in battle helmet —
Ясный, Кроткий, Златолатный,	The Bright One, the Meek, the Golden-armored,
Кем возвысилась Москва!	He who Moscow's glory raised!
Ангел, Мученик, Посланец	Angel, Martyr, Envoy
Поднял звонкую трубу…	Raised a sonorous pipe…
Слышу ко́ней тяжкий танец,	I hear the heavy dance of horses,
Вижу смертную борьбу…	I see the mortal battle…
Светлый Муж ударил Деда!	The Light Man struck the Old!
Белый — чёрного коня!..	The white — the black horse!...
Пусть последняя победа	Let the final victory
Довершится без меня!..	Be won without me!
Я бегу на воздух вольный,	I run out into the free air,
Жаром битвы утомлён…	Exhausted by the heat of battle…

Бейся, колокол раздольный,	Strike, free clock,
Разглашай весенний звон!	Ring out the spring chime!
Чуждый спорам, верный взорам	Stranger to arguments, true to the gazes
Девы алых вечеров,	Of the maiden of scarlet evenings,
Я опять иду дозором	I go again to keep watch
В тень узорных теремов:	Into the shadow of palaces adorned:
Не мелькнёт ли луч в светлице?	Won't a light flicker in the parlor?
Не зажгутся ль терема?	Won't the palaces blaze with light?
Не сойдёт ли от божницы	Won't there descend from the sanctuary
Лучезарная Сама?[43]	Sun-Radiance Herself?

The foot-substitution prosodist's first task is to determine what type of foot forms the basis of a given line of verse. Given that most lines of Blok's "The Duel" begin with a stressed syllable, end with an unstressed syllable, and have four stressed syllables in total, foot-substitution prosodists would divide the line into four even feet (here separated by a /), with the expected stress on the first syllable of each foot (here underlined). Having identified the poem's *meter* as trochaic tetrameter, foot substitution prosodists then go on to mark the poem's *rhythm*—that is, the 'actual' pattern of stress created by the poem's language (here marked in **bold**):

> Дн**и** и / н**о**чи / **я** без / в**о**лен,
> Жд**у** чу / д**е**с, дре / мл**ю** без / сн**а**.
> В п**е**снях / д**а**льних / к**о**ло / к**о**лен
> Пр**о**буж/ д**а**ет / с**я** вес / н**а**.

According to this approach, meter is the "ideal law governing the alternation of strong and weak sounds in verse," while rhythm is "the actual alternation of strong and weak sounds, resulting from the interaction between the natural characteristics of the linguistic material and the metrical law."[44] This clear distinction between meter as ideal scheme and rhythm as deviation from that scheme accounts for the relatively unproblematic status of rhythm in the work of such leading metrists as Viktor Zhirmunsky, Kiril Taranovsky, Mikhail Gasparov, Petr Rudnev, Andrei Kolmogorov, and more.[45]

In the first two lines of "The Duel", verbal material obediently follows trochaic law: the stress of each word coincides with the pattern of strong sounds dictated by the meter and all feet are fulfilled.[46] In the third line, however, the third foot is without stress (resulting in what some metrists term a 'pyrrhic foot', in which both syllables are unstressed); in the fourth, both the first and third go without. This is the dominant tendency of the poem, in which the first and/or third foot is unfulfilled in twenty-eight of its thirty-six lines. Another pattern thus emerges alongside the metrical pattern from the arrangement of frequently- and rarely-stressed feet; this is what Slavic metrists call the *secondary* rhythmic pattern. In this instance—given that rarely-stressed

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[43] Blok, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 2: 100.

[44] Viktor Zhirmunsky, *Vvedenie v metriku. Teoriia stikha* (Leningrad: Academia, 1925), p. 23.

[45] See e.g. Zhirmunsky, *Vvedenie*. See Yury Lotman, "Ritm i metr", in Yury Lotman, *Analiz poeticheskogo teksta. Struktura stikha* (Leningrad: Prosveshchenie, 1972) and Jakobson, "Retrospect" for thorough histories of these developments.

[46] Various metrists have noted that poets tend to place more stresses on the first lines of stanzas than on other lines. (See e.g. Barry Scherr, "Taranovsky's Laws: Further Observations from a Comparative Perspective", in *Poetry and Poetics: A Centennial Tribute to Kiril Taranovsky,* ed. by Barry Scherr, James Bailey and Vida Johnson (Bloomington: Slavica, 2014), p. 361).

feet are the first and third feet of the line—this secondary rhythm is what is known as an *alternating* [*al'terniruiushchii* or *chereduiushchiisia*] rhythm, in which frequently-stressed feet (here, the second and fourth) alternate with rarely-stressed feet (the first and third).

Already, it is clear that this approach lends itself to—and encourages—quantitative analysis of verse rhythm. Working with a grid of metrical feet, Slavic metrists have calculated the most common deviations from this grid for each meter; amassing data for poetry from different time periods (one impressive study conducted by Taranovsky without a computer analyzes 350,000 separate verse lines), they have arrived at historical descriptions of these rhythmic variations and the likelihood of their incidence during any given period.[47] Based on this huge repository of information, a Slavic metrist can identify the rhythmical variations from the metrical scheme in Blok's "The Duel"—omission of the first and/or third stressed syllable—as 'traditional', typical of nineteenth-century verse written in trochaic tetrameter.[48] Robin Kemball offers precise figures for rhythmic variations in trochaic tetrameter for Blok's poetry of the second volume relative to figures for all poems written by Blok in this meter. Kemball speaks in terms of the "arsis," the position that should bear stress according to the metrical scheme:[49]

Trochaic tetrameter	stress in the arsis of all four feet	light arsis in 1st foot	light arsis in 2nd foot	light arsis in 3rd foot	light arsis in 1st and 3rd feet	light arsis in 2nd and 3rd feet
Second vol.	25%	19.3%	-	36.6%	19.1%	-
Overall	27.3%	19.8%	-	35.4%	17.5%	-

Comparing these statistics to the comparable figures for poets such as Pushkin and Bely, Kemball finds that Blok is *less* likely to combine light arses in the first and third feet and *more* likely to have a light arsis in the third foot alone.[50] Andrei Bely, working many years earlier and with a broader view, finds that—in comparison with the four-foot iambic line—the Russian four-foot trochee displays, *in general*, i) a higher total incidence of pyrrhic feet (*per* Bely, 'accelerations of rhythm'); ii) fewer pyrrhics in the third foot; iii) far fewer pyrrhics in the second foot; iv) nearly twice as many pyrrhics in the first foot. Kemball adds that the incidence of lines with two light feet (a term he prefers to 'pyrrhic', given the shades of stress, or *intensy*, he identifies, following the influential prosodist, Georgii Shengeli, even in syllables that don't

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[47] See Kirill Taranovsky, *Russkiie dvuslozhnyie razmery. Stat'i o stikhe* (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskoi kul'tury, 2010); Mikhail Gasparov, *Sovremennyi russkii stikh* (Moskva: Nauka, 1974).

[48] Mikhail Gasparov, *Russkie stikhi 1890-ikh-1925-go goda v kommentariiakh* (Moskva: Vysshaia shkola, 1993). Note that the meter here follows Taranovsky's law of regressive accentual dissimilation, the alteration of strong and weak ictuses throughout the entire line whereby the final is strongest, the second to last weakest, the third to last strong but less so than final, the fourth to last weak but less so than second to last, etc.

[49] The choice of vocabulary is an important one. I prefer to speak in terms of stressed and unstressed syllables, since this is the terminology familiar to the widest audience; it implies a *linguistic* conception of rhythm, where the tension between metrical norms and the stress patterns of actual language are foregrounded. Studies that proceed in terms of the *arsis* understand the stressed syllable as significant only as part of a pair (or triple) with the *thesis*. Like the term *ictus*, which can be 'fulfilled' or 'unfulfilled,' *arsis* implies an abstract conception of meter in which the metrical grid precedes the poem itself, which becomes a series of counted syllables.

[50] Kemball, *Blok*, p. 190.

bear full stress) in combination is two to three times as high in the Russian trochaic line as in the iamb.[51]

Before diving down this metrical rabbit hole in pursuit of Bely, Kemball, et al—perhaps, by mounting a detailed comparison of metrical variations in all the trochaic tetrameter poems in *City*, or by tallying these results against those for iambic poems in the same cycle—we might do well to pause to reflect on what such efforts might produce, beyond more precise figures as to which feet tend to go without stress in Blok's trochaic verse. Certainly, in the local context of "The Duel", tracing rhythmic variations does reveal several localized and subtle effects. In the first three stanzas, each stanza has fewer stressed syllables overall; correspondingly, the number of lines per stanza with two light feet increases. The movement from the speaker's position of earthly entrapment (fourteen of sixteen syllables in the quatrain bear full stress) to his vision of the "Radiant Woman" (nine syllables bear full stress) is paralleled by a growing 'lightness' of rhythm. In the following stanzas, the number of light feet again decreases; it is not until the final stanza of the poem—which is metrically identical and thematically related to the third—that the same 'lightness' is achieved.[52] In other words, light feet do seem to function here as a form of "rhythmic italics," to borrow Gasparov's term.[53] If this, though, is the 'sum total' of deviations from metrical norms of which Bely spoke, it is somewhat disappointing: how, after all, should we account for the poem's central section, the duel announced by the title, which—unmarked by rhythmic italics—features in this reading as nothing more than a background against which the third and final stanzas stand out more starkly?

This is an admittedly partial introduction to the methods of Slavic metrics and versification in general.[54] As I hope to have demonstrated, however, a common problem with such analyses—as sensitive as they may be to versificational hierarchies (the foot, the line, the stanza) or their phrasal equivalents (syllables, tone units, lines and verse paragraphs)—is a certain failure to account for how poetry's many linguistic components function together to produce the experience of rhythm in poetry. This is something that metrists of these schools come close to admitting themselves: detailed statistical analyses of metrical variations in a poet's verse conclude with no more than reference to the poet's "instinctive 'feel' for satisfactory rhythm."[55]

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[51] Zhirmunsky 'disproved' Shengeli's theory of the *intensa* soon after its publication; Shengeli himself abandoned the theory after the 1920s. For criticism of Kemball's reliance on the concept of *intensy*, see Petr Rudnev "Metricheskii repertuar A. Bloka" in *Blokovskii sbornik II* (Tartu, 1972), p. 224. Cf. also Osip Brik, who holds that it is "completely fruitless to attempt to divide syllables into stressed, half-stressed, unstressed, lightly stressed, and so on, and in so doing to penetrate into the multifariousness [*mnogoobrazie*] of rhythmic movement. Everything depends on the rhythm of poetic speech, of which these syllabic series are the consequence." ("On Rhythm").

[52] Another terminological knot: metrists often speak of the "weight" or "strength" of stressed syllables, but, as this example makes clear, rhythmic emphasis can as easily be the result of light or weak syllables.

[53] Gasparov, *Ocherk*, p. 135.

[54] Many recent books on meter and rhythm begin with useful overviews of work to date. See, for example, Richard Cureton, *Rhythmic Phrasing in English Verse* (New York: Longman, 1992); Donald Wesling, *The Scissors of Meter: Grammetrics and Reading* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996); Clive Scott, *Reading the Rhythm: The Poetics of French Free Verse 1910-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). For comparative studies of English and Russian metrics, see Kemball, *Blok*; James Bailey, "An Exploration in Comparative Metrics", *Style* Vol. 21, No. 3 (Fall 1987), 359-376; Scherr, "Taranovsky's Laws".)

[55] Kemball, *Blok*, p. 212. As Robin Kemball claims about midway through his exhaustive study of Blok's meter and rhythm, "Only a poet possessed of unfailing rhythmical intuition can produce such variety in ternary meter without once overstepping the limits—intangible, undefinable, but no less real—laid down by the needs of easy, effective, unstilted, musical declamation" (p. 228). See also e.g. the conclusion of Mikhail Gasparov and Marina Tarlinskaja's proposed "probability model of verse": "This means that Browning was practically indifferent to the variation and mostly obeyed the language constraints, while Tennyson preferred it and used it more frequently than it would occur

Rhythm remains a fundamentally elusive quality, which, even when its components are accounted for in detail, produces an aesthetic effect that is impossible to describe. As the puzzle presented by "The Duel" begins to suggest, and as the following discussion of the Formalists' theories of rhythm will argue at more length, the solution to this problem is to consider rhythm as a fundamentally contextual phenomenon—one that relies precisely on the combination of repetition and difference that is produced when its local events are framed by the event of the poem as a whole. This turn to the Formalists will end with a return to the discussion initiated by "Last Day" regarding the interrelationship of the events depicted in or by the poem's content and the event(s) of poetic form.

Russian Formalism and the Reinstatement of Idiosyncrasy

Contrary to the common view that the Russian Formalists gave birth to the tradition of "meticulous statistical studies" of verse,[56] the early work of Formalists such as Osip Brik, Boris Tomashevsky and Yury Tynianov explicitly rejects the distinction between meter and rhythm from which, as we have seen, statistical prosody emerged. This was part of the Formalists' more general objection to simplistic views of the relationship between form and content, a relationship that, as we have seen, Blok already begins to complicate. For the Formalists, the fixation of many Russian Symbolists upon the supposed 'correspondence' between a work's form and its content was a corollary of the mimetic view of art, and inevitably led to claims such as that made by Bely, who heard in Blok's rhythms "the noisomeness of a hangover."[57] They regarded the distinction between metrical "calculation" and rhythmic "expressivity" as an extension of the same tendency. Dispensing with the metrical foot, the Formalists instead positioned rhythm as that which dynamizes both form and semantic material to *make* meaning; of central importance here is the intimate relationship between rhythm and time.

Like Blok's interest in the rhythms of history, Formalism's earliest statements about rhythm seem, at first blush, to align them with the modernist rejection of metrical rules and prosodic tradition. Osip Brik's pioneering theory of rhythm—first elaborated in speeches given at the Moscow Linguistic Circle (in 1919) and OPOIaZ (in 1920) and later published in *Novyi Lef* as "Rhythm and Syntax" (in 1927)—does away with meter and syllabo-tonic versification entirely.[58] This is in keeping with the iconoclastic program of his Hylaean (later Futurist) friends,

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naturally. Why Tennyson did it is not quite clear. He probably liked the rhythm of "feminine," "feet-effacing" word endings." ("A Probability Model of Verse (English, Latin, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese)", *Style*, vol. 21, no. 3 (1987), 322-58 (p. 324)).

[56] Caryl Emerson, "Russian Critical Theory" in *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth Century Russian Literature*, ed. by Marina Balina and Evgeny Dobrenko (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 272

[57] Boris Eikhenbaum, "Teoriia 'formal'nogo metoda'," *O literature* (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel', 1987), pp. 375-408 (p. 383). See also Eikhenbaum's criticism of Bely in "On Sounds in Verse" [*O zvukakh v stikhe*] (in *Skvoz' literaturu* ('S-Gravenhage: Mouton, 1962), pp. 201-208).

[58] As Marina Akimova notes, the effort expended dismissing the concept of the "foot" [*stopa*] in the 1927 article is an extension of polemics with Briusov's *Science of verse* [*Nauka o stikhe*] spearheaded by Jakobson and Brik in the Moscow Linguistic Circle between 1919 and 1922 ("Kakogo Brika my chitaem? Zagadki 'Ritma i sintaksisa'" in *Mogut li teksty lgat'? K probleme raboty s nedostovernymi istochnikami. Materialy chetvertykh Lotmanovskikh dnei v Tallinnskom universitete*, ed. by T. Kuzovkina (Tallinn: Tallinn University Press, 2014), p. 92. See Brik's review of Briusov's *Science of Verse* (1920) and protocols of the relevant meetings in S.I. Gindin, "Kak Moskovskii lingvisticheskii kruzhok voeval s Briusovym i Potebnei", *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie,* No. 86 (2007)). Akimova finds the continuation of these polemics in the 1927 article anachronistic; Briusov had died in 1924 and the foot had long since been generally acknowledged to be a problematic, if not entirely dispensable, unit of verse. I would

who proclaimed their hatred of "meters in schoolbooks" in one of their earliest publications, the 1913 *A Trap for Judges II*.[59]

If Brik's disdain for syllabo-tonic versification has roots in common with modernist poets' rejection of metrical rules and prosodic tradition, however, his theory is not a complete repudiation of formal constraint.[60] Brik certainly takes issue with the idea that a poem's rhythm consists of a set of defined, static elements that can be isolated from the verse line as a dynamic entity.[61] Equally, however, he insists that rhythm cannot be viewed as "some elemental force that as though destroys the smooth flow of syllables and creates the essence of verse."[62] Instead, rhythm is for Brik born of motion "shaped in a particular way"—not by a metrical scheme but by what Brik terms the "rhythmic impulse," a "combination of intensities and breaks" [*intensivnosti i pereryvy*] that "exists in one's consciousness before any kind of materialization."[63] Rhythm emerges instantaneously, at the moment that this "rhythmic impulse" meets the words and syllables that form the poem's material. Rather than "stressed and unstressed" [*udarnye i neudarnye*], syllables for Brik "have been stressed" or "have not been stressed" [*udarennye i neudarennye*], since "[t]heoretically, every syllable can *be* stressed or can *not be* stressed— everything depends on the rhythmic impulse."[64]

Brik is confident that "a precise definition of the rhythmical impulse would give the key to all the complex questions of rhythm," but he does not provide one himself.[65] While some have attributed this lack of precision to the LEF publication's self-declared status as excerpts from an as-yet-incomplete book (never published), it seems to me that the article's ambivalence as to the exact nature of the rhythmic impulse is a necessary one, and tells us something important about the way Brik conceives of rhythm.[66] As Brik describes it, the rhythmic impulse is both prior to form and material and perceptible only when it comes into contact with them. Rhythm here is neither a set of deviations from a metrical scheme nor an elusive, elemental force; it is the product of constant dynamic compromises between the rhythmic impulse and syntax, compromises that may seem unexpected and appear to be governed by chance but which have their own laws and patterns, both syntactic and rhythmic.[67] The equivocal status of the rhythmic impulse—neither form nor material but dynamic mediator between the two—is a concept that preserves the *unpredictability* of rhythm while still accounting for the structures which rhythm unarguably creates and transforms.

Yury Tynianov's 1924 *Problem of Verse Language* develops and systematizes this theory; defining more clearly the particular relationship into which rhythm puts form and

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attribute the space given to this issue not to oversight but to Brik's attentiveness, alongside his fellow Formalists, to the source of poetry's measure, for so long erroneously located in the metrical foot.

[59] Burliuk et al., *Sadok sudej II*, reprinted in *Manifesty i programmy russkikh futuristov. Die Manifesten und Programmschriften der russischen Futuristen,* ed. by Vladimir Markov (Munich: Fink, 1967), p. 52.

[60] Cf. Shklovsky's comment in "Art as Device": "There is 'order' in art but not a single column of a Greek temple corresponds to it exactly" (1917: 14).

[61] "Nobody would ever dream of saying that a person dancing the waltz combines some definite, periodically recurring movements [though] clearly a person dancing the waltz is performing a certain pre-given formula." Osip Brik, "Ritm i sintaksis", *Novyi Lef*, No. 3-7 (1927) No. 3, p. 17.

[62] Brik, "Ritm", No. 4, p. 26.

[63] Brik, "Ritm", No. 3, p. 18. Cf. Mayakovsky's claim in *How to Make Verse.* Brik comments explicitly on the recent tendency of poets to emphasize this point ("Ritm", No. 5, p. 35).

[64] Brik, "Ritm", No. 4, p. 27; p. 17.

[65] ibid., p. 18.

[66] Akimova, "Kakovo Brika?", p. 97.

[67] Brik, "Ritm", No. 5, p. 33.

material, it reveals rhythm's role in the creation of poetic meaning. Tynianov argues that the successivity of verbal material is one of four defining features of verse language, alongside the unity of the verse sequence, the density [*tesnota*] of the verse line, and the dynamization of verbal material.[68] That is, whereas the sequence of words in prose is arranged to communicate meaning that is only fully perceived when the utterance is finished, the meaning of poetry is created by the fact of verbal material being set in motion by rhythm: it emerges from the "general dynamism of the construction," in which the tightly-packed components of the verse line influence, change, and deform one another as successive words interact, their semantic potential unfolding and expanding by dint of their proximity and the movement between them.[69]

Like Brik, Tynianov's account of rhythm is built upon a sense of rhythm as fundamentally unpredictable yet also structured; in this sense, both view rhythm as an event in the dual sense discussed at the beginning of this chapter—as that which indexes both an uncontrolled and a delimited 'happening'. Crucially, they both also seem to claim that this very combination of unpredictable predictability—this peculiar eventfulness of verse—is the key to poetry's ability to make meaning. This goes beyond the 'semantic aureoles' that scholars such as Gasparov have argued link meter and meaning [*metr i smysl*] and the range of other semantic and non-semantic roles rhythm plays in verse to suggest something about the cognitive processes that rhythmic structures in poetry not only represent but in an important sense provoke.[70] Secondary sonic and semantic features vie with each word's primary meaning and alter it, such that the precise shape and meaning of the verse line is inherently unfixed (unpredictable); it is readerly participation that stabilizes the rhythmic and semantic contours of each line.[71] Rhythm is the product of both the "uncontrolled happenings" produced by the interaction of material and form and the reader's experience of and active participation in ordering these happenings; a poem's content is inseparable from its form, and both are defined by the eventfulness of rhythmic movement.

This line of argument has been taken up in recent work on rhythm. For these theorists, as for the Russian formalists, rhythm exists only as a process, accessible, as Clive Scott has argued more recently, "only in the linear reading of the text."[72] In their more or less explicit involvement of the reader, these and other similar theories open up the way to what Simon Jarvis has praised elsewhere as the "reinstatement of idiosyncrasy." Jarvis argues that just such a return to the

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[68] See Aage Hansen-Löwe's in-depth discussion of this point and rhythm as the *dominanta* or principle constructive factor in verse more generally (*Russkii Formalizm. Metodologicheskaia rekonstruktsiia razvitiia na osnove printsipa otstraneniia* (Moskva: Iazyki russkoi kul'tury, 2001), pp. 306-309).

[69] Yury Tynianov, *Problema stikhotvornogo iazyka* (The Hague: Mouton, 1963 [1924]), p. 120. See Hansen-Löwe's detailed commentary (*Russkii Formalizm*, pp. 314-316). Cf. also Boris Tomashevsky's definition of poetic speech as "a dense web of verbal associations in their 'progressive development'." "Thanks to this, the development of poetic speech follows… dense verbal associations from word to word" (*O stikhe: stat'i* (Leningrad: Priboi, 1929), p. 73).

[70] For rhythm's various roles, see Attridge, *Rhythms*, pp. 285-313. The relation between rhythm and meaning that I am identifying here and the notion of 'semantic aureoles' are not mutually exclusive; Brik was in fact the first to note the frequency with which Russian trochaic pentameter was used in poems dealing with the 'theme of the path', an observation that would be developed by Taranovsky in his groundbreaking study on the topic (See I. P. Pil'shchikov, "Nasledie russkoi formal'noi shkoly i sovremennaia filologiia", *Antropologiia kul'tury*, No. 5 (2013), p. 334; Kirill Taranovsky, "O vzaimootnoshenii stikhotvornogo ritma i tematiki", *American Contributions to the Fifth International Congress of Slavists*, 2 vols. (The Hague: Mouton, 1963) I (1963), pp287-332.

[71] Tynianov, *Problema.*

[72] *Reading the Rhythm*, p. 23. As Cureton postulates, somewhat gnomically, "rhythmic structures are cognitive representations of the flow of energy in the stream of our experience" (*Rhythmic Phrasing,* p. 121). See also Wesling, *Scissors.*

'subjective' side of rhythm is essential if prosody's pursuit of stressed syllables is not to "to delete everything about the experience that makes it an experience."[73] If the iterative structures of rhythm—its repetitive patterns within and across poems—are what make rhythmic experience possible, it is precisely in their unique instantiation in each poem, line, and position that rhythmic experience inheres. Rhythm implies repetition, but even in the most metrically regular of lines this is always repetition with a difference, as form interacts not only with verbal material but with the act of reading, too. Rhythm is an event—a process that insists at every step that *something is happening*, even, or especially, if that something cannot be clearly reduced to a set of schematic positions; rhythm marks the passing of time and promises simultaneously that temporal experience is more than mere quantity.

Rhythm in "The Duel"

How does this help us to read "The Duel"? As we have seen, close attention to the poem's versification reveals the patterns that structure the movement of the line, contributing to its rhythmic effect. Metrical analysis falls short, however, when, focusing excessively on arbitrarily defined components of individual lines and finding significance only in areas of 'deviance', it loses sight of the formal whole to which these components belong. This is particularly pressing in a poem such as this, in which the duel announced by the poem's title takes place in the most metrically regular section of the poem (stanzas four, five, and six)—that is to say, in the least 'eventful' part of the poem, according to traditional metrical analysis.

This central section does seem related only tangentially to the rest of the poem, thematically as well as metrically; at the end of the sixth stanza, the hero even flees from it ("Let the final victory / Be won without me!") to return to the drifting reveries that were so abruptly cut short by the entrance of "The Bright One, the Meek, the Golden-armored" in the fourth stanza. Are we then, alongside Mints, to understand the poem's main thrust to be the lyric hero's assertion that he is "above both earthly good (if such a thing exists) and earthly evil, because he, striving towards "Her", is above everything earthly"?[74] Again, this reading leaves the duel itself, the center of the poem, in an odd position, mere metrical background for the rhythmic 'italics' of the third and ninth stanzas and thematic background for the epiphanies that these stanzas deliver or anticipate.

An alternative approach is to read 'eventfully'—to read for rhythm in the purposefully expansive sense that I have begun to outline. This means to read for meter and for meaning simultaneously. As we have seen, they are inextricably intertwined, and it is out of their simultaneous unfurling that the rhythm of a poem emerges. Rhythm, in my reading, 'is' the poem as it unfolds through time—or, more precisely, that which makes us aware of time unfolding. Read from this angle, Blok's duel comes back into focus as the poem's main event: for both the

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[73] Simon Jarvis, "Prosody as cognition", *Critical Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 3 (Autumn 1998), 1 -14 (p. 7). One thinks also of Clive Scott's objection to metrical theories obsessed with definitional reliability ("the elusive and illusory ability to say, categorically, what is metrical and what is unmetrical") over descriptions of metrical features that might be put "into operational use for the 'average' reader," and which can therefore claim to be "rhythmically significant." (*Reading the Rhythm*, p. 7). Cf. also Wesling, who calls on metrists (and humanists in general) to be more mindful of the need "to relate our actual verbal behavior and human moral knowledge to our special codes of expertise" (*Scissors*, p. 54).
[74] *Poetika*, p. 82.

lyric hero in the poem and the reader of the poem, the fight at the center of the poem is important not so much for what it *is* but for what it *does*.

As in "The Last Day", progression and stasis are in uneasy relation in the first three stanzas of "The Duel". The temporal movement of the day (from morning, through day and evening, to dawn) is obscured by the continuous, uncompleted action of these stanzas' verbs (I wait, I dream, it breezes, the evening star clings). The stanzas move toward a rhythmic peak, but any promise of culmination is undercut by the repeated daily cycle in which this movement is framed: this is one of many "days and nights" that pass, with the implication the hero does not progress, instead suspended in a potentially endless loop of anticipation by the glimpses of his longed-for ideal this trance-like state affords. The poem, too, has nowhere to go but back; any further lightening of feet would result in its lines evaporating entirely.

This is typical of Blok's early poetry, a body of work that centers on a single dramatic conflict, that of the hero's love for the Beautiful Lady and his attempts to reach her. Repeatedly tracing a path from approach to retreat, hopeful expectation to its inevitable disappointment, *Poems about the Beautiful Lady* and other early cycles develop their central theme without bringing it any closer to resolution.[75] Here, by contrast, the spell is abruptly broken by the intrusion of external events (again, recall "The Last Day": "And suddenly sounds flew in"); another conflict supersedes that between hero and his Lady. Now verbs are in the past tense: in contrast to the languorous action of the first stanzas, the action here is fast-paced and palpably sequential. The present becomes the space of physical sensation (I hear, I see) rather than mystical expectation; in parallel, the randomness of each successive line's rhythmic profile—with the number and position of light feet constantly changing—demands a more attentive, present-oriented response to the verse line than that encouraged by the accretive pattern of the first three stanzas' rhythm.

Eventually, the hero flees this over-stimulating scene to return to the reveries of the poem's start. His perspective, however, has been altered. The duel has prompted a shift in the lyric hero's relation to time: the state of passive expectation that characterizes the first stanzas—when the speaker, 'without will,' awaits a future he expects external rhythms of the day to bring—has been replaced by a new, active stance (as the reappearance of the root "-vol-" [will, freedom] here, without negation, further suggests).[76] Commanding the spring bell to ring out, the hero moves restively through space and sharpens his focus impatiently on the future. If the "Sun-radiant Wife" stands on the horizon in the third stanza, though, here—despite the hero's resolve—she remains tantalizingly beyond the horizon of his vision and of the poem itself.

"The Duel" was written after Blok's first visit to Moscow, where he was struck by the affirmative key of the Moscow Symbolists' spiritual hopes; "I feel that something important is beginning for me," he wrote to Bely upon his return to Petersburg.[77] The poem can be read as a poetic rendering of this trip and its emotional consequences. More compelling than this biographical explanation, however, is the *rhythmic* reason for the hero's inability to return to the start of the poem—a reason to which the poem's apparent circular structure points. The return in the final stanza of the poem to the metrical pattern of the third only emphasizes the difference in its rhythmic profile. This difference is in part a factor of syntax: the parallel constructions of the insistent questions with which the poem ends contrasts starkly with the single enjambed sentence

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[75] See Sloane, *Lyric Cycle* for a full discussion of this dynamic.
[76] Note also the echo of "zhdu" in "chuzhdyi" (the lines are metrically identical): the speaker's earlier pose of passive expectation is now replaced by his active, decisive position in relation to the surrounding world.
[77] Blok, *Sobranie sochinenii*, VIII, p. 94.

of which the third stanza consists. It is also—simply, though crucially—because this is the second time this exact pattern of metrical deviations has appeared in the poem. The final stanza cannot be a return because it is a repetition, and precisely in this manner, paradoxical as it might seem, marks its difference from the third.

It is no coincidence that one of the poem's only temporal deictics appears at this juncture, and that it is one that signals repetition: "again". As Roland Greene points out, "the adverb *again* explicitly insists on the similarity of past and present" but fails to "cancel the present tense's implicit, automatic affirmation of its own distinctiveness."[78] Its purpose, Sharon Cameron claims, "is not to chart sameness but disparity."[79] In the context of this poem, it seems to me, "again" emerges from the duel, an event that brings sequential earthly time into contact with suspended poetic time. When the hero abruptly flees before the duel's conclusion, he flees linear temporality—a temporality at odds with the circling motion of his quest for the ideal (which, were it ever to be reached, would involve the *transcendence* of time not the completion of a trajectory *in* time). "Again" confirms the hero's immersion in time. As in "The Last Day", however, this intrusion of linearity into the poem doesn't necessarily indicate a turn towards prose. Rather, it demonstrates a new orientation toward poetry as a medium by which to mark the passing of time.

As Jonathan Culler succinctly suggests, "rhythm is an event without representation."[80] "The Duel" is titled with the name of an event, but the poetic event it stages is that of rhythm: the reader, like the hero, moves from a state of passive expectation to a new awareness of rhythm's potential as a poetic event. The sequential earthly time of the duel intrudes upon suspended poetic time; "The Duel" is a reflection upon the implications of combining them. Its final stanzas attempt to combine the rhythmic progress of the first, 'poetic' section of the poem with the actions in time of its second, 'earthly' section. In so doing, they declare the challenge that lies ahead as the hero—appearing here for the first time in *City*—moves into the city: to render events in the world *poetic* events—rhythmic events. This is the challenge that the rest of the poems in the cycle take up.

Part Two: Rhythm in Practice

Two approaches to rhythm in the city, and in *City*, have emerged so far. The first, encountered in "The Last Day", is concerned with the rhythms of the city and its inhabitants. The poem seeks to transform these rhythms into poetic events, exploiting poetry's formal (and temporal) structures

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[78] Greene, *Post-Petrarchism*, p. 34.

[79] Cameron, *Lyric Time,* p. 165. Note the importance that "again" [*snova/opiat/vnov'*] takes on in Blok's third volume, where it is related to the Nietzschean concept of eternal return. Note also the *elegiac* vein in Blok's work—which so frequently turns on the hero's attempts to come to terms with the loss of his Beautiful Lady—to which this deictic alerts us.

[80] Jonathan Culler *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 138. Cf. also Nicolas Abraham, who claims that 'rhythmizing consciousness' "cannot observe what it creates […] At most it can pretend to verify whether or not its magical injunctions have been followed […] 'quasi-observation' […] in this sense, it is completely erroneous to speak of a perception of rhythm or of a 'perceived rhythm.' What occurs, in fact, is the rhythmization of perception, a creation within a consciousness of unreality" (*Rhythms: On the Work, Translation, and Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Benjamin Thigpen and Nicholas T. Rand, ed. by Nicholas T. Rand and Maria Totok (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 73).

to return the *feel* of time to an urban population trapped in the "grey web" of *bezvremen'e*, 'time without time'. The second approach—similar to the first—is found in "The Duel", where it is the lyric hero himself who is shaken out of the self-induced *bezvremen'e* of his early, Beautiful-Lady-oriented mysticism and roused into a newly active relation to time and rhythm. The concerns of these two early poems begin to sketch out the field in which poetic rhythm functions, the rhythmic object and the perception of rhythm that are at the poles of its activity.

I have tried to suggest through my readings of these poems that the most productive way to read rhythm is to read *eventfully*—to understand the metrical, syntactic and semantic components of the rhythm object as significant only when perceived in their simultaneous unfolding. I pursue a purposefully expansive approach to rhythm that attempts to close the gap between text and rhythmic experience opened up by diagrams and abstract schema. This is an approach I will continue to develop in the readings of poems selected from *City* that follow. Understanding rhythmic experience both historically, as a defining feature of early twentieth-century Petersburg life, and poetically, as the fundamental structure of poetic temporality, the cycle demands—even encourages—an expansive approach to rhythm; its main concern is precisely the boundary between social time and poetic time.

Blok's poetry of this period is typically discussed in terms of its content. The city motivates a shift from the mystical landscapes of his youth to socially committed poetry that abandons the strained vertical of expectation typical of Blok's early poetry to look along the horizontal axis of the revolutionary street; in parallel, the 'eternal' temporality of the first volume is eschewed in favor of that of everyday life and the city.[81] Reading the rhythm of *City*, however, reveals that neither shift was immediate or total; indeed, the cycle is concerned precisely with the possibility of such a transformation. As such, the rhythms of *City* elucidate more fully "the intimate link" that Dmitrii Maksimov and many others discern "between [Blok's] principal periods and the decisive events of Russian history."[82] Maksimov echoes Blok's aunt, M.A. Beketova, in designating the events of 1904-05 a "turning point" [*perelom*] in the life of the poet: these were, he asserts, years when "[Blok] emerged from the world of isolated observation into the social, historical, and national world of great passions and great thoughts."[83] As such, Maksimov focuses on poems that deal explicitly with social issues and workers (including, among others, "They rose from the gloom of graves…", "The Barge of Life", *"Her" Arrival*, "Meeting" and "The Satiated Ones"), which, he argues, though "not the best of Blok's works, from an artistic perspective […] are important for his future development. Putting social content into lyric form, these poems opened up new vistas."[84] (254).

Where Maksimov and other Soviet critics are understandably concerned to demonstrate Blok's commitment to revolution, even at this early stage, the rhythms of *City* reveal a more complex picture of Blok's engagement with the unrest of 1904-05 and the ensuing years of reaction, one in which the "artistic perspective" is all-important. While Blok certainly became newly conscious of social and political issues during this period, there is a larger question mark over his sense of how lyric form was to respond to these issues; as he complains to Bely in March of 1905, "politics has stuck in my throat" [*politika stala poperek gorla*].[85] Rather than

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[81] Mints, *Poetika*, pp. 444-531.
[82] Blok i revoliutsiia 1905-go goda,"in *Revoliutsiia 1905 goda i russkaia literatura,* ed. by V.A. Desnitskii and K.D. Muratova (Moskva-Leningrad, 1956), p. 246.
[83] ibid., p. 276.
[84] ibid., p. 254.
[85] Letter to Bely cited ibid., p. 261.

combing Blok's back catalogue for poems that address social issues, therefore, I read the poems that follow—all written in 1905—from a formal perspective. All are set on the city street, a space defined by the same tension between unpredictability and control as I suggest characterizes rhythm and the event and which becomes the stage here for an urgent reflection on the value of poetry's mechanisms for marking time in the context of historical upheaval.[86] Does the something that happens in poetry *matter*, these poems ask—might rhythm's repetitions with difference make a difference?

Rhythm, the Event, and the Revolution of 1905

City's early poems, preoccupied with urban poverty and apocalyptic presentiments though they may be, by and large attempt energetically to grapple with the challenge of the city. Whether they reflect upon the potential of fin-de-siècle urban life to reanimate poetic time and that of Blok's poetics in particular (as I have claimed "The Last Day" and "The Duel" do) or whether they put this new dynamism to work (as in the ordered chaos of poems such as "Deceit", "The city turned its lifeless face…", and "Hymn"), these poems are enquiring and invigorating sorties into the city street.

As the cycle progresses, this energy begins to ebb. In this section, I want to read three poems written in 1905, a year of revolution framed by the slaughter of Bloody Sunday and the October Manifesto and marked by strikes and unrest throughout the empire. These poems, I suggest, register Blok's growing uncertainty as to poetry's ability to respond to these events; rather than the breakdown of verse's formal features, the result if this crisis is intensified engagement with poetry itself as event.

"Street, street…" ["Ulitsa, ulitsa…"], the fifteenth poem in the cycle, explicitly combines—and juxtaposes—the temporalities of the urban street with which it opens and the lyrical setting with which it ends:

Улица, улица...	Street, street….
Тени беззвучно спешащих	Shadows of those soundlessly hurrying
Тело продать,	To sell their body,
И забвенье купить,	And to buy oblivion,
И опять погрузиться	And again to plunge
В сонное озеро города — зимнего холода...	Into the sleepy lake of the city — of winter cold….
Спите. Забудьте слова лучезарных.	Sleep. Forget the words of the radiant ones.
О, если б не было в окнах	O, if only the windows were without
Светов мерцающих!	Flickering lights!
Штор и пунцовых цветочков!	Drapes and crimson little posies!
Лиц, наклонённых над скудной работой!	Faces, bent over meager work!
Всё тихо.	Everything is silent.
Луна поднялась.	The moon has risen.
И облачных перьев ряды	And rows of cloud feathers
Разбежались далёко.[87]	Have run far and wide.

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[86] Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, trans. R. Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 18-21.

[87] Blok, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 2: 109. Translation my own.

For those anxious to highlight Blok's participation in the unrest that followed Bloody Sunday (he marched in a street procession, one oft-repeated anecdote goes, and even carried a red flag) this poem—dated January 1905—is somewhat problematic. Far from an impassioned response to the state-sanctioned slaughter of workers on Palace Square, the poem drifts through a weary description of the moral squalor of urban life, the speaker bitterly regretting its tawdriness and poverty before turning away to look at the night sky. A certain apathy governs on the level of meter, too, which is in largely unrhymed, mixed triple time lines of different lengths. The speaker's thoughts seem to wander, the poem's loosely connected fragments coming to resemble the stream of a consciousness that has lost its faith and, with it, all sense of direction.

This same 'unfinished' quality, however, points to the poem's central concern. With the repeated "street, street…" of the poem's trailing first line and the single rhyme pair found in its sixth, the poem simulates the moment of composition and the poet's search for rhythm. Combined with the dual focus of the speaker's gaze—first trained on the street and the life of the city but by the end turned to the lyrical space of the night sky—this suggests the poem's concern with the possibility of rendering the city poetically, of capturing it in rhythmic language. "Street, street…" answers this question negatively. Beyond the imperative, "sleep", the poem contains no conjugated verbs in the present tense, lending the actions it does record an oddly abstract quality; there is little sense that anything is *happening*. The indecisive movement of the poem's meter compounds this sense. That the poem's only conjugated verbs refer to the moon's movement through the night sky and the dispersal of clouds add to the feeling that time passes inexorably, and poetry, here at least, is incapable of making this any more tangible.

Lack of direction is a theme in several poems in *City*, particularly those—such as "In taverns and winding side-streets…" or "I walk, I wander, dejected…"—in which the speaker is walking through the city. The temporal concern that this aimlessness bespeaks is made clearest in "I walk—and everything is fleeting…", which appears soon after "Street, street…":

Иду — и всё мимолётно.	I walk—and everything is fleeting.
Вечереет — и газ зажгли.	Evening falls—and they've lit the lamps.
Музыка ведёт бесповоротно,	Music leads irrevocably
Куда глядят глаза мои.	Wherever my eyes look.
Они глядят в по́дворотни,	They look into a gateway,

Где шарманщик вздыхал над тенью своей…	Where an organist was sighing over his shadow…
Не встречу ли оборотня?	Won't I meet an *oboroten'*?
Не увижу ли красной подруги моей?	Won't I see my red girlfriend?
Смотрю и смотрю внимательно,	I look and I look attentively,
Может быть, слишком упорно ещё…	Perhaps still too intently….
И — внезапно — тенью гадательной —	And — suddenly — as a mysterious shadow —
Вольная дева в огненном плаще!..	A free girl in a fiery coat!..
В огненном! Выйди за поворот:	In a fiery one! Go around the corner:
На глазах твоих повязка лежит ещё…	You are still blindfolded…
И она тебя кольцом неразлучным сожмёт	And she will squeeze you in an indivisible ring
В змеином ло́говище.[88]	In the snake's den.

Here, direction and temporality are explicitly in tension, as the conflict between the directionality of "irrevocably" and the aimless wandering implied by the next line's idiom makes clear. The speaker leans forward into time and yet is aware of his powerlessness within its flow, just as he claims to wander aimlessly but is led by the music. Combined with the line's off-kilter dol'nik rhythm, such paradoxes magnify the divide between speaker and city already made graphic by the dashed caesurae of the first two lines; they are out of step, as the jumble of tenses in these first two lines further suggests. The impersonal construction of the next line, moreover, revokes human agency entirely to intimate a more profound concern. While the street lamps lit by man will make easier the navigation of dark streets, they cannot prevent evening falling; time's progress cannot be reversed nor—for all that modernity accelerates—sped up. Time 'flies past' the speaker—the literal translation of the Russian *mimoletno,* "is fleeting"—who is aware of a lack of *events*: the temporal cycles implied by the fall of night and the lighting of the gas lamps highlights above all the monodirectional yet aimless nature of his own motion.[89]

Events when they do appear in the poem are intimately connected with time. As the renowned folklorist, Alexander Afanas'ev details, the *oboroten'* is a spirit that appears *in the evening*, and only *fleetingly*: the hero's search for this creature thus appears as an attempt to invest the empty time of the first stanza with meaning.[90] When the *oboroten'* does appear, it is too "sudden" for the poem fully to register; again, the poem's main event is elided. We know it *happened* only because the previous stanza's monotonous flow is disrupted. The return of the gas lamps in the "fiery dress" of the mysterious woman here testifies to the transformative effect of this temporal jolt, as does the ability of the hero—the "irrevocable" [*bez*povorot*no*] motion of time now overcome—to move around the corner [*povorot*]. Still, the promise of progress is quickly stymied by the tight ring [*kol'tso nerazluchnoe*] in which the hero is trapped. This constrictive circle is the polar opposite of the "fleeting," linear time with which the poem begins; its potentially fatal consequences (it holds the hero in a "snake's den") suggests that the complete rejection of the earthly time of the city and history which the hero's search for an event (in the realm of folklore) demands can lead only to a dead end.

The tonic meter of "I walk—and everything is fleeting" is thus not the only source of its imbalance; the hero fails to strike the necessary balance between the boredom tempered with

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[88] Blok, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 2: 111. Translation my own.
[89] Note the use of the unidirectional verb of motion *idti* here (directionality) in combination with the idiom "wherever my eyes look" (aimlessness); compare "I walk, I wander, dejected…" where the multidirectional verb of motion [*khodit'*] is used.
[90] For more on the poem's folkloric images, see commentary in Blok *PSS*, II, p. 746.

eventfulness—repetition with difference—from which rhythm emerges. This is further highlighted by the emphasis placed on this in "You pass without a smile…", the next-but-one poem in the cycle:

Ты проходишь без улыбки,	You pass without a smile
Опустившая ресницы,	Having lowered your lashes,
И во мраке над собором	And in the gloom above the cathedral
Золотятся купола.	Cupolas shine gold.
Как лицо твоё похоже	How similar your face is
На вечерних богородиц,	To those of evening Mother of God [icons],
Опускающих ресницы,	Lowering their lashes,
Пропадающих во мгле…	Disappearing in the gloom…
Но с тобой идёт кудрявый	But with you goes a curly
Кроткий мальчик в белой шапке,	Meek boy in a white cap,
Ты ведёшь его за ручку,	You lead him by the hand,
Не даешь ему упасть.	Won't let him fall.
Я стою в тени портала,	I stand in the shadow of the gateway,
Там, где дует резкий ветер,	There, where a sharp wind blows,
Застилающий слезами	Veiling with tears
Напряжённые глаза.	My strained eyes.
Я хочу внезапно выйти	I want suddenly to come out,
И воскликнуть: «Богоматерь!	To shout out" "Mother Mary!
Для чего в мой чёрный город	Why have you brought the Christ Child
Ты Младенца привела?»	To my black city?
Но язык бессилен крикнуть.	But my tongue is powerless to shout.
Ты проходишь. За тобою	You pass by. Behind you
Над священными следами	Above your blessed footprints
Почивает синий мрак.	Blue darkness rests.
И смотрю я, вспоминая,	And I look, remembering,
Как опущены ресницы,	How the lashes were lowered,
Как твой мальчик в белой шапке	How your boy in a white cap
Улыбнулся на тебя.[91]	Smiled at you.

Commentaries on this poem typically focus on the *Bogoroditsa* (Mother of God) imagery at its center, as a simple girl on the street takes on the divinity of an icon in the eyes of the wandering hero.[92] Somewhat rarely for *City*, and for Blok's oeuvre as a whole, this missed encounter with a potentially divine woman is not the cause for despair; the poem ends with the smile that was lacking at its start. Indeed, read in the terms of this discussion, what is most striking about this poem is its marked eventfulness, particularly given its reprisal of the circular structure we have seen play such an important role in the poems examined so far. Here, rather than an inescapable circle, the structure is productive and suggests a conciliatory position that offers poetry as a place in which even the most ordinary of events can become an experience. Nothing has 'happened,'

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[91] Blok, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 2: 118. Translation my own.
[92] See Blok *PSS*, II, p. 755 and Mints *Poetika*, p. 69.

and yet something has, as the change of tense in the final stanza—which looks back at the moment that has passed with the woman—suggests.

Contrary to the expectation aroused by the poem's first line and the urban setting, the passing encounter recounted in this poem is not fleeting; written largely in the present tense, the poem extends the moment of the woman's passing, which takes place slowly over the poem's length.[93] The action is linear—the woman approaches and then, in the penultimate stanza, disappears into the darkness—and yet far from transitory; indeed, her passing is the only event in the poems examined so far that is not partially or entirely elided. Several elements contribute to this effect. First, the poem's subtly mirrored structure—in which the first stanza is echoed by the sixth (you pass by), the second by the fifth (I am reminded of the Mother of God), and the third by the fourth (I, like the young boy, need your protection)—contains the motion while simultaneously emphasizing the woman's progress towards the hero and away.

This conjunction of the linear and the cyclic is highlighted further by the recurrence of the image of lowered lashes, each time appearing in a different grammatical form each time (having lowered; lowering; were lowered) and echoed by the poet's own eyes, veiled with tears. This device explicitly points to the notion of *repetition with difference* that is so central to the functioning of rhythm (and with it, poetry), and which is the explicit focus of the poem's final stanza. This stanza depicts a moment of recollection, or repetition with the difference of time; it both cements the linear motion of the poem's event (the first instance of a past tense verb signaling progression through time) and (by dint of its own position outside of it) throws the symmetrical structure of the preceding stanzas into relief. Much as the extension of the girl's passing through the poem's first six stanzas gives the event *in* the poem full weight, so this final stanza asserts the event *of* the poem; aligned here for the first time in the cycle, these two events confirm that 'something is happening' both in the poem's world and in the reader's. It is in this sense, perhaps, that the poem is "one of [Blok's] most artistically perfect pieces": its theme is poetic perfection, which comes not from the perfect fulfillment of a metrical scheme, but from the delicate act of capturing experience in time.[94]

Far from a "combination of mysticism and the birth of democratic sentiment," as Mints claims, this poem is marked precisely by its rejection of mysticism and its turn away from social and political concerns.[95] "You pass without a smile…" is dated 29th October 1905, barely two weeks after the October Manifesto was issued (on 17th October 1905); its poetic perfection and positive conclusion are thus tempered by the retreat they register—away from the cycle's initial desire to adapt poetic temporality to the rhythms of the city and history and back to the isolated perfection of lyric time. The disjuncture between poetic content and historical events at this point in *City* is important and not accidental: arranging the cycle in 1915, Blok had ample opportunity to alter the dates on his poems, a practice to which other examples suggest he was not averse.[96] To mark a poem such as "Street, street…", in which apathy is the main affect, with the date

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[93] Compare to Baudelaire's *À une passante*, which can hardly begin before its nominal subject disappears into the crowd.

[94] N. Ia. Abramovich, cited Blok PSS II, p. 755**.** The poem's concern with *poeticity* is further indicated by its initial title, "Romancero", a clear reference to Heine's 1851 collection *Romanzero* (Blok was a keen translator of Heine's verse); the poem's metrical and thematic connections to Heine are discussed in Yury Tynianov, "Blok i Geine," in *Ob Aleksandre Bloke. Stat'i*, p. 250.

[95] The hero doesn't "go out of (through) the doorway," a motif that is associated, in Blok's first volume, with access to an ideal realm (Sloane, *Lyric Cycle*, pp. 169-176); nor does he actually address the girl as Mother of God, leaving her instead to continue on her way.

[96] Stone, "Biographical Symbolism."

'January 1905' makes conspicuous the poem's neglect of Bloody Sunday (which took place on 9th January 1905); it also suggests that Bloody Sunday might have everything to do with the poem's formal struggles.

"The Unknown Woman" and (as?) Rhythm

At the midpoint of the cycle occupied by "You pass without a smile…", the conclusion of this struggle to find the right form for historical events is retreat: the poem is satisfied simply to be a poem. The rest of the cycle, however, traces a growing discomfort with this position. This is expressed nowhere more fully than in "The Unknown Woman", which appears about two thirds of the way through the cycle and is one of Blok's most famous poems. Following Blok himself—who, in his 1910 essay "On the Contemporary State of Symbolism", refers to the poem as the most vivid reflection of the period of the 'antithesis' —the poem's title has become shorthand for this whole period of Blok's work. Here is the poem in full:

Незнакомка	The Unknown Woman
По вечерам над ресторанами	Above the restaurants in the evenings
Горячий воздух дик и глух,	The sultry air is wild and still,
И правит окриками пьяными	And the decaying breath of spring
Весенний и тлетворный дух.	Sounds in the drunken cries.
Вдали, над пылью переулочной,	Above the dusty distant lanes
Над скукой загородных дач,	The boredom of summer homes,
Чуть золотится крендель булочной,	The baker's gold sign barely shines
И раздаётся детский плач.	And a child's crying rings out.
И каждый вечер, за шлагбаумами,	And every evening, beyond the crossing gates,
Заламывая котелки,	With bowler hats tipped rakishly,
Среди канав гуляют с дамами	The practiced wits stroll with the ladies
Испытанные остряки.	Among the drainage ditches.
Над озером скрипят уключины,	Out on the lake, oarlocks creak
И раздаётся женский визг,	And a woman starts to squeal,
А в небе, ко всему приученный,	While up in the sky, inured to it all,
Бессмысленно кривится диск.	The moon's disk senselessly leers.
И каждый вечер друг единственный	And every evening my only friend
В моём стакане отражен	Is reflected in my glass,
И влагой терпкой и таинственной,	Made meek and reeling, like myself,
Как я, смирён и оглушён.	By the mysterious, astringent liquid.
А рядом у соседних столиков	And drowsy lackeys lounge about
Лакеи сонные торчат,	Beside the adjacent tables
И пьяницы с глазами кроликов	While drunks with rabbit eyes
«In vino veritas!»[1] кричат.	Cry out "In vino veritas!"
И каждый вечер, в час назначенный	And every evening at a certain hour
(Иль это только снится мне?),	(Or is it just a dream?),
Девичий стан, шелками схваченный,	A girl's figure, swathed in silk,
В туманном движется окне.	Moves across the misty window.

И медленно, пройдя меж пьяными,	And slowly passing among the drunks,
Всегда без спутников, одна,	Always companionless, alone
Дыша духами и туманами,	Wafting breaths of perfume and fogs,
Она садится у окна.	She takes a table by the window.
И веют древними поверьями	And an air of ancient legend
Её упругие шелка,	Wreaths her resilient silks,
И шляпа с траурными перьями,	Her hat with its funereal plumes,
И в кольцах узкая рука.	And her slender ringed hand.
И странной близостью закованный,	And entranced by this strange nearness,
Смотрю за тёмную вуаль,	I look through her dark veil,
И вижу берег очарованный	And see an enchanted shore
И очарованную даль.	And a horizon enchanted.
Глухие тайны мне поручены,	Deep secrets are entrusted to me,
Мне чьё-то солнце вручено,	Someone's sun is in my care,
И все души моей излучины	And at every turn, astringent wine
Пронзило терпкое вино.	Pierces my soul.
И перья страуса склонённые	And drooping ostrich plumes
В моём качаются мозгу,	Waver in my brain,
И очи синие бездонные	And fathomless blue eyes
Цветут на дальнем берегу.	Bloom on the distant shore.
В моей душе лежит сокровище,	A treasure lies in my soul,
И ключ поручен только мне!	And the key belongs to me alone!
Ты право, пьяное чудовище!	You are correct, you drunken fiend!
Я знаю: истина в вине.	I know it: wine brings truth.[98]

24th April 1906. Ozerki.[97]

As many scholars have observed, the poem divides perfectly into two parts of six stanzas each, which correspond to the two worlds between which the hero, the subject of the seventh and central stanza, is suspended: the monstrous banality of suburban St. Petersburg and the "enchanted distance" of his longed-for ideal. In this sense, "The Unknown Woman" is the epitome of the dualism [*dvoemirie,* lit. 'double-worldness'] that characterizes the cycle as a whole, in which the everyday mingles with the mystical as the hero wanders the city, drawn to a higher 'beyond' even as every step confirms his entrapment in the earthly world of subjective illusion.[99]

Blok's contemporaries tend to view the second half of the poem as emerging from the first in a positive sense; even if "drunkenness has only half-opened [*priotkrylo*] the road from the world of illusion to the real world [*mir real'nosti*]," the vision nonetheless attests to the possibility of genuine spiritual experience.[100] More recent scholars have, by contrast, emphasized the deep ambivalence surrounding this experience in the poem. The symmetrical structure of the

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[97] Blok, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 2: 122.
[98] "The Unknown Woman," accessed August 22, 2017,
http://max.mmlc.northwestern.edu/mdenner/Demo/texts/unknown.html. Translation modified.
[99] Viktor Zhirmunsky, "Poeziia Aleksandra Bloka," in *Ob Aleksandre Bloke. Stat'i*, pp. 77-80.
[100] ibid., p. 80

poem—in which the cheap surroundings of a suburban restaurant are couched in the spiritual lexicon of Blok's first volume even as the mysterious woman (the Beautiful Lady?) is clothed in the garb of a street prostitute—insistently mingles the earthly and the divine, as words and phrases echo across these spheres. The result is not so much to divide the poem along the line suggested by its symmetrical structure—to cast the second half of the poem as a transformed version of the first, and hence closer to the speaker's longed-for 'ideal'—but to create an overwhelming "sense of having been there before" that "testif[ies] to the ultimate sameness of all levels of consciousness in the poem."[101] For these readers, the poem and its insistent mixing of the 'high' and the 'low', the 'poetic' and the 'earthly' is testament to the romantic irony that now saturated Blok's worldview. Having lost faith in the existence of an objective reality outside the self, the poet despairs at the inevitable subjectivism of his vision; if nothing has an independent value beyond the poet's imagination, no ideal is possible, let alone within reach.

This reading is troubled by the poem's metrical structure. If the first, 'earthly' part of the poem refuses to settle into a pattern (with light feet irregularly scattered throughout each stanza), the second, 'poetic' part deviates from the metrical scheme only according to traditional variations for iambic tetrameter (with the third foot of each line most likely to be without stress). The difference merits attention because it resonates on the semantic level, as is made clear in the seventh stanza (the only stanza in which feet are almost all stressed): here, the repetitive time of the first half of the poem ("and every evening") and the particularized time of the second ("at the appointed hour") collide. It is no coincidence that this stanza—as John Bowlt claims, "the tensest point of the poem"—is also that in which the poem's pivotal question appears, ironically, as an aside: "or is it just a dream?"[102] The much-debated question of whether the hero's vision is a genuine mystical experience or the pathetic fantasy of a drunk is marked as also a question of *poetic temporality*; its answer is inseparable from this concern.

With this in mind, Bowlt's observation, in the same article, that the poem's hypnotically regular (iambic) meter and rhyme scheme, as well as its dense web of sonic and semantic echoes and repetitions, render it an "unmotivated display of device" is extremely important; far from "unmotivated," however, this display of device is central to the poem's meaning.[103] Countless readers of the poem have commented on the poem's perfect rhymes and unrelieved iambic tetrameter lines, the repetition and transformation of words and phrases from one half of the poem in the next, the long 'a' sounds that echo across the poem's two halves, in each part associated with diametrically opposed semantic and emotional spheres, and so on. These patterns have been exhaustively listed elsewhere and need not detain us now.[104] What I want to focus on instead is the extraordinary consonance of content and form that the identification of such patterns reveals—so exaggerated that it is the very coincidence of sound and sense that becomes most significant, not individual instances of their correlation.[105]

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[101] John Bowlt, "Aleksandr Blok: The Poem 'The Unknown Lady'," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 17 (1975), 349-356 (p. 356).

[102] ibid., p. 353.

[103] ibid., p. 351.

[104] See e.g. D. M. Magomedova et al., "'Neznakomka' A. A. Bloka: piat' razborov", *Vestnik PSTGU*, vol. 2, issue 16 (2009), 36-108; Mints, *Poetika*, pp. 532-539.

[105] The exaggerated 'poeticity' of the poem extends beyond its verbal and sonic patterning; as scholars have variously demonstrated, the poem is replete with recycled images (both from Blok's own work and the work of other Symbolists, notably Briusov and Gippius), Symbolist tropes, the Romantic tradition, and more; these are images "worn down to the level of clichés" [*sterty do stepeni shtampov*], as Tynianov points out (1921: 244). See e.g. the chapter on the semantic aureole of the iambic tetrameter with masculine/dactylic rhymes in Gasparov 1984. Note

As is implicit to the concept of rhythm as *event*, content cannot exist in poetry without form, and especially rhythm, just as rhythm cannot be entirely independent of content. "The Unknown Woman", taking this premise to its logical extreme, addresses its most urgent question to poetry itself. For the poem's form and its content are perfectly aligned in all ways except one: the uncertain status of the event *in* the poem—" or is it just a dream?"—is in tension with the poem's forcible—hyperbolic—assertion of its status *as* rhythmic event.[106] The central ambiguity of the poem is not so much the nature of the hero's vision, but that raised by this juxtaposition of spiritual (non-)event and poetic event.[107] The poem raises the question of poetry's ability to transform mundane time or to make us aware of its passing and, moreover—if it is indeed possible—what the value of this transformation might be.

The final line of "The Unknown Woman" dramatizes this impasse. While few critics fail to mention the repetition of the Latin proverb, "in vino veritas", that appears in the sixth stanza of the poem, none remark the metrical coincidence of the original line («In vino veritas!» кричат [*"In vino veritas!" they shout*]) and this new iteration (Я знаю: истина в вине [*I know: truth is in wine*]), despite the differing positions and languages in which the proverb appears in each. Metrically identical yet pointedly different, the lines assert both return and progress, highlighting the repetition with difference that is the central device of poetry and, in particular, rhythm; despite the poem's apparent symmetry, this final line asserts that perfect symmetry is a poetic impossibility. Read negatively, it leaves the poem echoing in an imperfect chamber, its many repetitions, echoes and returns nothing more than so many reflections in the hero's wine glass. Read positively, it demonstrates the inevitable change that the process of reading and the fact of rhythm effect. Does the event of the poem change everything or nothing, the final line seems to ask; does something happen—or does nothing?

Even more emphatically than the other poems I have looked at here, "The Unknown Woman" is concerned with poetry's precarious reliance upon both repetition and difference. Pointedly distanced from the urban context that is the backdrop to the rest of the *City* cycle, "The Unknown Woman" accepts the inevitably isolated position of the lyric but asserts the value of the particular kind of experience it offers. If the mysterious woman at its center does not offer a definitive answer to the question repeatedly posed by Blok's poetry of this period, she embodies the inevitable persistence of doubt. Certain of the woman's existence only in her presence, able only to register the event in passing, "The Unknown Woman" demonstrates the limits of the lyric even as it declares its faith in the fleeting insight to which form gives rise. "The poet is the son of harmony," Blok would assert in his 1921 speech, "On The Poet's Calling"; "his undertaking […] is incommensurable with the order of the external world." It is this precisely this isolation that enables the poet to catch the "rhythmic oscillations" of history and "to bring this harmony into the world."[108]

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also the similarity to Briusov's "Passer-by" ["*Prokhozhaia*"] that struck many contemporaries (Blok, *PSS*, II, p. 761). See also Magomedova et al., "Neznakomka".
[106] Note the frequent description of listening to Blok reading the poem as like witnessing "the process of creation being repeated" (Blok, *PSS*, II, p. 760).
[107] Taking a further step back, note the 'event' of the poem's publication, which shot Blok to fame; from the darling of Symbolist circles, "precious to a few," he became "the favorite of the crowd" (Sergei Solov'ev, cited Blok, *PSS*, II, p. 763).
[108] Blok, *Sobranie sochinenii*, VI, pp. 160-8.

Conclusion

The grand vision behind Blok's trilogy has struck many as a culmination of the Romantic cult of the poet and the idea, in Yury Lotman's description, "that a poet's life, his personality and fate merge with his creative work, creating for the public a certain unified whole."[109] More specifically, Jonathan Stone has described the trilogy as part of the general shift towards "biographical Symbolism" that took place under the auspices of the *Musaget* publishing house in the early 1910s. Reorganizing their work and publishing it in collected volumes, the Symbolists sought to reorient their work so that it might speak to a wider audience than that reached by the densely allusive networks of poetic cycles that characterize their earlier publications.[110]

Where Stone reads these efforts to historicize Symbolism and to document the evolution of its central tenets as a response to the self-declared "crisis" that beset the movement in 1910, Blok's reconceptualization of his oeuvre might instead be viewed as a response to a larger crisis, one that reached beyond Symbolism to lyric's very form. For while the biographical element in Blok's work is indeed strong, the elaborate and purposeful nature of the poet's arrangement of his "random" lyrics into a "trilogy of incarnation" points to an equal concern with the event as both a formal and a temporal problem. Intended "to establish the internal linkage of *events*" [my emphasis], the trilogy seeks to situate the individual lyric, the "random" [*sluchainyi*] result of an isolated creative experience, within the design of the whole, the narrative of a life and the flow of history.[111] Elevating the random "to the level of 'the inevitable'," the trilogy straddles the same divide between chance and plan as the event.[112]

In this sense, the trilogy is a response to a more general modern dilemma than that faced by the Symbolists in 1910—a three-volume dramatization of the urgent question mark placed over lyric form by the modern age. Though it is with reservations, Blok eventually affirms the ability of poetry to intervene in the world, for reasons that "The Last Day" already makes clear. This ability resides in rhythm, which emerges from a dialectic of *structure* and *uncertainty*. Rhythm renders the confusion and chaos of historical events comprehensible without making them static; indeed, it is the predictability inherent to rhythm that guarantees the singularity of the events that constitute it. For even if we remain stuck with "The Last Day" on an infinite loop, we encounter the rhythm of the poem each time we read it; engaging actively with the verse line, our feeling of time is restored. For Blok, this is what renders the ordered structures of verse, *stikhi*, uniquely capable of producing the sensitivity necessary to perceive the "rhythmic oscillations" of the *stikhiia*, the elemental forces that make history move.

This conception of rhythm offers the key to understanding the intensity and ubiquity of highly technical debates about poetic rhythm in the years between and following the revolutions of 1905 and 1917. These were years of war and civil war, revolution and massive social upheaval; strange years, it would seem, to spend fighting about the metrical foot. Yet Russian modernists turned to poetry and rhythm not in search of an escape from historical circumstances but in an attempt to articulate more clearly the precise nature of literature's potential role in these circumstances. By returning to the specificity of poetic form, its functioning, and its effects, these poets and theorists looked to identify the concrete ways that poetry intervenes in the world

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[109] Yury Lotman, *Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin* (Leningrad, 1981), p. 53.
[110] Stone, "Biographical Symbolism."
[111] Blok, *Sobranie sochinenii*, V, p. 433.
[112] Dmitrii Maksimov, *Poeziia i proza Al. Bloka* (Leningrad, 1981), p. 47.

as poetry—that is, to interrogate the *poetic means* by which a new language, a new relation to things, and even a new world might be achieved.

CHAPTER TWO:

IMAGE

Introduction

Does the term 'image' refer to pictorial representation or to a (combination of) word(s)? If by image we mean a *likeness*, the obvious answer would seem to be that an image is a picture: the verbal image, which resembles its object thanks only to conventional interpretations of arbitrary signs, is a figurative extension of the image and shares its qualities only metaphorically. The verbal image is doubly suspicious for its dependence upon reports of mental imagery, a notoriously difficult phenomenon to verify and at best impossibly impermanent and inconsistent in comparison with the material solidity of a graphic representation.[1] No surprise, then, that 'text' (and with it, the verbal image) is so often positioned as the 'other' of image 'proper', the second term in an intractable binary that divides—as W.J.T. Mitchell observes in his invaluable study, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*—symbols and the world, signs and their meanings, and "(in the largest sense) culture and nature."[2] Artificial and arbitrary, the verbal image threatens to "[disrupt] natural presence by introducing unnatural elements into the world—time, consciousness, history, and the alienating intervention of symbolic mediation."[3]

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[1] Mental imagery has been central to discussions of the mind since the time of the Ancient Greeks and continues to be a topic of much debate in psychology. See *Imagery*, ed. by Ned Block (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981). P.N. Furbank comments at length on the mental image, which he finds to be, if not entirely illusory, too ephemeral a basis upon which to construct a serious discussion of the poetic image (*Reflections on the Word "Image"* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1970). My own view, to be elaborated below, is that the discussion of mental imagery in connection with poetry is to be avoided when it stands for a conception of the imagination as a residue of perception, i.e., when the "mental images" provoked by poetry are understood to have a natural or necessary connection with real experience in the world. In other senses, however, I take no issue with the phenomenon, which seems to be a quite necessary part of cognition. See W.J.T. Mitchell's informative discussion in *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 14-19.

[2] Mitchell, *Iconology*, p. 43. My account in these pages is indebted to Mitchell's careful work on this topic in the past decades. See also *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994) and *What do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[3] Mitchell, *Iconology*, p. 43. An inverted version of this hierarchy is at the center of the debate most famously exemplified by Lessing's *Laokoön* (1766), whose rebuttal of Horace's then-popular maxim, *ut pictura poeisis*, emphasizes the limits of painting as a static art of *space* in opposition to literature, the dynamic art of *time*. This distinction persists in criticism to this day. See W.J.T. Mitchell's numerous corrections to this view, e.g. "The Politics of Genre: Space and Time in Lessing's Laocoon," *Representations*, no. 6, 1984, pp. 98–115; "Spatial Form in Literature: Toward a General Theory," *The Language of Images,* ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. 271-299. This chapter will be interested in both the spatial and temporal qualities of verbal imagery.

As others have argued, the matter might equally be viewed from quite the opposite angle. Visual images, for all their apparent materiality, are no more stable or permanent than the verbal or mental image, and no less likely to be perceived differently by different viewers. If visual images seem closer to 'reality', this is only because Western culture has learnt to think it so, a lesson imparted in no small part by the invention of artificial perspective, with its claim to portray "the way we see,"[4] and reinforced by the dependence of the classical divisions of Western philosophy (between mind and matter, subject and object) upon a certain (direct) relation "between visual images and the objects they stand for."[5] In the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries, by contrast, the tendency has been towards viewing the visual image as "the sort of sign that presents a deceptive appearance of naturalness and transparence concealing an opaque, distorting, arbitrary mechanism of representation, a process of ideological mystification."[6] The visual image and the verbal image, that is, are both at base material representations that rely upon certain shared conventions regarding the interpretation of signs. Now that we are surrounded by images, everything has become text.[7]

Clearly, to focus exclusively upon the common basis of word and graphic representation in semiotic convention is not much more helpful than the essentialist insistence upon their absolute difference. But if both positions elide much that is truly distinct about the visual and the verbal, they are useful insofar as they point towards the necessary ambiguity that is always attendant upon the image, which mediates between experience and representation, reality and our knowledge thereof, and invokes both visual and verbal modes of understanding as it does so.[8]

When Plato censures artistic images as imitations-of-imitations, at a double remove from and a dangerous distortion of the Real, it is this ambiguity that he seems to be attacking, and in particular the image's claim to mimic, or to reproduce, or to evoke some part of lived reality even as it always and inevitably draws attention to its artificiality.[9] Yet if it is the untidiness of

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[4] Mitchell, *Iconology*, p. 37. For more on the history of perspective, see Erwin Panofsky, "Perspective as Symbolic Form" & Christopher Wood's informative introduction to the most recent translation (New York: Zone Books, 1997). For a correction to Panofsky's argument, see James Elkins, *The Poetics of Perspective* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), which argues that perspective emerged as "an intellectual accomplishment rather than as a transcription of appearances" (p. 136) and that "Renaissance artists and writers saw many techniques where we see a single discovery" (p. 8).

[5] Mitchell, *Iconology*, p. 16.

[6] Mitchell, *Iconology*, p. 8.

[7] This tendency is best exemplified by modern semiotics, which emerged from the work of nineteenth-century philosopher and mathematician, Charles Sanders Peirce. Cf. more generally the dominance of linguistic philosophy in the twentieth century. See Richard Rorty, *The Linguistic Turn: Essays in Philosophical Method* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992).

[8] Mitchell discusses the entwinement of verbal and visual representation in "Ut Pictura Theoria: Abstract Painting and Language" (*Picture Theory*, p. 213-239). He argues that it is impossible to construct a solid wall between even the most abstract visual art and verbal discourse due to the inevitably verbal nature of interpretation. My view of their interaction in poetry, to be described in this chapter, is somewhat different.

[9] As Mitchell reminds us, an image "cannot be seen *as such* without a paradoxical trick of the consciousness, an ability to see something as 'there' and 'not there' at the same time." *Iconology*, p. 17. The inherent ostentation of verbal imagery is made explicit in such figures as metaphor, in which two *un*like things are compared to reveal their shared properties. The contrived nature of such comparisons is highlighted further by the fact that "[t]he interpretation of a metaphor often turns not on the properties of the secondary subject has but on what we habitually *pretend* it to have: think of what happens when we call someone a gorilla." (David Hills, "Metaphor," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), ed. by Edward N. Zalta, URL = https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/metaphor/.) (Note that this ostentation can be of differing degrees, with scholars typically distinguishing between explicit metaphors (e.g. "I am a moth") and implicit metaphors (e.g. "I flutter helplessly"). Plato's arguments against imagery are made most famously in the *Republic*.

the image—its pretensions to mediation between different realms of experience and its tendency to spill over any clear divide between categories—that makes it so resistant to definition, this same quality suggests one way to delimit the set of questions raised by the image, and namely: to view the image not in terms of *likeness* per se but as the generator of a certain kind of relationality, a way of bringing different realms of experience into contact and of making connections between them. In this case, what is at stake is not the relative accuracy of verbal representation as compared to visual, nor the relative veracity of mental imagery over and against perception, but rather the variety of overlapping cognitive axes along which words and pictures ask us to move.[10]

This chapter is about the image as a poetic device, but it will not be interested in specific verbal figures such as metaphor or metonymy. Speaking instead in terms of the poetic image, it looks to position Russian modernism's artistic and theoretical interest in this poetic device in the larger context of the period's persistent fascination with making connections across and between categories. Modernism's interest in bringing art into contact with life is well known, as is the era's fascination with new syntheses of the arts and with synaesthetic blurring of the senses. In Russia, particular attention was paid to the boundary between the verbal and the non-verbal, or—as this opposition was understood—between the rational and the ir- or a-rational. When the Russian Symbolists, following the philosopher and linguist Aleksandr Potebnya, declared art to be "thinking in images" [*myslit' obrazami*] or the Futurists invented *zaum'*, the "transrational" or "beyonsense" language consisting of "chopped-up words, half-words, and their artful combinations" (as the 1913 manifesto *The Word as Such* [Slovo kak takovoe] explains), both groups alike sought to access a truth other than that made available by rational speech.[11] Language thus liberated from its traditional denotational tasks, poets focused instead on the expressive potential of the word 'as such', emphasizing its sonic or musical qualities as well as its physicality as a thing.[12]

This was, in other words, a period during which the expressive capacity of different media and their ability to signify were being intensely debated—when the signifying qualities of both the word and graphic art were up for debate, as well as the referential capacity of these

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[10] Juliette Stapanian's study of the intersections between poetic practice and painting in Russian modernism speaks in terms of verbal and pictorial 'codes', which generative "a multiplicity of cognitive axes along and among which the reader/spectator is able to move" (*Mayakovsky's Cubo-Futurist Vision* (Houston, Rice University Press, 1986), p.3). She attributes this quality of Mayakovsky's poetry to his interest in cubist painting. I would argue that it amplifies an effect always latent in the poetic image.

[11] Herbert Eagle and Anna Lawton (eds.), *Russian Futurism through its Manifestoes, 1912-1928* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 61. Note that the intentions of Kruchenykh and Khlebnikov differed importantly in this connection: Kruchenykh sought to liberate linguistic sound from the yoke of rationality, whereas Khlebnikov looked to return to a language of pure rationality, viewing everyday language as "the shadow of the great laws of the pure word fallen on an uneven surface" ("Nasha osnova", in Velimir Khlebnikov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, ed. by R.V. Duganov, 6 vols. (Moskva: IMLI RAN, 2005) 5: 167-181 (p. 169).

[12] The semantic indeterminacy around which *zaum'* revolves is quite different from the latent polysemy with which Potebnya is concerned. For Potebnya and his followers, multiplicity of meaning resides in the word's "inner form," the ancient tropes from which the word's modern meaning stems. For the *zaumnik*s, by contrast, it is the outer form of the word, its sound, which is most important. For detailed discussion, see Steiner, *Russian Formalism*, p.145-6. While the Russian Symbolists are often associated with music and the post-Symbolist avant-garde with visual art, the Futurists and the Formalists were far from uninterested in sound (as Brik writes, "poetic language is musical language"), much as Symbolism had its own active visual culture.

media.[13] It seems not coincidental, therefore, that, for the various competing artistic programs of Russian modernist poetry and theory, the status and import of the image, or *obraz*, became *the* means of self-definition and aesthetic polemic. If it seems odd that the most concerted efforts to distinguish clear boundaries between literary movements and ideologies were made *via* a device that, as I have already begun to suggest, has never been one to heed strict demarcations of any kind, this only confirms the slippery and often contradictory ground across which the image guides us. It is both ironic and to be expected, then, that the Russian modernist poet most associated with the image, Boris Pasternak, has proven so resistant to categorization. Now claimed as a Symbolist, now as a Futurist, Pasternak is characterized above all by his "borderline" [*pogranichnyi*] status.[14] This position is perhaps made inevitable by the poet's shifting alliances—he associated at different times with both Symbolists and Futurists—but it is also due, more fundamentally, to the centrality of the image to his work.[15]

This chapter focuses on Pasternak's 1917 collection, *Poverkh bar'erov* [*Over the Barriers*].[16] Pasternak, as is well known, disliked his early writing, deeming it pretentious and too self-consciously innovative with regard to technique; he even rewrote large swathes of *Over the Barriers* in the late 1920s, with a new edition appearing in 1928.[17] Though the collection was not without its admirers among Pasternak's contemporaries, their assessment largely matched Pasternak's own, with reviewers generally finding it opaque, excessively complex and lacking focus.[18] For many, this was precisely a problem of Pasternak's imagery. Although routinely praised for its "concreteness" and connection with the everyday,[19] critics found Pasternak's

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[13] The same, of course, holds true for a variety of European modernist practitioners, not least the Cubist painters who were to have such a decisive influence on the Russian avant-garde. I discuss the specificity of the Russian approach in section three of the present chapter.

[14] Lazar Fleishman, *Boris Pasternak v dvadtsatye gody* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1982), p.10.

[15] Pasternak attended the seminars held at the Symbolist publishing house *Musaget.* For more on Pasternak's connection with Symbolism, see e.g. V.S. Baevskii, "Lirika Pasternaka v istoriko-kul'turnom kontekste," *Izvestiia Akademii nauk. Seriia literatury i iazyka*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (1988), 130-41; Sir Maurice Bowra, "Boris Pasternak" in *The Creative Experiment* (London: Macmillan, 1949), pp. 128-58; Lazar Fleishman, *Boris Pasternak: The Poet and His Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990). Pasternak, who was conscious of his late start as a writer, felt himself to be a literary outsider, "condemned to originality" by his long "abstention from writing." *Okhrannaia gramota,* in Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, ed. by D. V. Tevekelian, 11 vols. (Moskva: Slova, 2003-2005) 3: 159. All citations from Pasternak's work will refer to this edition, except where marked.

[16] The forty-nine poems in the collection were written between 1914 and 1916. It was first published in December 1916 but is dated January 1917. Several scholars regard it as marking Pasternak's "departure from symbolism and his turn toward futurist, especially Mayakovskian, poetics," one reason for my focus on it here (Larissa Rudova, *Understanding Boris Pasternak* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), p. 17).

[17] Pasternak undertook major revisions before reissuing the new edition, significantly revising some poems and excising a large number of others. The order of the poems also changed considerably (though the poems I will look at in what follows appear in the same, or roughly the same, position in both). I am working with the original edition.

[18] It is unsurprising that the collection attracted so little attention when it was first published, at the peak of the war and on the eve of a year of revolution and radical upheaval. The most enthusiastic responses to the collection came from Pasternak's friends and fellow poets, Konstantin Loks, who praised its "dithyrambism," and Sergei Bobrov, who had been instrumental in publishing the collection under the auspices of the futurist group, Centrifuge. Opinion since has been divided. Vladimir Markov (*Russian Futurism*, pp. 268-70), Larissa Rudova (*Understanding Boris Pasternak*, pp. 17-22) and Henry Gifford (*Pasternak: A Critical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 41-7) offer the most extensive English-language commentaries on the cycle; all regard it as exhibiting "[a]ll basic elements of [Pasternak's] style and poetic vision" (Markov, *Russian Futurism*, p. 268) but nonetheless ultimately only a precursor to "his first triumph," *My Sister—Life* (Gifford, *Pasternak*, p. 42).

[19] "Pasternak's poetry is of the close-at-hand and the concrete," as Andrei Syniavsky writes. "Poeziia Pasternaka", *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy* (Moskva: Biblioteka poeta, 1965), p. 56.

poetry to be so "overloaded" [*peregruzhennyi*] and "oversaturated" [*perenasyshchennyi*] with images as to be almost incomprehensible: "You're getting in the way of people understanding you" [*Vy meshaete liudiam poniat' vas*], as Gorky would chide the young Pasternak.[20] It is as though the very stuff of life were too much to comprehend. Yet if for his critics the chaotic, often excessive imagery of Pasternak's early poetry seems to prevent comprehension and even to be directly opposed to it, the spatial, material connotations of their criticisms suggest the issue might be viewed from another angle: there is something *material* about what this poetry asks us to understand, and there is something material about the *way* we are to understand it, too.[21]

This is suggested already by the Russian word for image, *obraz*, which comes from the same root as *razit'*, "to strike, to hit": the *obraz* is an image, a representation, but it is inextricable from this notion of physical impact.[22] As I shall argue in this chapter's first part, this Russian etymology points toward an alternative way to conceptualize the functioning of poetic imagery more broadly, an approach suggested by Pasternak's work and developed in the work of the Formalists. Where theorists have tended to approach the image from a semiotic perspective, focusing above all upon what the image *means* (or fails to mean) as a sign, or upon the problematic relationship between signifier and signified toward which the image draws out attention, the Russian context reminds us that poetic imagery plays an equally important *structural* role—indeed, that structure is central to the emergence of sense in poetry more generally.

While spatial metaphors have often been used to describe the functioning of figurative language, this chapter argues that describing the mechanics of individual figures is less important than identifying the origin of these spatial metaphors themselves.[23] As I shall claim, they emerge

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[20] The poet Nikolai Aseev, who, with Pasternak and Sergei Bobrov, was part of the Futurist group Centrifuge, comments on this same contradiction, noting, "the precision and distinctness of Pasternak's definitions, most of which, as I have said, draw on a stock of ordinary, everyday things, evidently confuse those critics who are accustomed to the 'refined' comparisons of a specifically poetic vocabulary. Nothing else could explain the accusation against Pasternak that his imagery is overcomplicated. Certainly he is far from simple and he never employs a cliché; yet even in his most difficult similes or contrasts he always remains realistic and exact to the point of reproducing everything to scale, whether he is comparing morning to a frame-maker walking along with a baguette, or making the blizzard whirl 'like a bicycle' over his wallpaper" ("Melody or Intonation" [1923], reprinted in *Pasternak*, ed. by Donald Davies and Angela Livingstone (London: Macmillan, 1969), p. 80. On Gorky's attitude toward Pasternak, see V.N. Al'fonsov, *Poeziia Borisa Pasternaka* (Sankt-Peterburg: Saga, 2001), pp. 343-7. Lydia Ginzburg also discusses their relationship in her introduction to *Perepiska Borisa Pasternaka*, ed. by E.V. Pasternak and E.B. Pasternaka (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1990), pp. 4-6.

[21] Alexander Zholkovsky's claim that all-pervasive *contact* is the defining feature of Pasternak's work is relevant here ("The Window in the Poetic World of Pasternak," trans. by L.M. O'Toole, *New Literary History*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Winter 1978): 279-314). Zholkovsky identifies the two central themes that define Pasternak's 'poetic world', that of contact (metaphorical, physical, phonetic) and that of the "higher phase," that is, "intensiveness of existence, where everything depicted seems to be in the highest possible state of elevation and tension" (pp. 290-1). These themes are instantiated in various ways (e.g., via motifs such "catching hold", "loving embrace", "trembling"; in such thematic dichotomies as the small-scale and the vast, the everyday and the significant; and so on). Zholkovsky conceives of Pasternak's work in terms of the different ways that these two themes interact, noting, on the one hand, the persistence with which contact between things in Pasternak's poetic world lead to the uncovering of the higher phase, and, on the other, the role of the higher phase in enabling contact between all things. I do not intend to discuss here the materialist approach to the image that is common in Soviet criticism. See e.g. Ivan Vinogradov, *Khudozhestvennyi obraz* (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel', 1936).

[22] Importantly, the -*raz*- root here is not the same as the prefix *raz*- in *razum*, intellect.

[23] The word 'metaphor' is itself a spatial metaphor, stemming from the Greek *metapherō*, "to carry over". I am thinking also of descriptions of the cognitive "leap" demanded by metaphor or, more generally, of definitions of

from the poetic image's reliance upon visual as well as verbal modes of understanding, a claim that the chapter's second part develops via a reading of several poems from Pasternak's *Over the Barriers*.[24] Realizing the image and its mechanisms in hypertrophied form, this collection demonstrates that the visual aspect of the image lies not so much in some purportedly vivid or concrete quality of its language as in its insistence upon the image's function as an element of poetic structure.[25] This focus recasts meaning as less a matter of semantic content than of a certain kind of relationality. For while the often dense and sometimes alogical nature of Pasternak's imagery might seem to preclude clear verbal communication, its imagery looks precisely to encourage communication in the original sense of the word—as a physical transfer or transmission that brings words and things into contact and precipitates mutual exchange.[26]

This reading would seem to place Pasternak in direct opposition to the Formalists, who were motivated precisely by the desire to establish clear boundaries between the study of literature and other spheres of inquiry. This was expressed in their interest in defining the difference between practical language, used purely instrumentally, and poetic language, which has no purpose beyond itself. The third and final section of this chapter shows that the Formalists' apparent disregard for the referential value of poetic language obscures a deeper interest in the role of poetic structure in revealing and reviving the structures of the word and the world. Reading Yury Tynianov's 1924 essay, "The Interval" [*Promezhutok*], this final section demonstrate the centrality of the image to the formalist conception of poetic language and of the role of the literary theorist more broadly.

Part One: Image in Theory

If the history of Western literature could, as Paul de Man suggests, be conceived "in terms of the relative prominence and the changing structure of metaphor,"[27] this history must itself be viewed within "the broad historical context of knowledge as a cultural product."[28] This much is made clear by Michel Foucault's analysis of "the order of things," the figures of knowledge that have held the world together during different historical epochs (or "epistemes", as Foucault terms

figures of speech as "the visibility of language." Paul Ricoeur, "The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Autumn 1978): 143-159 (p. 144).

[24] This is suggested already by what Aristotle identifies as the two functions of imagery, which, he argues in his *Poetics*, is used both to fill lexical lacunae and to decorate or embellish.

[25] The Russian verb *pisat'* means both "to write" and "to draw".

[26] As the media theorist John Durham Peters has shown, the changing meaning of the word 'communication' is intimately connected with the rise of new communication technologies at the end of the nineteenth century, which resulted in a goal-oriented conception of communication as moving from sender to receiver. This resulted in widespread anxiety regarding its liability to fail, which Peters views as the root of the modernist preoccupation with the insurmountable barriers to genuine interpersonal communication (*Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), esp. pp. 1-21). The shift may also explain critical concern regarding the communicative failures of Pasternak's poetry. Notably, anxiety about the possibility of communication is quite foreign to Pasternak's own work. Not only was he a remarkably prolific correspondent, writing hundreds of letters each year, the worldview expressed by his poetry is markedly optimistic; as Andrei Syniavsky comments, "Wonder at the miracle of existence—this is the pose in which Pasternak has frozen, forever amazed and enchanted by his discovery: 'it's spring again'." "Poeziia Pasternaka," p. 15.

[27] "Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image," *Rhetoric of Romanticism*, p. 1.

[28] Stephen Foley, "Imagery," *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, p. 665.

them).[29] For W.J.T. Mitchell, building upon Foucault, the image is not simply a particular kind of sign but a notion that emerges from and fundamentally shapes our perception of the things in the world and our relation to them. The long list of things that we call by the name of "image"— which includes a broad range of visual and non-visual phenomena from pictures and statues to maps, optical illusions, patterns, poems and even ideas—reflects the diverse ways in which different disciplines, discourses and demographics have organized the world and their knowledge of it.[30]

The image in theory is, in other words, the image in history, so that this section will first look backwards before it attempts to move ahead. As it does so, however, it will trace the relatively constant tendency to regard the image as *the* defining device of poetic language, whether understood negatively (as with Plato's mistrust of art and its reliance upon mimesis) or positively (as by Aristotle, who regards metaphor as the highest proof of artistic genius).[31] As we will see, the need to distinguish poetic discourse as a special kind of knowledge via the image came to be felt particularly keenly with the rise of science and the collapse of the medieval world-view, as poets sought in the image a way to restore the inherent meaningfulness of nature and the purposiveness of human life.[32] As a consequence, the term 'image' came to be attached to a certain kind of poetic knowledge. However, while this knowledge has been located beyond the reach of rational scientific thought, it continues to be conceived as primarily *semantic*, aligned with the mind as opposed to the body and providing privileged access to the internal world of human experience and thought.

I begin here with a brief survey of the history of the term 'image' in Anglo-American poetry and scholarship that expands upon these statements and provides a contrastive backdrop for the discussion of the image's material, structural aspect that follows. Here, I discuss Pasternak's image in the light of a different tradition, one that understands the functioning of the poetic image in terms of the material constraints of the poetic medium and is interested in it primarily as a means of articulating the particular way that poetic language brings things into relation. Without making claims regarding the privileged referential power of poetic language, its "more intimate" relationship with things, this approach argues that poetry's particularity resides in the demands it makes upon its reader to traverse different modes of understanding. Ultimately,

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[29] *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970 [1960]). Foucault describes the underlying epistemological assumptions (*episteme*) of different historical periods in the terms of the image: the Renaissance *episteme*, for example, stressed similitude; knowledge of the world stemmed from detecting and interpreting the infinite echoes and resemblances between things in it. The Classical *episteme*, by contrast, is based on order, measurement, and classification; here, differentiation between things is key.

[30] For more on this "far-flung family" of imagery, see Mitchell, *Iconology*, pp. 9-14.

[31] I do not intend to recount in detail the confusing multiplicity of ways in which "image" has been applied in literary criticism, though I will note where the term becomes broader and more specific. Frazer and Mitchell both regard the term "image" as among "the vaguest" in literary criticism. It has been used to refer to literal as well as figurative language (to "what the words actually name" (the title of the chapter on imagery in Hugh Kenner's *The Art of Poetry* (New York: Rinehart, 1959)) as well as to tropes), to "the representation in poetry of any sense experience" (Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, *Understanding Poetry* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston Inc., 1961), p. 555), and "and even [to] recurrent semantic, syntactic, and phonemic motifs" (Mitchell, *Iconology*, p. 24).

[32] This is the argument made by Nicholas Halmi, whose study of the "intellectual and social purposes" of the Romantic symbol views its main function as compensatory: "defined as inherently and inexhaustibly meaningful, [the symbol] existed equally and equivalently in diverse ontological and temporal realms — art and nature, antiquity and modernity — indicat[ing] that the principal concern of their symbolist theory was not in identifying, still less in interpreting, actual symbols, but instead in establishing an ideal of meaningfulness itself." (*The Genealogy of the Romantic Symbol* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 18.

I find that it is precisely in drawing attention to its conventionality that the poetic image returns us to the things and structures of the world.

History of the Term 'Image' in Anglo-American Poetry and Criticism

The meaning of 'image' as a term of English-language literary criticism has undergone significant changes since the term's first appearance in the seventeenth century.[33] As Ray Frazer has shown, the term entered literary critical vocabulary as a result of empiricist models of the mind, which regarded the origin of all knowledge as located in the impressions left by sense experience upon the mind, and hence consciousness as "a system of receiving, storing, and retrieving mental images."[34] In this environment, poetry, and language in general, came to be viewed as "a process of pictorial production and reproduction." The skilled poet was he who was able to capture the images of daily sense experience in his imagination ready then to be transcribed into verse.[35] Rhetorical figures and tropes, the center of Renaissance critics' attention, were now dismissed as the remnants of a prescientific age, "nothing but a matter of relations among signs," and use of them declined, as did their prestige; "plain" and "perspicuous," by contrast, the image reached right out to objects, "often giv[ing] us more lively ideas than the sight of things themselves."[36]

For Coleridge, writing at the end of the eighteenth-century, the ability to capture and reproduce mental pictures was a faculty not of the imagination but of mere fancy. Imagination, Coleridge judged, was not that which *reproduced* reality but which *created* it—a vital force in its

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[33] The history that follows is indebted to the overview provided by Ray Frazer in "The Origin of the Term 'Image'," *ELH*, vol. 27, no. 2, 1960, pp. 149–161. Clearly, imagery has existed in poetry since far before the seventeenth century, as has critical discussion of imagery. I restrict this discussion to a history of the word 'image' as a term of literary criticism. For discussion of the emergence of imagery as a literary device, see, for example, Olga Freidenberg, *Image and Concept: Mythopoetic Roots of Literature*, ed. by Nina Braginskaia and Kevin Moss, trans. by Kevin Moss (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 1997); Boris Maslov, *Pindar and the Emergence of Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). M. H. Abrams' *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953) is another rich source for this history (of which Abrams' book itself has now become part). He begins his overview with Plato and Aristotle and the concept of imitation.

[34] Mitchell, *Iconology*, p. 16.

[35] Frazer, p. 157. If it was precisely in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries that Horace's maxim *ut pictura poeisis* became most popular, it was also during this period that it began to meet with widespread resistance, as most famously exemplified by Lessing's *Laocoön* (1766). Lessing's refutation of the maxim rested, however, not so much upon poetry's inability to imitate as upon the specificity of what the poetic medium, as inherently temporal, could imitate in contrast with the medium of painting, which he identifies as spatial. See fn3 of this chapter for problems of this division. For a brief history of this shift, see Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, p. 13-4. Where the maxim remained popular, it began to refer to imitating the natural landscape rather than paintings (Frazer, "Origin," p. 157).

[36] Addison, cited in Mitchell, *Iconology*, p. 23. Frazer comments, "technical virtuosity [thought highly of by Renaissance thinkers] was to become suspect in the later seventeenth century; "artificial" was to take on a pejorative meaning; the employment of figures came to be thought of as a sort of dishonest tampering with the truth" ("Origin," p. 150). Frazer finds numerous reasons for this shift, including "the French classical influence on the court of Charles II, the new science, the reaction against religious enthusiasm (or all of these together)" (ibid.), a trio he characterizes as contributing to "[t]he neo-classical disinclination to be deceived and unwillingness to suspend disbelief" (ibid., p. 152). The result was a widespread "suspicion of language," which held that "if language itself was shifty, figurative language was totally dishonest, and metaphor not to be borne" (ibid., pp. 150-1). See also Richard P. Martin, "Against Ornament," *Persistent Forms: Explorations in Historical Poetics*, ed. Ilya Kliger and Boris Maslov (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016): 274-313.

own right.[37] The notion of imagery was split in two: the visual bent of the eighteenth-century image, associated with empiricist models of perception, was contrasted to the so-called higher image, a pointedly *in*visible image, which, intellectual and inward, did not simply store sensory impressions of external reality but translated or transfigured them to reveal a more profound truth than that available to rational thought and mundane vision.[38] This shift led to greater confusion in the application of the term "image", which now referred both to literal expression and figurative speech, concrete nouns and tropes, external visibilia and spiritual insight.[39] This ambiguity is quite in line with Romantic poetics more broadly, which sought to reconcile opposites in the organically unified whole of nature and the universe.[40] By sublimating and mystifying the image, Romanticism attached it to a truth that resided beyond the world of appearances but which was nonetheless manifest in nature for those minds discerning enough to grasp it.[41]

The ambiguity nurtured by Romanticism is amplified in the work of the Imagists, for whom the image became a focal point for exploring the nature of representation in art. This new modernist image combines both a hyperbolized variation upon the eighteenth-century interest in the concrete and particular ("no ideas but in things," as William Carlos Williams would declare)[42] and the logical culmination of Romanticism's sublimation of the image, now defined, by Ezra Pound, as "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time."[43] Understood "not as a pictorial likeness or impression, but as a synchronic structure in some metaphorical space," the image was now to depict both the absolutely tangible and the profoundly elusive aspects of human experience simultaneously.[44]

The apparent contradiction between these impulses has been explained with reference to what has been described as the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century "ideology of

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[37] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. Adam Roberts (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), esp. Chapter IV.

[38] On Coleridge's efforts to distinguish between ("desynonymize") terms such as imagination and fancy, image and mental picture, or allegory and symbol, see Nicholas Halmi, "Coleridge on Allegory and Symbol," *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Frederick Burwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 345-358.

[39] Image had already begun to be used as a term for metaphor in the eighteenth century; at this time, however, the extension of the term's meaning emerged from a sense of the essential basis of all language, figurative and literal, in sense experience and description. See Frazer, "Origin," pp. 158-9.

[40] As Pierre Hadot comments, the poem became for these writers "a microcosm that somehow imitates the gigantic poem of the universe." (*The Veil of Isis: An Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature*, trans. by Michael Chase (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 215.

[41] The image is central to M.H. Abrams' argument, in *The Mirror and the Lamp*, regarding Romanticism's turn away from mimesis and toward transformative expressivity. The other classic study of this phenomenon is Frank Kermode, *The Romantic Image* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002 [1957]). Kermode argues that the Romantic view of the image as "a radiant truth out of space and time" is inextricably associated with another central Romantic belief, the notion of "the necessary isolation or estrangement of men who can perceive it" (p. 4). Clearly, the Romantic image and its connections with the Romantic concept of the Symbol, as well as with philosophy and theories of the mind, deserve much more space than I am able to give them here. For a lengthier account, see Halmi, *The Genealogy of the Romantic Symbol*.

[42] Originally a line from the 1927 version of his long poem, *Paterson*.

[43] "A Few Don'ts for an Imagiste," *Poetry* Vol. 1 (March 1913), p. 200. The Imagists regarded their movement as polemically opposed to Romanticism. See T.E. Hulme's essay, "Romanticism and Classicism," written 1911-12 and first published posthumously in Hulme, *Speculations; Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. by Herbert Read (London, K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1924).

[44] Mitchell, *Iconology*, p. 25. Louis Menand calls the Imagist image "[a] kind of minimalist, or demystified, version of the symbol" ("T.S. Eliot," *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, ed. by A. Walton Litz, Louis Menand, and Lawrence Rainey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 28).

sensationalism."[45] Inspired by philosophers such as Henri Bergson, writers and critics sought to rediscover the direct link with lived experience that had been severed by nineteenth-century rationalism and positivism, for which precise and detailed observation of the particular had as its end the reduction of the particular to the general and the rule.[46] In contrast to the sensationalism of eighteenth-century discussions of the image, the modernists, following Bergson, moreover, came increasingly to view lived experience in terms of multiple and overlapping conscious states that are continually organized into complex unities (so-called 'flux'). Returning to the particular and the individual, to concrete objects and their qualities, the Imagists sought also to reveal the deep truth about the human condition that these objects contained.

We see, then, a gradual evolution of the term image, which enters poetic vocabulary as an assertion of language's ability to reproduce empirical reality, becomes a means by which to express poetic language's connection with the ideal, and then combines both these things at once. Nonetheless, despite the polemical shifts in each epoch's emphasis, and the shifting philosophical bases of their interest in the image, there is a constant tendency to view the image in relation to the mind—as the crystallization of intellectual and emotional experience of the world and that which, whether by visible or invisible, empirical or spiritual means, brings inner life into contact with perceptual reality. If later poets moved away from the firmly empirical bases of the eighteenth-century notion of the image as a perceptual residue, the continuing importance of this view of the image as the trace of something now absent is made clear by the mystical power with which it was increasingly endowed, a fascination that stems from its promise, as a direct referent to the world, thought, or human experience, to make it possible "to possess magically the absent thing, body, or person."[47] As the Imagist poet Archibald MacLeish declared, "a poem should not mean / but be."[48]

The Imagists' view of the image reverberates throughout twentieth-century literary practice and theory, most notably in the work of the so-called New Critics.[49] As has frequently been observed, the New Critics viewed the poem as a self-contained aesthetic whole, a position elaborated in books with titles such as *The Well-Wrought Urn* (Cleanth Brooks, 1947), *The Verbal Icon* (W.K. Wimsatt, 1954), and more.[50] Central to the New Critical approach, however, was what T.S. Eliot described as "heterogeneity compelled into unity": the assumption that every work of art "imposes an order, an organization, a unity" on complex and disparate materials.[51]

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[45] Louis Menand, "T.S. Eliot," p. 28.

[46] "No image can replace the intuition of duration, but many diverse images borrowed from very different orders of things, may, by the convergence of their action, direct consciousness to the precise point where there is a certain intuition to be seized." Henri Bergson, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. T. E. Hulme (London: Macmillan, 1913), p. 14. Bergson was extremely popular in Russia; his ideas were influential both for Pasternak and for formalist theory. On Bergsonian elements in Pasternak, see e.g. Guy de Mallac, "Zhivago Versus Prometheus," *Books Abroad*, Vol. 44 (1970): 227-331.

[47] Ricoeur, "The Metaphorical Process," p. 150.

[48] "Ars Poetica," *Collected Poems 1917-1982* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985)

[49] While Imagists, and Pound in particular, are often held "accountable" for the sharp rise in the popularity of the term "image" (see in particular Furbank, *Reflections on the Word "Image"*), the New Critics' embrace of the principles behind this view of the image – which they then made into a system of studying poetry – is probably equally 'to blame'.

[50] The same, but different – John Crowe Ransom's *The New Criticism* (1941), in which he brings together disparate literary scholars/theorists (I.A. Richards, T.S. Eliot, and Yvor Winters) and compares their methods with his own. Establishing the school, which was in fact much looser than e.g. Russian Formalism.

[51] T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1950), p. 243; René Wellek and Austin Warren, *A Theory of Literature*, 3rd edition (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1970), p. 24.

The echo of Imagism's interest in the poem as a unified image that contained multiplicity is quite audible in New Critical concepts such as "the concrete universal" (a category borrowed from idealist philosophy), the truth that emerges when the individual object is presented and revealed "in its full complexity and individuality."[52]

Like modernist poets (and romantic poets before them), the New Critics sought to mark out the special realm of aesthetic knowledge.[53] Their efforts to do so resulted in a paradoxical approach characterized by, on the one hand, an empirical, "scientific" methodology (intended to assert art's legitimacy as a space of cognition) and, on the other, an emphasis upon the inherent ambiguities of language (and hence, the ultimate ineffability of the knowledge to which aesthetic objects provide access).[54] Poetry was marked off from rational, positivist discourse even as literary criticism borrowed the authority of such discourses to establish its own legitimacy in the academy.[55] In practice, this meant that the New Critical method consisted in "first point[ing] at the categories of language that can be paraphrased in logical terms, and then demonstrat[ing] that the interplay of these categories creates unities that cannot be 'retold' in logical discourse."[56] This explains New Criticism's dual insistence upon the possibility of a *correct* reading of poetic imagery—that is, of reconstructing the experience from which it emerged—and the impossibility of paraphrasing fully the meaning that it contains.

As Paul de Man argues in his 1957 article, "The Dead-End of Formalist Criticism," the conflicting impulses of this approach—which insists in theory upon the 'organic unity' of the poem's structure even as critical practice uncovers the ambiguities and irony of poetry's structure and language—betray a certain deconstructive impulse, if not one acknowledged by the New Critics themselves.[57] Where the New Critics ultimately contain the ambiguities that they uncover in the image by reconciling them in the aesthetic whole (producing, as Caroline Levine has recently noted, "a dialectic of lively energy and strict control that always ends in containment"[58]), de Man instead dwells upon them, arguing, first, that these aporia point to New

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[52] Mark Jancovich, "The Southern New Critics," *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism. Volume 7: Modernism and the New Criticism*, ed. by A. Walton Litz, Louis Menand, and Lawrence Rainey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 200-218 (p. 207).

[53] This has been regarded as an attempt to protect poetry as "a haven from the alienation of industrial capitalism" (Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p. 45) and a "defense of literary studies against the encroachment by various sciences" (Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 20). As Art Berman argues, "The issues are bigger than literary criticism. They concern the attempt, in society generally, to unite a system of humanistic values with a scientific technology that threatens to subvert those values, a central dilemma of modern times" (*From the New Criticism to Deconstruction: The Reception of Structuralism and Post-Structuralism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p. 62).

[54] Walter J. Ong gives an early and lucid account of this tendency in "The Meaning of the 'New Criticism'" in *Twentieth Century English*, ed. W.S. Knickerbocker (New York, 1946), pp. 344-70. The notion of the precise yet intuitive cognitive value of art can be traced to the Romantic period and, in particular, Kant's *Critique of Judgment*.

[55] Louis Menand and Lawrence Rainey, "Introduction," *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism. Volume 7: Modernism and the New Criticism*, ed. by A. Walton Litz, Louis Menand, and Lawrence Rainey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 8-12.

[56] Ewa M. Thompson, *Russian Formalism and Anglo-American New Criticism: A Comparative Study* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), p.36.

[57] "The Dead-End of Formalist Criticism," *Blindness and Insight*, p. 231. "Almost in spite of itself, [American criticism] pushes the interpretative process so far that the analogy between the organic world and the language of poetry finally explodes" ("Form and Intent in the American New Criticism," *Blindness and Insight,* p. 28).

[58] Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 30.

Criticism's consciousness (as exemplified for de Man by I.A. Richards and William Empson) of the inevitable non-coincidence of the signifier and the signified. This awareness, de Man insists, undermines any claim as to poetic imagery's ability fully to communicate the "initial experience" from which it emerged. Insisting upon the possibility of such, criticism of this sort is blind to the true significance of the imagery it looks to elucidate: "the deep division of Being itself,"[59] that between self and the world. The image does not bridge this divide, as Romantic and New Critical readings assert, "it *names* it."[60]

De Man makes a similar argument in "The Rhetoric of Temporality," here focusing on the Romantics themselves.[61] The central issue in this essay is, again, the gap between the literal and the figurative, between self and world, between what is said and what is meant—a gap that language feigns to bridge but which it cannot help but expose.[62] Where the New Critical view of the absolute unity of the poem allows these critics to claim total control over the poem's meaning, as fundamentally elusive as it might be, de Man insistence upon this animating disunity of language results in a view of poetic significance defined by a total *lack* of control; as he summarizes, "the 'meaning' of the metaphor is that it does not 'mean' in any definite manner."[63] Nonetheless, de Man's ultimate claim is that this quality exempts literary texts from the self-deceptiveness that otherwise pervades language and its pretensions to univocity; while literary texts cannot escape the "unbearable" discontinuity of language and the natural world, of the literal and the figurative, their awareness of the instability of these relationships provokes reflection upon this fact. Despite his contention that texts (can) never say what they really mean, in other words, de Man is still concerned primarily with poetry's relation to *meaning*—with the semantic claims, failures, and potential of poetic language.

As for the poets discussed above, the New Critics and de Man are interested above all in the referential capacity of poetic language, a capacity that continues to be conceived in terms of the originary experience from which the poem emerges. While De Man's insight into the inevitable, and constitutive, opacity of figurative language may subvert the notion of the signifier's determinate relation to the signified, replacing it with a view of poetic language as a "dynamic register and producer of tensions, ironies, and contradictions," his interest in the *temporality* of figurative language reveals his continued engagement with a theoretical tradition for which the referential capacity of the image—its claim to capture and preserve a piece of reality, now absent—continues to be what is most at stake.[64]

Pasternak's Glasses: The Image and Convention

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[59] "Dead-End," p. 237.

[60] "Dead-End," p. 237.

[61] *Blindness and Insight*, pp. 187-228.

[62] De Man wrote extensively on the image, Romanticism, and criticism; I do not have the space to do his complex arguments justice here. In addition to the essays already mentioned, see "Form and Intent in the American New Criticism" (*Blindness*, pp. 20-34); "The Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image" (*Rhetoric of Romanticism*, pp. 1-18); "Image and Emblem in Yeats" (*Rhetoric of Romanticism*, pp. 145-238); "Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric" (*Rhetoric of Romanticism*, pp. 239-62).

[63] "Dead-End," p. 235. For one summary of de Man's argument with New Criticism, see Richard Rorty, "Deconstruction," *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism. Volume 8: From Formalism to Poststructuralism*, ed. by R. Selden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 166-196.

[64] Gordon Teskey, "Allegory," *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, p. 38.

How does the *material* approach to the image that I am proposing differ from the tradition just outlined? This approach is also interested in the relationship between verbal representation and the world of experience; it moves, however, from the opposite direction, asking not how the image refers back to the world but, rather, what the image sends us out towards. As such, I hope to avoid the tradition of binary thinking that underlies much of what I have just described, whereby words and pictures are conceived in terms of their relative proximity to the objects they describe.[65] This tradition is exemplified in the influential art historian Ernst Gombrich's insistence upon "the commonsense distinction between images which are *naturally* recognizable because they are imitations and words which are based on *conventions*."[66] This opposition underlies much discussion of the poetic image, which is either praised for its ability to capture visual experience, i.e., to overcome conventionality, or for the very fact of its conventionality, held by some to make language uniquely suitable for thought and reflection. It is also at the root of much of the evaluative language encountered in discussions of the image, with the superiority of nature or convention always implicit to any judgment as to the relative ability of text or image to represent the world.[67]

Such assumptions rest upon the further assumption that the primary goal of art is to reproduce, as accurately as possible, the thing, sensation, or thought it describes. This is a common theme in criticism of Pasternak's work, which frequently notes the strikingly visual quality of Pasternak's poetry of this period.[68] This quality is attributed, on the one hand, to the precision of the everyday details that fill Pasternak's verse and, on the other, to the cubistic, collage-like quality of their arrangement, a quality that inheres, in large part, in the complex syntactical and grammatical structures that are such a marked feature of the poet's early work.[69]

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[65] I leave Derrida's critique of the phonocentrism of Western metaphysics—its tendency to treat the spoken word as closer to truth than the written, *visible* word—until the next chapter.

[66] Gombrich, "Image and Code: Scope and Limits of Conventionalism in Pictorial Representation," *Image and Code*, ed. Wendy Steiner (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Studies in the Humanities, no. 2, 1981), p. 11. My emphasis. Gombrich is best known for *Art and Illusion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), in which he argues at length that pictures are as reliant upon convention as language. Mitchell argues that his later work on the *limits* of convention does not so much negate this enormously influential argument as lay bare its basis in the age-old, value-laden, and ultimately incoherent distinction between nature and convention. *Iconology*, pp. 75-94.

[67] The value attached to nature and convention is not constant. While the 'natural' connection of visual imagery to the objects it depicts has, for some, signaled its superiority to the artifice and mediation inherent to linguistic convention, others have viewed the conventionality of language as a token of human superiority to nature, signifying "spiritual, mental things, in contrast to images which can only represent visible, material objects" (Mitchell, *Iconology*, p. 78). Mitchell, whose explicit goal is to expose and avoid this and other essentializing arguments, is a notable exception to this tendency.

[68] Although his father was a painter, Pasternak himself had no formal training in graphic art. This differentiates Pasternak from the Cubo-Futurists, with whom he was closely associated in the period 1915-1917, and the majority of whom trained as painters. More detail on Pasternak's interest in visual art and on the profound influence that his father's painting had upon his poetics, see Dasa di Simplicio, "B. Pasternak i zhivopis'" in *Boris Pasternak and His Times: Selected Papers from the Second International Symposium on Pasternak*, ed. Lazar Fleishman (Berkeley: Berkeley Slavic Specialties, 1989), pp. 195-211. As Marina Tsvetaeva writes, "Pasternak *sees* in verse, whereas I *hear*" (*Pis'ma k A. Teskovoi* (Prague: Academia, 1969), p. 62. Tsvetaeva's emphasis). See also Susanna Witt's discussion of the importance of painting in *Doctor Zhivago*, "Creation as *zhivopis'*" in *Creating Creation. Readings of Pasternak's* Doctor Zhivago (Stockholm: Almqvist och Wiksell International, 2000), pp. 30-56).

[69] Yury Lotman explicitly links the complex syntactical texture of Pasternak's early work with its basis in the "visual appearance of the world" [*zritel'nyi oblik mira*]. Lotman argues that Pasternak purposefully breaks syntactic and lexical norms in order to overcome the "lie" of language and return to reality; he concludes, "the universal idea in Pasternak is a *seen* idea" [*obshchaia ideia u Pasternaka—eto uvidennaia ideia*. Lotman's emphasis]. "Stikhotvoreniia rannego Pasternaka. Nekotorye voprosy strukturnogo izucheniia teksta," *O poetakh i poezii* (Sankt-

Despite this clear indication that these poems work precisely at the intersection of the visual and the verbal, there is a tendency in criticism to work backwards from the poem's verbal fabric to the visual scene or everyday experience to which its images refer—to identify the "banal things" that the words 'actually' represent, and hence the poem's meaning.[70] The implication is that the conventionality of language must be overcome if we are to access the reality that the poem represents, a reality that is assumed to be fixed and prior to the text itself.[71]

The material approach to imagery upon which I shall elaborate in the pages to come argues instead for the poetic image's interest precisely in the limits set by convention as it explores and exploits the productive ambiguity of its position at the intersection of multiple modes of representation. Rather than thinking in terms of the natural or necessary connection of words or pictures with what they signify, I am interested here in the relationship that is established between signs themselves. This approach acknowledges the "suspension of ordinary descriptive reference" that theorists such as Roman Jakobson have identified as the defining feature of poetic discourse.[72] At the same time, it follows philosophers such as Nelson Goodman and Paul Ricoeur to contend that this very suspension of reference produces an indirect or second-order reference that returns us to reality by "remak[ing]" it.[73] As I shall argue, this is the result of the poetic image's special position on the borderline between verbal and visual representation, whereby it simultaneously engages the alternate modes of reading that these two symbolic systems dictate. Attending seriously to the pictorial dimension of the poetic image reveals the reflection upon convention that is always at its center and which returns us to reality not by claiming likeness with the things in the world but by attuning us to the structures through which we perceive this things and organize experience of them.

The following discussion is structured around an image taken from one of Pasternak's best-known poems, "Mirror" [*Zerkalo*], from the 1922 collection *My Sister—Life* (written in 1917). As we will see when we turn to *Over the Barriers*, the approach to the poetic image that I want to argue for in this chapter views the image as a network of effects rather than a single word or phrase; for now, I focus on a single stanza for the sake of clarity:

> Там сосны враскачку воздух саднят

Peterburg: Iskusstvo-SPB, 1996), pp. 688-717 (p. 709). Boris Gasparov, Lazar Fleishman, and Roman Jakobson also comment on the cubist quality of Pasternak's early work.

[70] Boris Gasparov, "Byt kak kategoriia poetiki Pasternaka (k interpretatsii stikhotvoreniia 'Zerkalo')", *Stanford Slavic Studies*, Vol. 8 (1994), pp. 56–69. Katherine Tiernan O'Connor's detailed commentary on the poems in *My Sister—Life* is a case in point (see *Boris Pasternak's* My Sister—Life*: The Illusion of Narrative* (Ann Arbor: Ardis Publishing, 1988). O'Connor's book is an invaluable guide to this complex collection, containing acute and intriguing interpretations of all its poems. The manner in which these interpretations are presented, however—first 'decoding' the images of each poem to discover what 'actually happens' and then offering analysis—seems to me to work against Pasternak's larger project.

[71] This approach accepts certain established postulates regarding the functioning of figurative language, in particular the connected notions that "certain names belong properly to certain things," that "figurative words are substituted for proper words or to fill a lexical gap," and that "to explain a trope is to find the absent proper word." Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. by Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello, SJ (London and New York: Routledge, 2003 [1975]), p. 23. In other words, work on figurative language is itself defined to a large degree by the nature/convention opposition, with the "proper" word is that which is deemed to be closest to reality (paradoxically, by dint of its very conventionality).

[72] Jakobson's best-known discussion of the self-referentiality of poetic language is found in "Linguistics and Poetics," *Language in Literature*, ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 62-94.

[73] Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976), p. 241.

Смолой; там по маете
Очки по траве растерял палисадник,
Там книгу читает Тень.[74]

The glasses that have been "lost in the grass" in this stanza have been variously interpreted. V.N. Al'fonsov, for one, is quite insistent the glasses are a metaphor for puddles left after a summer storm.[75] Katherine O'Connor, by contrast, emphasizing the day's extreme heat, suggests that they are either "a noun metaphor for sunspots" or, simply, a pair of glasses left in the garden after a long day's reading in the sun—a reading that Al'fonsov rejects outright.[76]

I am not interested in establishing which of these readings is correct; both are valid, reached via a series of deductions based on the imagery, language, and structure of the rest of the poem, the rest of the cycle, or Pasternak's poetic system considered as a whole, all legitimate and important frames of reference.[77] Where I prefer Al'fonsov's reading to that of O'Connor, however, concerns the conclusion to which this process leads. If both O'Connor and Al'fonsov view Pasternak's poetry as realistic (that is, as traceable to "a sensation that has really been experienced—visual, tactile, sonic, or all these things at once"),[78] O'Connor's ultimate goal is to reconstruct the coherent narrative that, she believes, is concealed both in this poem and in *My Sister—Life* as a whole. This requires a continual division of images into clearly distinct 'vehicles' and 'tenors': do the glasses 'stand' for sunspots, or do they metonymically imply a specific narrative, that of a day's reading in the sun? In both cases, one half of the comparison must fall away or move into the background; the word can only refer to one thing, and the ultimate goal of reading is to establish and fix this relationship.

Al'fonsov's conclusion is quite different. Although he, too, insists upon the image's basis in real feelings and experience, he finds "the point of reading [to be] not, in the end, to return to the original object, to guess 'what he meant.'"[79] Rather, he argues, these images ask us to read "broadwise [*vshir'*] to a new meaning"—a meaning that is discovered only when we allow ourselves to be "drawn into the miracle of transformation that, in poetry, reality undergoes."[80] This reading detaches the materiality of the image from the necessity of reattaching it to the real

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[74] In James Falen's translation: "The pines are aswagger, stinging the air / With needles of resinous scent; / The flowerbed, frantic, is hunting its glasses, / While Shade reads a book in its tent." Boris Pasternak and James Falen, *My Sister Life and the Zhivago Poems* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2012), p. 16. This translation used throughout this section.

[75] V.N. Al'fonsov, *Poeziia Borisa Pasternaka*, p. 328.

[76] I find much to agree with in Al'fonsov's work on Pasternak, which I will return to frequently in the pages to come. However, while I support the thrust of his project—to show that Pasternak's work "is at base comprehensible (concrete), and we can get used to reading him as we got used to reading Fet or Blok, who were also hard to understand in their time"—I am skeptical of some of his more definitive conclusions regarding the precise interpretation of individual images. *Poeziia Borisa Pasternaka*, p. 330.

[77] O'Connor, for example, arrives at *hot day* from the phrase "po maete": "The noun *maeta* denotes exhausting toil or labor. *Po maete*, therefore, could be freely rendered as "while toiling or laboring" […] *Po maete* may suggest something different, however: since *maiatnyi den'* can be used as a synonym for *hot day*, *po maete* may simply suggest in the heat or in the sun" (*The Illusion of Narrative*, p. 32). Al'fonsov's assertion that a storm has just passed is based on a later line in the poem ("And after the rain, out there in the garden, / The statues have slugs for eyes"), as well as the poems immediately preceding "Mirror" in *My Sister—Life.*

[78] *Poeziia Borisa Pasternaka,* p. 327. Pasternak himself also repeatedly asserted his poetry's realistic bent, if in more general terms: as he writes, "art is realistic in that it doesn't invent metaphor for itself but finds it in nature and solemnly reproduces it." *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 3: 187)**.**

[79] *Poeziia Borisa Pasternaka*, p. 330.

[80] *Poeziia Borisa Pasternaka*, p. 331.

object or feeling whence it emerged by pointing towards the materiality of poetry itself. These are images that must be read *spatially* ("broadwise"), a claim that is not purely metaphorical but which is attuned to the network of structural processes in which the image is involved. Let me explain by way of an analogy with visual representation.

The glasses' ability simultaneously to evoke numerous potential, and even conflicting, referents makes of the image something like a visual pun. The effect is akin to that produced by so-called "multistable" images—graphic representations such as the famous "duck-rabbit". Such images are commonly referred to as optical illusions, but this deflects from their essential function, which is "to illustrate the co-existence of contrary or simply different readings in the single image."[81] In Pasternak's poem, too, the glasses 'exist' to the same extent that the puddles or the sunspots do; everything depends upon the angle of vision.

The question seems to be more complex in poetry, where we 'see' images only to the extent that we understand the semantic content of words and attach this meaning to our existing visual knowledge of the objects in question. In some sense, this is where the analogy I am offering breaks down; the *word* 'glasses' will not suddenly mean 'puddles' if we squint and tilt our heads. In another sense, however, this is exactly what the poetic image makes possible: the word 'glasses' *does* also mean puddles, figuratively speaking, in this context and at this instant at least. If the semantic content of the word is necessary to conjure the image in the first place, that is, the image itself opens up new angles of meaning in turn. The different readings of this image provided by O'Connor and Al'fonsov demonstrate that this effect works on multiple levels and moves in multiple directions simultaneously.[82] Much as the "duck-rabbit" image challenges the notion of a natural connection between visual representation and the object it depicts and *at the same time* opens up surprising perspectives on ducks and on rabbits, the poetic image works by both annulling language's relationship with the world and simultaneously reviving it.[83] The essential point is that these new references are not fixed *and* (or because) they are always perceived simultaneously with the second-order reference of these images, which is an auto-reference to themselves as representations: both the "duck-rabbit" and the poetic image are *multi*stable, meaning that our awareness of each stable possibility is always accompanied by our consciousness of the multiple options that the image contains.

I use this example because it highlights an important issue, namely, that both textual and visual representations rely upon a complex dialectic of convention and experience—a fact which Pasternak's image, and the poetic image more generally, work to expose. This is an insight that is developed in the theory of representation offered by Nelson Goodman in his *Languages of Art*. Goodman's theory, which has as its aim precisely to distinguish between visual and verbal signs, may not seem an obvious place to look as we consider the productive intersection of visual and

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[81] WJT Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 45. His term "multistable" is a variation upon the "metastable" images discussed in Tsili Doleve-Gandelman and Claude Gandelman, "The Metastability of Primitive Artefacts," *Semiotica*, Vol. 75, Issue 3-4 (1989): 191-213.

[82] This effect relates to the problem of paraphrase, much discussed in philosophical debates about metaphor. Stanley Cavell notes the fact that most attempts to paraphrase figurative speech end with the words "and so on" without explaining this endlessness (*Must We Mean What We Say?* (New York: Scribner, 1969), p. 79). Donald Davidson suggests that the reason lies in the endlessness to what metaphor makes us notice ("What Metaphors Mean," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (1978), 31-47 (p. 46-7fn16). This is in line with his larger claim, made in the same article, that metaphors have to be defined by their characteristic 'effect' on the hearer (by what they make him 'notice') rather than as distinct cognitive contents; as he concludes, "seeing as is not seeing that" (ibid., p. 47).

[83] The "duck-rabbit" is used by Wittgenstein to establish his theory of 'seeing as'—the idea that there is no univocal 'seeing' but only multiple (sometimes contradictory) possibilities. Doleve-Gandelman and Gandelman, "Metastability," p. 191.

verbal modes of representation. However, his careful discussion of the different kinds of convention that govern these modes is quite illuminating for the borderline case represented by the poetic image.

Goodman distinguishes between texts and images in terms of "differentiation" and "density." Whereas texts are made up of differentiated characters (such as letters of the alphabet or words) which retain their significance when transferred from one context to another, pictures, Goodman argues, are "dense" or "replete" symbol schemes, in which "every mark, every modification, every curve or swelling of a line, every modification of texture or color is loaded with semantic potential." If gaps differentiate successive letters of the alphabet ("there are no intermediate characters between "a" and b" that have any function in the [differentiated] system"), a dense scheme consists, by contrast, of an infinite number of meaningful marks.[84] As Mitchell, summarizing Goodman's argument, notes,

> "A particular spot of paint might be read as a highlight on Mona Lisa's nose, but that spot achieves its significance in the specific system of pictorial relations to which it belongs, not as a uniquely differentiated character that might be transferred to some other canvas."[85]

Goodman differentiates between sign-types without falling back on the essentializing distinction between nature and convention by thinking not in terms of how visual or verbal representations relate to the world they depict but, rather, in terms of how different symbolic marks construct different systems of meaning. His interest is practical rather than metaphysical, focusing on differences in our use and interpretation of these two systems from within the conventions of representation. This approach locates the materiality of both visual and verbal representation at the intersection of the material constraints of medium and the material circumstances within which convention acts.

I dwell on Goodman's theory because it goes a long way to clarifying the precise nature of the poetic image's visual element. This arises not from a vague sense of the particular 'vividness' of certain words or their power to conjure mental images but the extent to which they work against the differentiated character of language as a system.[86] For it seems clear that poetry, while it still operates with language as a system of differentiated signs, is equally interested in density as a representational strategy: placing words and sounds into new relationships via rhyme, rhythm, assonance, and stanzaic form, the very building blocks of poetic language function by blurring the distinctions between signs.[87]

We have already seen one way in which Pasternak challenges the gaps between words upon which language as a differentiated system relies. Even the most cursory of glances at his poetry further demonstrates what I am suggesting we think of as its density, as words and phrases as though emerge one from the other in a tightly-woven network of sonic, visual, and grammatical associations. So, for example, the *ochki* [glasses] with which we are concerned

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[84] *Iconology*, p. 68.

[85] *Iconology*, p. 67.

[86] Unlike many of those who have discussed the difference between verbal and visual, Goodman does not proscribe hybrid works, despite his emphasis upon distinguishing between sign systems.

[87] Cf. Jakobson's famous definition of the poetic function: "The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination." "Linguistics and Poetics," *Language in Literature*, p. 71. Elsewhere, Jakobson notes "a remarkable analogy between the role of grammar in poetry and the painter's composition." "Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry," *Language in Literature*, p. 132.

emerge from the *kach-* words threaded through the first and second stanzas ("*kach*aetsia" ["is asway", l.2]; "k *kach*eliam" ["to the swings", l.4]; "v ras*kach*ku" ["are aswagger", l. 5]), an effect that is both sonic[88] and visual as the differing line-positions in which each *kach-* word appears enact the swinging motion that this root signifies and which, if I may speak figuratively, seems to propel the constant rearrangement to which its letters are subject. The semantic and material aspects of the words are activated and brought together with the reader's experience of interpreting them, which takes place within the specific system of relations that this composition constructs. The "glasses" image is not an isolated or isolatable entity, but must be read "broadwise"—as part of a network of dynamic and situated processes from which its significance is inextricable.

The claim that poetic devices direct readerly attention toward the poetic medium is not new. This is the process to which Jakobson refers in his classic essay, "Linguistics and Poetics," where he writes, "[The poetic] function, by promoting the palpability of signs, underscores the message for its own sake and deepens the fundamental dichotomy between signs and objects."[89] For Jakobson, this places the poetic function in direct opposition to the so-called "referential function," which is oriented toward the context or referent and concerned with the message's informational value. If the meaning of poetic imagery is conditional upon "a suspension and seemingly an abolition of the ordinary reference attached to descriptive language,"[90] however, this statement does not address the poetic reference that emerges in ordinary reference's stead; as Paul Ricoeur has argued, it "[is] not false but gives an incomplete picture of the whole process of poetic reference."[91]

A complete picture of this process must include what Ricoeur terms the image's second-order reference. This is the result of our simultaneous perception of language's ordinary reference and the fact of this reference's annulment—a process akin to that of metaphorical sense, which relies upon "the emergence of a new semantic congruity or pertinence from the ruins of the literal sense shattered by incompatibility or absurdity."[92] Just as this new congruity is felt as such only when the original incongruity remains palpable, so the new reference produced by the poetic image relies upon a kind of "stereoscopic vision," as W. Bedell Stanford puts it, that enables us to maintain two points of view at the same time.[93] Importantly, this does not mean that a text's images leave room for subjective projection; rather, the new point of view suggested by second-order reference is the product of the "concrete representations aroused by the verbal element and controlled by it"—of the words' semantic meaning but also of their interaction as sonic and graphic objects. If metaphorical sense not only abolishes but preserves the literal sense, metaphorical reference, too, maintains the ordinary vision in conjunction with the new one to which poetic language's conjunction of language and form gives rise.

Such an approach begins to explain the apparent paradox presented by the "thingness" [*veshchnost'*] of Pasternak's poetic world and his "tendency to dispense with the object."[94] As I hope to show in the extended readings of Pasternak's work that follow, the strange kind of

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[88] Unstressed "o" is pronounced "a" in Russian, hence *ochki* is pronounced *achki.*
[89] "Linguistics and Poetics," pp. 69-70.
[90] "The Metaphorical Process," p. 152.
[91] "The Metaphorical Process," p. 153. As Ricoeur notes, Jakobson himself acknowledged that "the supremacy of the poetic function over the referential function does not obliterate the reference but makes it ambiguous" ("Linguistics and Poetics," p. 85).
[92] "The Metaphorical Process," p. 153.
[93] W. Bedell Stanford, *Greek Metaphor Studies in Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1936), p. 105.
[94] Roman Jakobson, "On the Prose of the Poet Pasternak," *Language in Literature*, p. 312.

double vision afforded by the poetic image emerges as much from the material aspect of poetic language as its sense, as the glasses image already begins to suggest. Glasses help us to see, but they do not pretend to offer one-to-one representation; indeed, the whole point of glasses is to *change* what we see, to make the objects of the world seem more concrete by magnifying them and bringing them into focus. At the same time as intensifying our visual experience of the world, moreover, glasses fracture it, framing our vision and delimiting it. All of these effects are also effects of the image, which, like glasses, mediates our experience of the text by material means—it offers a new frame through which to see the world, rather than preserving a now-absent sensorial experience.

Pasternak himself frequently referred to art as something like an organ of perception, a theme that is particularly prominent in *Doctor Zhivago* but which runs throughout his life and work. Viewed through the lens of the image, this theme becomes part of a broader interrogation into the inevitably conventional nature of representation and the dialectic of discovery and invention that emerges from within convention. When Lazar Fleishman identifies the "non-coincidence of 'the word' and 'the thing'" as Pasternak's "central theme,"[95] then, this non-coincidence does not seem to be felt negatively. It indicates that Pasternak's work does not "battle with the fictions of language in the name of reality" but contemplates and productively exploits the gap between word and thing as it explores the inevitably conventional nature of representation and the reality to which representation nonetheless gives rise.[96] Like the many other optical devices, mirrors, windows, and candles that fill Pasternak's poetry, the glasses in this poem point to an interest in imagery not as a question of representation but as a means of crossing from one domain into another and precipitating, however fleetingly, exchange between them.

This capacity to bring apparently incommensurable realms into contact defines the poetic image, which exists at the intersection of verbal and visual modes of representation, making use of both the differentiated system of language and semantics and a dense, pictorial system in which each detail is context-dependent and inflected. The image thus exists at the intersection of both the temporal and the spatial, demanding that we move across and between different realms of experience, perception, and representation in a motion that is ongoing and constant.[97] As such, it brings us to one of the central questions of this dissertation: is there any way to say, without the statement being purely metaphorical, that poetry is connected to the world? The next section examines how this question is addressed, and answered, in Pasternak's early work.

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[95] *Stat'i o Pasternake* (Bremen: K-Presse, 1977), p.22.

[96] Yury Lotman, "Stikhotvoreniia", pp. 707.

[97] We might also think of the effect just described a kind of *trompe l'oeil*-in-reverse. Rather than, as in *tromp l'oeil* proper, a painting that makes the depicted objects seem three-dimensional (i.e., like 'real' objects), the seemingly concrete, real objects that fill Pasternak's poems turn out to be 'not real', or, at least, less solidly present than the poetry's reassuringly everyday language would have us think. Yet the very dissolving of these objects brings a new object into focus, a sharper focus than it would have been otherwise (the "new vision" of which Al'fonsov speaks); the undoing of one *trompe l'oeil* is to the benefit of creating another, a process that moves continually in both directions.

Part Two: Image in Practice

For much of his early career, Pasternak was dogged by accusations of subjectivism and a lack of interest in contemporary social reality,[98] with even those favorably inclined toward his work tending to regard him as "a poet who gazes lovingly at 'his sister, life', remaining at an idyllic remove from the tempest of time [and] hardly aware of 'what millennium it is out there.'"[99] More recently, scholars have demonstrated, on the contrary, Pasternak's deep imbrication in the cultural debates of his day, identifying the wide array of artistic, philosophical, and social questions with which he was concerned and by which his work was shaped.[100] Parallel studies of Pasternak's poetics have argued that its apparent proclivity for "vague, diffuse, 'initial' impressions,"[101] the cause of such opprobrium among Soviet critics, belies the painstaking transformations to which the perception of reality was subject in his verse as Pasternak strove, like so many of his modernist contemporaries, to uncover and depict "the hidden relationships between objects and essences of the external world."[102]

These scholarly efforts to demonstrate Pasternak's deep contemporaneity and his interest in the world of objects are valuable and important. They have, however, often been accompanied by a tendency to insist upon rather too direct a relationship between Pasternak's poetry and the 'reality' it depicts, regarding the ultimate aim and most striking feature of Pasternak's verse to be the completeness of its merger with the world.[103] My reading will approach Pasternak's poetry from the other direction to demonstrate the attention that his verse repeatedly draws to its *distance* from reality. As I began to suggest in the previous section, Pasternak's poetry is fascinated with the limits imposed by linguistic and poetic convention. Extending this discussion here, I want to demonstrate that this preoccupation with the distinctiveness of the poetic medium

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[98] Fleishman cites a letter sent by Pasternak to Briusov in 1922 in which he describes being summoned to speak to Lev Trotsky, who asked the poet "why I 'refrain from' references to social themes" (*Boris Pasternak v dvadtsatye gody*, p.15). For a sample of negative Soviet criticism, see e.g. A. Prosorov, "Tragediia sub''ektivnogo idealista," *Na literaturnom postu* No. 7 (1932); A.N. Tarasenkov, "Okhrannaia gramota idealizma," *Literaturnaia gazeta* No. 68 (1931).

[99] Fleishman, *Boris Pasternak v dvadtsatye gody*, pp. 7-8. Fleishman is citing a well-known line from the 1917 poem, "About these Verses," included in *My Sister—Life*: "Won't you tell me, dear ones, please, / Which millennium it is out there?"

[100] Pasternak himself wrote repeatedly, in his biographical prose and in numerous critical articles, about the figures and movements that shaped his work, from his early infatuation, as a music student, with Scriabin, to his time as a student of philosophy at Marburg university, to the decisive influence of poets such as Rainer Maria Rilke, Aleksandr Blok, and Vladimir Mayakovsky. As Fleishman and others have shown, his interests ranged far more widely than this "scanty" selection suggests, and include an array of figures and artistic and philosophical movements, from Edmund Husserl and the Marburg School to Velimir Khlebnikov, Konstantin Bolshakov and the French Symbolists, among many others. See e.g. Fleishman, "K kharakteristike rannego Pasternaka" in Fleishman, *Stat'i o Pasternake*; Fleishman, *The Poet and his Politics*; Viach. Vs. Ivanov, "K istorii poetiki Pasternaka futuristicheskogo perioda, *Pasternak. Vospominaniia. Issledovaniia. Stat'i* (Moskva: Azbukovnik, 2015), pp. 464-482. On Pasternak's involvement in literary debates of the twenties, see Fleishman, *Boris Pasternak v dvadsatye gody*.

[101] A. Selivanskii writing in the 1934 *Literaturnaia entsiklopediia*, cited Lotman, "Stikhotvoreniia," pp. 700-1.

[102] Lotman, "Stikhotvoreniia," p. 704. Lotman situates Pasternak's work within modernism's broader interrogation of the relationship "between verisimilitude and truth" (p. 704).

[103] Andrei Syniavsky, for example, is typical in his praise of Pasternak's "surrender of authorial rights to the landscape." "Poeziia Pasternaka", p. 23.

is part of a larger effort to position poetry as an active participant in social reality.[104] Pasternak's work advocates for a view of art not as merging with life but precisely as separate from it; it is this very separateness that brings art most closely into contact with reality.

The readings that follow will focus on a series of poems selected from *Over the Barriers*, a collection whose "chaotic" imagery and "lack of organizing principle" have seemed for many to imply the minimum of artistic deformation to which the poet's immediate impressions are subject.[105] This quality has been judged both negatively, as proof of the poet's subjectivism, and positively, as evidence of the poet's commitment to faithfully documenting the tumultuous reality of the period 1905-1917.[106] I argue instead that these poems are defined precisely by an interest in the constructedness of poetry as a means by which this turbulent period might be understood. This interest emerges from the experience of the inter-revolutionary period but does not simply record it: rather, the book argues for a certain way of reading and perceiving both poetry and the world. The book's lack of a clear narrative belies its unifying interest in the poetic image's unique ability to create a new reality, one that both flows from reality and generates its own, that lives even as it signals that it does not. I propose, then, that we regard the collection as a multistable image writ large, in which art and life slip continually in and out of focus to suggest a third way that lies between, over them both.

The three poems examined here—"Dedication" [*Posviashchenie*], "A Bad Dream" [*Durnoi son*], and "Marburg" [*Marburg*]—are selected "intentionally at random," as Pasternak would have it, to illustrate the variety of methods by which Pasternak achieves the effect I am describing.[107] Each poem illustrates a different method by which the breach between life and art is bridged via the image and the attention that it draws to the poem's own structure. The poems I will read are all fairly long, not unusual for this collection though also not the rule; I have selected them for the detail in which they allow me to comment upon the book's aims and methods. As the first and last poems in this volume, however, I also intend this selection to suggest something of the arc that this collection nonetheless traces as it makes its claim.

"Dedication": The Poem as Multistable Image

"Dedication" is the first poem in the collection. The poem is addressed, at least initially, to a wintery urban courtyard [*dvor*], but it is unclear to whom, precisely, the poem is dedicated. As the poem unfurls, however, the meaning of this title becomes apparent. Both a written artifact and a public action in the world, "Dedication" concerns not only the difficulty of translating experience in and of the world into verbal art but also the purpose of doing so. Here is the poem in full:

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[104] So Lotman, who discusses the complex transformations to which elements in Pasternak's verse are subject, eventually asserts the origin of his imagery in the "*seen* and *felt* world" of empirical reality ("Stikhotvoreniia," p. 707).

[105] Rudova, *Understanding Boris Pasternak*, p. 18. The complex metrical structure of the poems in the collection is enough to demonstrate the falsity of this view; as Mikhail Gasparov has shown, the book is one of the very few in Russian poetry in which triple time measures predominate ("Stikh B. Pasternaka," *Izbrannye trudy* (Moskva, 1997) 3: p. 511-2).

[106] J.W. Dyck, for example, regards the collection as "a testimonial document which reveals to us through the torments and passions of the poet a poetic history of the mind of those who experienced, felt, and therefore lived the years 1905-1917." *Boris Pasternak* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972), p. 62.

[107] Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 3: 159.

Посвященье

Мелко исписанный снежной крупой,
Двор, — ты как приговор к ссылке,
На недоед, недосып, недопой,
На боль с барабанным боем в затылке!

Двор! Ты, покрытый усышкой листвы,
С солью из низко нависших градирен;
Шин и полозьев чернеются швы,
Мёрзлый нарыв октября расковырян

Старческим ногтем небес, октября
Старческим ногтем и старческим ногтем
Той, что, с утра подступив к фонарям,
Кашляет в шали и варит декокт им.

Двор, этот вихрь, что, как кучер в мороз,
Снегом порос и по брови нафабрен
Снегом закушенным, — он перерос
Черные годы окраин и фабрик.

Вихрь, что, как кучер, облеплен; как он,
Снегом по горло набит и, как кучер,
Взят, перевязан, спален, ослеплён,
Задран и к тучам, как кучер, прикручен.

Двор, этот ветер тем родственен мне,
Что со всего околотка, с налёту,
Он объявленьем налипнет к стене:
Люди, там любят и ищут работы!

Люди! Там ярость сановней моей.
Люди! Там я преклоняю колени.
Люди, там, словно с полярных морей,
Дует всю ночь напролёт с Откровенья.

Крепкие тьме — полыханьем огней,
Крепкие стуже — стрельбою поленьев!
Стужа в их песнях студеней моей,
Их откровений темнее затменье!

С улиц взимает зима, как баскак,
Шубы и печи и комнат убранство,
Знайте же, — зимнего ига очаг
Там, у поэтов, в их нищенском ханстве.

Огородитесь от вьюги в стихах
Шубой; от ночи в поэме — свечою.
Полным фужером — когда впопыхах
Опохмеляется дух с перепою.

И без задержек, и без полуслов,
Но от души заказной бандеролью

Dedication

Finely written all over with snow grain,
Yard, — you're like a sentence to exile
To lack-of-food, lack-of-sleep, lack-of-water,
To pain that pounds in the back of the head like a drum!

Yard! You, covered with a dryness of leaves,
With salt from the low-hanging cooling towers;
Of tires and runners show black the seams,
The frozen abscess of October is picked open

By old man's nail of the skies, of October
The old man's nail and by the old man's nail
Of she, who, standing at the streetlights since morning,
Coughs in her shawl and prepares them a decoction.

Yard, this blizzard, that, like a coachman in the frost,
Is overgrown with snow and plastered upon the curb-brow
As champed-at snow, — it has outgrown
The black years of the outskirts and factories.

Blizzard, that, like a coachman, is plastered all over; like him,
Up to its neck with snow and, like a coachman,
Taken, bound, scorched, blinded,
Shredded and screwed, like a coachman, onto the clouds.

Yard, this wind is kin to me
In that from the whole neighborhood, at high speed,
It will stick as an announcement to the wall:
People, there they love and are seeking work!

People! There, rage is more stately than mine.
People! There I bow my knees.
People, there, like from the Polar seas,
All night blows wind from Revelation.

Indebted to the darkness — for the blazing of fires,
Indebted to the bitter cold — for the shooting of billets!
The bitter cold in their songs is more bitter than mine,
Their eclipse is darker than revelations.

From the streets winter, like a Mongol lord, exacts
Fur coats and stoves and fittings of rooms,
Know then, — the hearth of the winter horde
There, where the poets live, in their beggarly Khanate.

Protect yourself from the snowstorm in verse
With a fur coat; from the night in the poem — with a candle.
With a full glass — when in a hurry
You are sobering your spirit up from overdrinking.

And without delays, and without half-words,
But from the soul as a registered parcel

Вина, меха, освещенье и кров | Wine, furs, light and shelter
Шлите туда, в департаменты голи. [108] | Send here, to the departments of poverty.

1916

The opening comparison of the yard to exile traces a course from the visual qualities of a yard to the inside of the speaker's head. The implication that the task not only demands exhausting labor of the writer but actually banishes him from the very world he looks to describe is developed in the poem's second half, in which poets live "there," in "the departments of poverty"; if the poet makes his own demands on the world, extracting payment in the form of everyday objects, he nonetheless remains at a remove from it. As I want to demonstrate, however, the distance that the poem's content asserts between the world and representation is countered by the movement out towards the world that its imagery encourages. This movement is precipitated precisely by the poem's awareness of its own status as text and involves not the poet but the reader.

The poem's auto-referential interest in its own means of representation is demonstrated, first, by its mingling of visual and verbal modes of representation. This is made explicit in its very first line: the yard is "written all over" [*ispisannyi*] with snow, a description that not only reminds the reader of the inevitably visual nature of the written word but also plays on the distinction between differentiation and density that I have suggested is so central to the poetic image: while language, typically differentiated, is here associated with density ("written *all over*"), the center of the scene's visual attention, the snow, is "krupa", a more specific word than the usual "sneg" that refers to individual grains of snow.[109]

The poem's interest in verbal representation is thus also an interest in interpretation; both demand a mode that is at the intersection of the visual and the verbal. This is further emphasized by the comparison at the center of this first stanza. Addressing the yard across the vivid gesture of a dash, the stanza draws emphatic attention to the moment of comparison both graphically and via intonation. The firm anchor provided by this dash and the accompanying words "you [are] like" draws together two seemingly distant realms, the yard, associated with the domestic sphere or community of some kind, and exile [*ssylka*], at a geographical and social remove that is emphasized by the emphatic lack asserted by the next lines; if it is the fullness of the yard that most commands attention ("written all over"), the physical privation of exile is most emphasized. As in the first line, however, this apparent opposition is simultaneously countered: even as material want is emphatically asserted on the semantic level, it is reversed by the sonic oversatiety produced by the repeated prefix "nedo-", a noise that seems to lead directly to the pain that in the stanza's last line "pounds like a drum in the back of the head". Similar dynamics are thus at play in the numerous opposing pairs (home and exile, abundance and lack, enclosed and open space) around which the first stanza is structured: spaces or states are pointedly differentiated, on the one hand, and embedded in the dense context in which they appear, on the other.

The yard itself, of course, is a space of transition between the house and the street; its importance in the poem's first half confirms the importance of the theme of movement between opposites that is introduced by the first stanza's central comparison. Indeed, the stanza represents something like an enactment of the multistable image that I discussed in the previous section, the dash around which the comparison revolves serving as the hinge between one reading of the

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[108] Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 1: 344-5.
[109] "Krupa" means "cereal grains" but is used figuratively to refer to a particular type of snow that falls in the form of small, circular grains that are slightly smaller than hail. The English equivalent is "graupel".

image and the other, as the rhyme of *dvor* [yard] and *prigovor* [sentence] indicates. Though this "sentence to exile" seems abstract at first, clearly the vehicle of the comparison and used simply to extend the description of the yard, the length of this comparison, which continues over three lines, lends it a reality of its own, emphasized by the physical pain it causes the speaker reinforced by its regular dactylic meter and the repeated plosives of the line "Na *b*ol' s *b*ara*b*annym *b*oem v zatylke!" ["To pain that beats like a drum in the head!"]. The comparison is both marked as mere verbal analogy for the experience of seeing the yard and becomes more tangible than the yard itself; at the same time, the two remain part of the same composite, as the faint echo of the initial line's falling snow in the final line's drum beats suggests.

The first half of the poem develops this effect via the multiple angles from which the yard is approached as it is first compared to the speaker's own state, then placed in the city landscape of which it is part, before finally becoming swept up in the wind that rushes through it. These sequential descriptions are as though overlain by the insistent repetition of the word "yard," which appears at the beginning of each new attempt to describe it. Nonetheless, each description is markedly different from the previous, as is most straightforwardly demonstrated by the differing number of stanzas devoted to each (one, two, and three, respectively). Bringing the yard into a series of distinct multistable relationships, the poem both unfolds the multiple possibilities contained by the yard and extends the multistable image that is the poem itself, in which the yard remains clearly distinct from its poetic depiction, yet is related to it in some—at this point in the poem still oblique—manner. As I will argue in the rest of this reading, the relationship that the poem proposes can exist between the poem and the world it describes emerges from the very attention that the poem draws to itself as representation and the acknowledgment of its inevitable distance from the world that this implies.

The sense of the ever-fracturing possibilities that are contained in the yard is reinforced by the poem's sonic fabric, which is thick with rhyme and repeated sound clusters, the constituent parts of each word seeming to shatter through the stanza or stanzas to follow like so many glints on the snow-covered yard. And indeed, the effect is as much graphic as it is sonic, as this emphasis on verbal texture combines with the poem's often unusual, sometimes archaic, and, on several occasions, newly invented vocabulary [*nedoed* (lack-of-food)*, nedopoi* (lack-of-drink), *usyshka* (a dryness [collective noun])] to render the words as much graphic objects as semantic units. This effect reaches its peak in the poem's fifth and sixth stanzas, in which a proliferation of "k" sounds (six in the fifth stanza and twelve in the sixth)[110] picks up a sonic theme that runs through the first four stanzas, amplifying it and attaching it to the sonic theme that runs through the second half of the poem, -*uch*-, which emerges from "k*uch*er" [coachman] and echoes through the words "za*kush*ennym" [champed-at], "*k tuch*am" [to the clouds] and "pri*kruch*en" [screwed (onto)]. A sudden abundance of mono- or disyllabic past passive participles further amplify the staccato notes of this soundscape, which in turn lends its support to the series of forceful actions that these participles describe ("Taken, bound, scorched, blinded, / Shredded and screwed, like a coachman, onto the clouds").

The effect is intensified by the unusual forms in which words appear: in the first half of the poem, there are only three conjugated verbs ("show blackly" [*cherneiutsia*], "coughs" [*kashliaet*] and "prepares" [*varit*]), with the majority of its nine verbs appearing in the short form of the past passive participle. Two past tense verb forms appear (*poros* and *pereros*), but these are unusual forms of the past tense that look more like nouns than verbs, particularly given the

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[110] This effect is even more pronounced in the 1928 revision of the poem, in which the number of "k" sounds in the fifth and sixth stanzas is twelve and fifteen, respectively.

pattern established by the first stanza's series of verbal nouns (*nedoed, nedosyp, nedopoi*) as well as, more locally, the noun with which these verb forms rhyme (*moroz*). This blurring of grammatical boundaries is added to further by the abundance of verbal adjectives and nouns (as, for example, in the first stanza's *ispisannyi* [from *ispisat'*, to write all over] and *nedopoi* [from *pit'*, to drink]), as well as the ubiquitous chains of genitive plural nouns. Frequent inter-grammatical rhymes add further to this effect: in addition to the *pereros/moroz* pair already noted, *gradiren*, a genitive plural noun, rhymes with *raskovyrian*, a past passive participle; *kucher*, a nominative noun, with *prikruchen*, another past passive participle; and *nafabren*, a past passive participle, with *fabrik*, a genitive plural noun. This is not to speak of the many words, phrases, and roots that are repeated throughout the poem. There is thus an almost literal sense in which the poem is "kaleidoscopic," as Rudova labels its themes, its words made to shift around, cut off before they can fully emerge only to reappear and rearrange themselves in new patterns.[111] The words are as though detached from their grammatical functions and rendered parts of a dense and ever-shifting visual whole.[112]

The paradoxical result of these effects is to task grammatical structures with a greater than usual share of the burden for the communication of sense; it is precisely where the poem most dramatically transcends the differentiation characteristic of language that it asserts its centrality once more. This is particularly true in the first half of the poem, in which only five conjugated verbs appear (*cherneiutsia, kashliaet, varit, poros,* and *pereros*) and straightforward syntactical constructions (of the type subject-verb-object) are replaced by chains of words knitted together by grammatical case.[113] The need to keep track of the relationships established by case is heightened by the predominantly hypotactic style of this part of the poem, in which subordinated clauses extend chains of imagery through each stanza and even, on one occasion, across syntactical breaks:

Мёрзлый нарыв октября расковырян	The frozen abscess of October is picked open
Старческим ногтем небес, октября	By the aged nail of the heavens, of October
Старческим ногтем и старческим ногтем	The aged nail and by the aged nail
Той, что, с утра подступив к фонарям,	Of that one, she who, standing by streetlights since morning,
Кашляет в шали и варит декокт им.	Coughs into her shawls and prepares them a decoction.

<div align="center">(ll. 8-12)</div>

The reader must follow this succession carefully in order to understand how its parts fit together, a concern that becomes explicit in the third line's "that one, she" [*ta*] (as well as the ambiguous pronoun, "them"), a deictic that depends for its referential efficacy upon knowledge of the point of view from which it is uttered. The strict perspective required by the poem's syntactical structure is now embodied as a physical position in space.

As is typical throughout the poem, these lines also suggest alternate readings. The specificity with which the deictic "that one" imbues them is countered by the ambiguity of this woman's identity or relation to the scene; strong echoes of the urban literary tradition (Blok's

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[111] *Understanding Boris Pasternak*, p. 18.

[112] Lotman makes a similar comment regarding sound repetition in Pasternak's work, which he argues "is meant to reveal the fiction of dividing the text into phonetic words […] the phonological repetitions [of the text] establish the structure of a special, super-lexical unity." Lotman, "Stikhotvoreniia", p. 711.

[113] This is also a striking feature of Pasternak's translation of his epigraph, taken from Charles Algernon Swinburne's 1880 poem, "By the North Sea":

<div align="center">To the soul in my soul that rejoices
For the song that is over my song.</div>

Pasternak translates (without line breaks): "Душе моей души, радующейся песне, что прекрасней моей."

urban scenes, for example, and the grotesque urbanism of much futurist verse) further temper its particularity. The central point here is that all these variant readings are active at once, working along different axes and contributing to the multistable network of images that the poem establishes and which remains in constant motion.

From all the above it is clear that the poem is defined first and foremost by what I would characterize as a dialectic of radical instability and control, a dialectic that flows from the poem's central images, the wild force of the wind and the firm ground of the yard. The poem's imagery cascades through the poem, moving seemingly at random from impression to impression; at the same time, this motion is dictated by the material of the language itself as the words fracture and rearrange themselves to give rise to each new feature of the poem's landscape. The meaning of each line and stanza and its relation to the rest of the poem is characterized by a large degree of openness, even as the tight grammatical constructions of the poem demand a precise route be taken through the poem's language. Our forced compliance and the discombobulation that is the result echo that of the speaker, who, sentenced to exile and appearing only once, in an oblique case ("to me" [*mne*] (l. 21)), passively acquiesces to the elements, meteorological and linguistic.

This theme is developed in the second half of the poem, in which motifs of subjugation and debt proliferate. Here, a switch to a paratactic style restricts the tight chains of interlocked words to individual lines or couplets, but the reader nonetheless remains dependent upon grammatical relations to parse the poem's language, as the phrase "krepkie t'me" illustrates most starkly: the adjective "krepkii", which means "strong, firm" in modern Russian, is here used in the archaic sense "indebted to".[114] The usage is clarified by an explanatory footnote in later editions of the collection, but the reader of the 1917 edition is left to parse the phrase by decoding the unexpected dative of the noun that follows, "[to] the darkness". Despite the highly specific sense in which the word is used, however, the word opens up numerous perspectives. The familiar semantic meaning of the word "krepkii" lends the grammatical relation upon which meaning here relies material weight, a play of the concrete and the abstract that is extended by the notion of being indebted "*to the darkness*". While "krepkii" is used in an abstract sense here, moreover, it emerges from the concrete conditions described in the poem, recalling the common collocation "krepkii moroz", a hard freeze or severe frost. It also joins the web of associations surrounding poetry and poets, revealed in the ninth stanza to be the inhabitants of the "there" [*tam*] referenced by the wind's announcement and connected throughout this section of the poem to motifs of wind, winter, night, cold, and tributary bondage. In this manner, the meaning of the phrase is both determined by its syntactic role and open, resonating on multiple levels simultaneously.

This dynamic of control and multiplicity, in other words, recalls the mechanics of the multistable image, which we perceive from one of several possible angles but which always also contains the possibilities that other angles make visible. The multistable image, I would suggest, provides one key to understanding the course traced by the poem from its initial interest in the yard to the mysterious winter "there" with which it ends. For something of the same dynamic as discussed in relation to the poem's first stanza applies to the poem as a whole, in which the yard

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[114] Viach. Vs. Ivanov attributes Pasternak's use of archaic Russian expressions during this period to the influence of Khlebnikov. "K istorii poetiki Pasternaka futuristicheskogo perioda," p. 474. Elsewhere, he connects such lexical choices with Pasternak's fascination with "the past of [Moscow]" ("The Moscow of Pasternak," *Vospominaniia. Issledovaniia. Stat'i*, pp. 640-651 (p. 641)). Markov also makes this connection, arguing that Pasternak "tries to suggest medieval Moscow through word choice" (*Russian Futurism*, p. 244).

is at first the reality that needs to be put into words, but which, by the end, has taken on a material existence of its own against which the speaker warns us to protect ourselves:

Огородитесь от вьюги в стихах   Protect yourself from the snowstorm in verse
Шубой; от ночи в поэме — свечою.   With a fur coat; from night in the poem — with a candle.
(ll. 37-38)

The poem as a whole becomes a kind of multistable image, the two parts of which—yard and poetry—are clearly distinct and yet part of the same composite. At the same time, the poem draws attention to its own fabric and its role in mediating between the two spheres with which it is concerned. In this sense, the obscurity of the poem's meaning is the most significant thing about this poem, which is precisely about the nature of communication between world and text. The text attempts to capture a portion of the material world yet constantly asserts its own material constraints as a written medium; it acknowledges and draws the reader's attention to its necessary distance from the experience it depicts due to its own status as a material object. Yet it is precisely in so doing that the poem creates a new relationship between the words and sounds of its own stuff and the physical world of which they are part, a relationship that emerges and exists during each reader's encounter with the text.

In this respect, the strikingly declarative mode of the poem and the request with which it ends are centrally important. The poem's interest in the spoken word is apparent from the start, established by the *prigovor* [sentence] of the poem's second line, which shares a root with *govorit'* [to speak], and resonating in the repeated apostrophic appeals to the yard that make up the poem's first half. These appeals grow more urgent in the poem's second half, in which the wind becomes an announcement on the wall that repeatedly calls out to the "people" it addresses, culminating in the final plea for the reader to send "wine, furs, light, and shelter" to the poets "without delay". If the poem functions in large part to bring the features of its own material into dynamic relationship, it relies, ultimately, upon the reader entering into a relationship of his or her own with the poem, one that, despite and even because of the obliqueness of the poem's content, sets the communication between world and text it stages in motion.

"A Bad Dream": The Literal and the Figurative

The next poem I analyze here is the next in the collection; it was written in 1914. Titled "A Bad Dream" [*Durnoi son*], it shares many of the same concerns as "Dedication". Here, again, highly visual landscape description is combined with sustained, almost hyperbolic, verbal experiment that displays a similar interest in the boundary between differentiated and dense modes of representation. Words and sounds are repeated and rearranged, echoing one another across boundaries that are at once radically blurred and all-important for the communication of sense. The strange logic of these structures is accounted for here by this poem's oneiric frame; the poem centers on a divine and dreaming figure, the "Heavenly Faster [*postnik*]". With the poem's violent imagery of death and natural destruction in mind, scholars have interpreted this figure as "an indifferent and non-intervening God" who, in Rudova's summary, "sleeps through the nightmare of war [i.e., World War One - *IP*] and thus lets the bloodshed continue."[115] As in "Dedication," however, the lack of communication that defines this poem's content stands in

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[115] Rudova, *Understanding Boris Pasternak*, p. 19. In this sense, the poem negates the proverb, "strashen son, da milostiv Bog" ("Fearful is the dream, but merciful the God").

purposive contrast to the alternative mode of communication proposed by its form. If the poem offers a reproach to the "Heavenly Faster", it also stages an investigation into the exchange precipitated by the energy latent in poetic language itself. The poem thus continues the exploration I have suggested begins in "Dedication" into how poetry might impact our perception of, and response to, the world. The violence of the poem's references to the atrocities of war is part of a larger investigation into the poetic image's ability to facilitate movement between literal and figurative domains:

Дурной сон	A Bad Dream
Прислушайся к вьюге, сквозь десны процеженной,	Listen to the blizzard, filtered through gums,
Прислушайся к захлесням чахлых бесснежий.	Listen to the whippings of the sickly snow-dearth.
Разбиться им не обо что, — и заносы	Nothing for them to crash down upon, —and drifts,
Чугунною цепью проносятся по снегу.	An iron chain, whip along the snow.
Проносятся чересполосицей, поездом,	Whip through strip holdings, [as] a train,
Сквозь черные десны деревьев на сносе,	Through black gums of trees under demolition,
Сквозь десны заборов, сквозь десны трущоб.	Through gums of fences, through gums of slums.

Сквозь тёс, сквозь леса, сквозь кромешные десны	Through boards, through forests, through pitch black gums
Чудес, что приснились Небесному Постнику.	Of the miracles of which the Heavenly Faster dreams.
Он видит: попадали зубы из челюсти	He sees: teeth have fallen out of jaws
И шамкают замки, поместия — с пришептом,	And castles mumble, estates – with a whisper,
Всё вышиблено, ни единого в целости!	Everything is knocked out, not a single one intact!
И постнику тошно от стука костей,	And the faster feels sick from the clatter of bones,

От зубьев пилотов, от флотских трезубцев,	From the prongs of pilots, from the navy tridents,
От красных зазубрин Карпатских зубцов,	From the red notches of the Carpathian jags,
Он двинуться хочет — не может проснуться,	He wants to move – he can't wake up,
Не может, засунутый в сон на засов, —	He can't, tucked into the dream on a sliding lock,—
И видит ещё. Как назём огородника,	And he sees also. Like the manure of a gardener,
Всю землю сровняли с землёю сегодня.	The whole earth has been flattened with earth today.

Не верит, чтоб месяц распаренный выплыл	Doesn't believe that the steamed moon swam out
За косноязычною далью в развалинах,	Beyond the tongue-tied distance in ruins,
За челюстью дряхлой, за опочивальней,	Beyond the decrepit jaw, beyond the bedchamber,
На бешеном стебле, на стебле осиплом,	On a crazed stalk, on a stalk that is wheezing,
На стебле, на стебле зимы измочаленной.	On a stalk, on the stalk of an exhausted winter.

Нет, бледной, отеклой, одутлою тыквой	No, a pale, swollen, bloated gourd
Со стебля свалился он в ближнюю рытвину,	It dropped off the stalk into the nearest pot hole,
Он сорван был битвой и, битвой подхлёстнутый,	It's been torn off by battle, and, whipped by battle,
Шаром откатился в канаву с откоса —	Like a ball it rolled into the ditch from a scarp –
Сквозь десны деревьев, сквозь черные десны	Through gums of trees, through black gums
Заборов, сквозь десны щербатых трущоб.	Of fences, through gums of pocked slums.

Пройдись по земле, по баштану помешанного,	Go for a walk on earth, through the melon field of a lunatic
Здесь распорядились бахчой ураганы.	Here the melon farm was managed by hurricanes.
Нет гряд, что руки игрока бы избегли.	No beds that have escaped the hands of the gambler.
Во гроб, на носилки ль, на небо, на снег ли	Into the grave or onto stretchers, into sky or snow
Вразброд откатились калеки, как кегли,	Cripples rolled in all directions, like skittles,
Как по небу звезды, по снегу разъехались.	Like stars across the sky, they spread across the snow.
Как в небо посмел он играть, человек?	How did he dare to play at heaven, man?

Прислушайся к вьюге, дресвою процеженной,   Listen to the blizzard, filtered through rotten rocks,
Сквозь дряхлые десны древесных бесснежий,   Through sickly gums of wooden snow-dearths,
Разбиться им не обо что, и заносы,   Nothing for them to crash down upon, —and drifts,
Как трещины черные, рыскают по снегу,   Like black clefts, skirr around the snow,
Проносятся поездом, грозно проносятся   Whip by as a train, terribly whip
Сквозь тёс, сквозь леса, сквозь кровавые десны…   Through boards, through forests, through bloody
………………………………………………….   gums….
И снится, и снится Небесному Постнику — [116]   …………………………………………………
………………………………………………….   And the Heavenly Faster dreams of, dreams of —

1914   …………………………………………………

The snow- and wind-whipped landscape of the poem's opening lines creates the initial impression that the title of the poem is intended figuratively, evoking the expression "it was like a bad dream" [*eto bylo kak durnoi son*] to characterize a real experience. This sense is reinforced by the exaggerated physicality of the landscape:

Прислушайся к вьюге, сквозь дёсны процеженной,   Listen to the blizzard, filtered through gums,
Прислушайся к захлёсням чахлых бесснежий.   Listen to the whippings of the sickly snow-dearth.
Разбиться им не обо что, — и заносы   Nothing for them to crash down upon, —and drifts,
Чугунною цепью проносятся по снегу.   An iron chain, whip along the snow.
(ll. 1-4)

Words associated with physical power and weight (*protsezhennoi, razbit'sia, chugunnoiu tsep'iu*) combine with a series of directional prefixes and prepositions (*pri – skvoz' – pri – raz – pro – po*) to lend the scene a forceful momentum that gains concreteness through spatialization. These effects continue for several lines, with repetition and parallelisms lending the text a momentum of its own as the clauses making up each line grow increasingly short, causing elements of the landscape to fly at an ever faster pace out of the poem's line of sight:

Проносятся чересполосицей, поездом,   Whip through strip holdings, [as] a train,
Сквозь чёрные дёсны деревьев на сносе,   Through black gums of trees under demolition,
Сквозь дёсны заборов, сквозь дёсны трущоб,   Through gums of fences, through gums of slums.

Сквозь тёс, сквозь леса, сквозь кромешные дёсны   Through boards, through forests, through pitch black
Чудес, что приснились Небесному Постнику,   gums
Он видит: попадали зубы из челюсти   Of the miracles of which the Heavenly Faster dreams.
(ll. 5-10)

It is just as the physicality of the landscape seems to have established itself that the poem suddenly reveals that its title was not meant figuratively: this may well all *be* the "bad dream" of the "Heavenly Faster". The poem is highly ambiguous on this point; despite the apparent shift of perspective brought about in lines 8-10 ("Through planks, through forests, through pitch black gums / of the miracles of which the Heavenly Faster dreamt"), the focus of this dream, the loss of teeth, resonates with the "gums" that are such a persistent feature of the first eight lines (the word appears five times), forcing the reader to retrace his or her steps and to reassess their significance in these initial lines as well as the status of the landscape these lines predict. The route we are asked to take moves at an unexpected diagonal: we become aware of our initial, and instinctual,

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[116] Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 1: 345-7.

absorption of these "gums" into the physical landscape via comprehension of them as figures, grotesque metaphors for features of the dark, bare, winter scene, and conversely, in the new frame of the dream, perceive their literal referent more strongly.

Even leaving aside for a moment the question of how "literal" dream-images can claim to be, the tangle of levels here is clear. It is intensified by the spatial prefix of "*pri*snit'sia", a neutral verb meaning "to dream" but which is here made spatial via the echo of the first line's "*pri*slushaisia" ["listen to"], an echo that at once deepens the confusion as to whether these initial lines refer to a dream landscape or reality and figuratively suggests the spatial nature of our movement between them. Similar tangles are attendant upon almost all the words in the brief lines I have quoted, which hover on the border between the literal and the figurative, the material and the immaterial. Many of the descriptors that make the landscape appear most physical are applied to its features only in a figurative sense; by the same token, its material features quickly take on figurative significance when the poem's lens is changed.

At times, this flickering is restricted to a single word, as is the case with the "gums" just discussed; at others, it extends through a series of words and stanzas, creating a crisscrossing network that spans multiple levels. The central example in this poem is the "teeth" of which the Heavenly Faster dreams. We have already seen how these dream-teeth alter the focus of the first ten lines of the poem. The teeth themselves, of course, are overtly tied to a folkloric frame, both via their connection with the anthropomorphized, pagan figure of the Heavenly Faster and due to the folk belief that regards dreams of lost teeth as a premonition of death. As the poem progresses, they provoke similar fluctuations between the literal and the figurative, most strikingly in the stanza that immediately follows that in which they first appear. Here, the teeth [*zuby*] are swept up in a cascade of words that share the same root, with "*zub*'ia" [prongs], "tre*zub*tsy" [tridents], "za*zub*riny" [notches] and "*zub*tsy" [jags] following in quick succession. This is not simply another case of sonic suggestiveness motivating the choice of words. The words share a root with "teeth" because they refer to words that visually or functionally resemble teeth; here, the proximity of the origin of these now-dead metaphors makes their literal basis tangible. At the same time, they become part of new metaphors, as the Carpathian Mountains are rendered "red notches of Carpathian jags" (l. 15), or evoke mythological contexts, as in the reference to "navy tridents" (l. 14).

The teeth thus bridge multiple domains in the poem, setting it   in motion along a series of intersecting paths between dream and reality, the figurative and the literal, the symbolic and the functional. This is a common feature of Pasternak's poetics, in which, as Lazar Fleishman has argued, "what is unique […] is not the abundance of tropes, but the way in which they are used."[117] "The axis of the text's structure," he writes elsewhere, "becomes not metaphor *as such*, but organization of the poem in such a way that one and the same word bear both figurative and literal meaning, depending on the point of view chosen and the stage of the exposure of the content."[118] As "A Bad Dream" demonstrates, the effect of this is much like that of the multistable image with which I have been drawing analogies thus far. Here, a different aspect of the double vision afforded by poetry is addressed than in "Dedication" as literal and figurative uses of the same word are activated by different elements of its immediate context in the text. The shifting frames that operate in the poem enact, moreover, the simultaneous abolition and preservation of literal sense that Ricoeur identifies as central to the functioning of metaphoric sense, just as the overarching frame of 'dream' within which the poem operates places the

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[117] *The Poet and his Politics*, p.106.
[118] "Svobodnaia sub''ektivnost'", in Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 1:22.

simultaneously referential and non-referential quality of metaphorical reference at the center of focus.

Whereas Rudova locates the poem's concern with (non-)communication on the level of content, therefore, I would identify it as a theme that is motivated by a broader interest in the communicative capacities of poetry and the image as such. Certainly, the effects I have described obstruct the communication of sense to a large degree, an inarticulateness that is again thematized by the network established by the "teeth" image as I have described it, which activates the idiomatic saying concealed in the poem's first line, "tsedit' skvoz' zuby" (lit. "to filter through one's teeth," used in the sense "to speak slowly, inarticulately; to speak unwillingly"),[119] a saying that is echoed in the "tongue-tied distance" [*kosnoiazychnaia dal'*] of line 21.[120] However, though the line of communication between God and man has been severed on the level of the poem's content,[121] the structure of the poem itself affirms poetry's ability to communicate in a manner that is precisely only half-verbal. The poem functions by making its semantic level ambiguous, holding open both literal and figurative senses of each word; by the same mechanism, it brings different spheres into connection, from reality and dream, to heaven and earth, to past, present, and the projected future that the series of ellipses that surround the final line's return to the Heavenly Faster's dreams imply. These spheres are brought into contact precisely by the language's refusal decisively to *mean*; they communicate precisely due to the subordinate function played by verbal communication.

The poem thus continues the method of purposeful non-comprehension that I suggested is important in "Dedication," asserting instead the vitality that is latent in language as a medium and which the negotiations prompted by the poetic image make active. This much is made clear by the all-pervasive movement gestured towards by the poem's abundance of spatial prefixes and produced, on the level of structure, by the short clauses and grammatical parallelism of the poem's frequent lists. Giving material form to the fluid cognitive perspective upon which its language relies, the poem offers itself as a means by which the absolute figurative might exist in tandem with the physical realm of man. In the final poem I will read here, this man is given body and set walking through the world; it is here, in the final poem of the collection, that the different poles of life itself are examined and the role of the poetic text made most explicit.

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[119] *Slovar' sovremennogo russkogo literturnogo iazyka*, 17 vols. (Moskva: Nauka, 1965) 17: 582.

[120] Here, again, the image functions not only on the level of semantic reference but also as a commentary on its own linguistic material; the reader's own tongue is also rather twisted by this stage in the poem. This is a frequent feature of Pasternak's work; as Syniavsky comments, "Pasternak's poems do not give the impression of exquisitely fashioned *objets d'art*. On the contrary, their language is rather ungainly, in places so hampered as to be tongue-tied, with unexpected stoppages and repetitions; a speech of gulps and sobs, overloaded with words that get in one another's way." "Poeziia Pasternaka," p. 30. Pasternak himself was known for his tendency toward "kosnoiazychie," confused articulation.

[121] This is the position taken by Per-Arne Bodin, who regards the poem as "tak[ing] up the existential question of the relation between God and man with an almost Dostoevskian frenzy. The answer which is given is a negative one" (Bodin "The Sleeping Demiurge: An Analysis of Boris Pasternak's Poem 'Durnoi son'," *Text and Context: Essays to Honor Nils Ake Nilsson*, ed. Peter Alberg Jense (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1987), p. 95). Bodin connects this with Pasternak's non-acceptance of the "cocktail of religion and cheap nationalism" hawked by the Russian Church during the First World War ("Boris Pasternak and the Christian Tradition," *Forum for Modern Language Studies,* Vol 26, No. 4 (1990), 382-401 (p. 383)). I would argue that the poem's interest in its context is less directly expressed.

"Marburg"/Marburg, Poetry, and Life

"Marburg" is, in many senses, a very different poem to the two we have looked at so far; indeed, it is often regarded as something of an anomaly within *Over the Barriers* as a whole, as the tendency to analyze it as a stand-alone text implies.[122] The special status accorded the poem derives from the central position afforded by scholars and the poet himself to Pasternak's "Marburg" period, the few months in 1912, when, as a young philosophy student, Pasternak lived and studied in Marburg, Germany under the Neo-Kantian philosopher Hermann Cohen.[123] It is during this period that Pasternak claims to have finally abandoned philosophy in favor of poetry.[124] The catalyst for this break, as Pasternak describes it, was the rejection his proposal of marriage received from Ida Vysotskaia, a childhood friend.[125] This autobiographical event frames "Marburg," which describes the failed proposal and the speaker's subsequent re-birth as a poet, and is what appears to mark the poem off from the rest of the poems in *Over the Barriers* most starkly, anticipating what Yury Tynianov would later describe as Pasternak's "diary" in verse, *My Sister—Life*.[126]

The poem, then, seems to stand at a "crossroads" in multiple senses of the word, itself concerned with the passage from one life to another and positioned by scholars on the threshold of Pasternak's mature writing.[127] As I shall argue here, this reading of the poem, which is typically discussed with reference to its 1929 redaction, places too much emphasis on the poem's autobiographical origins. If we read the original redaction of the poem as it would have been read in 1916, when the details of Pasternak's Marburg period were not widely known, a different

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[122] "The one indubitable triumph of the volume was the confessional poem 'Marburg' […] 'Marburg' stands on the brink of *My Sister Life,* in which Pasternak finds his own voice outside the Futurist movement" (Gifford, *Pasternak*, p. 47).

[123] Pasternak devotes the whole second part of his autobiographical sketch, *Safe Conduct*, to his time in Marburg. Fleishman has written at most length about Pasternak's studies in philosophy; see *Stat'i o Pasternake*; "Boris Pasternak's Student Notebooks," *"Marburg" Borisa Pasternaka. Temy i variatsii*, ed. El. V. Pasternak (Moskva: Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi gumanitarnyi universitet, 2009), pp. 157-224.

[124] Evgenii Pasternak notes that several of Pasternak's earliest poems were written before 1912, though Pasternak later appended this date to all of them. "Marburge v tvorchestve Borisa Pasternaka," *"Marburg" Borisa Pasternaka*, p. 57.

[125] In *Safe Conduct*, Pasternak describes the circumstances of his proposal, which he made on the last day of the Vysotskaia sisters' short visit to him in Marburg in June 1912. Distraught, he accompanied the sisters to Berlin, their next destination, spending a sleepless night in a cheap hotel before returning to Marburg and packing away his philosophy books for good. Of the morning after Vysotskaia's rejection, he writes: "I was surrounded by changed things. Into the essence of reality crept something that I had never experienced. Morning knew me by my face and had appeared precisely in order to be with me and never to leave" (*Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 3: 181). As several biographers have noted, the decision appears to have been made less suddenly than this description suggests. Edith Clowes notes the decisive role also played by a party in Kissinger on July 11, 1912, where his sister, Josephina, and Ida Vysotskaia mocked him for his philosophical interests, which they felt made him pompous and dull (*Fiction's Overcoat: Russian Literary Culture and the Question of Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 265). As he writes in a letter to his old friend, Alexander Shtikh several days after this event, "I'm burying philosophy… All the people I care most about have turned away from me, either openly or in secret" (*Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 7: 124).

[126] "Promezhutok", in *Poetika. Istoriia literatury. Kino*, ed. by A.P. Chudakov, M. O. Chudakova and E. A. Toddes (Moskva: Nauka, 1977), pp. 168-195 (p. 184).

[127] Andrei Syniavsky comments on this crossroads in "Diskussiia," *"Marburg" Borisa Pasternaka*, p. 55.

picture emerges.[128] Here, the most striking feature of the poem is not that the speaker is walking through Marburg, but rather that he is embodied and walking at all—a first for this collection and extremely rare in Pasternak's oeuvre as a whole.[129] The emphatic fact of the speaker's movement through space gives body to the metonymic principle that Roman Jakobson famously identified as the basis of Pasternak's writing and thought.[130] Whereas Jakobson's interest is in the effect of this metonymic approach on Pasternak's lyric hero, who is "thrust into the background" by the proliferation of personified objects to which metonymy gives rise, I focus instead on the relationship of productive non-equivalence between world and poem to which the metonymical mode here gives rise. Here is the 1916 redaction of the poem in full:

Марбург

День был резкий, и тон был резкий,
Резки были день и тон —
Ну, так извиняюсь. Были занавески
Жёлты. Пеньюар был тонок, как хитон.

Ласка июля плескалась в тюле,
Тюль, подымаясь, бил в потолок,
Над головой были руки и стулья,
Под головой подушка для ног.

Вы поздно вставали. Носили лишь модное,
И к вам постучавшись, входил я в танцкласс,
Где страсть, словно балку, кидала мне под ноги
Линолеум в клетку, пустившийся в пляс.

Что сделали вы? Или это по-дружески,
Вы в кружеве вьюжитесь, мой друг в матинэ?
К чему же дивитесь Вы, если по-мужески —
мне больно, довольно, есть мера длине,
тяни, но не слишком, не рваться ж струне,
мне больно, довольно —
                                       стенает во мне
Назревшее сердце, мой друг в матинэ?

————————————————

Вчера я родился. Себя я не чту
Никем, и ещё непривычна мне поступь,
Сейчас, вспоминаю, стоял на мосту
И видел, что видят немногие с мосту.

Инстинкт сохраненья, старик подхалим,
Шёл рядом, шёл следом, бок о бок, особо,
И думал: «Он стоит того, чтоб за ним

Marburg

Day was harsh and tone was harsh,
Harsh were day and tone —
Well, I'm sorry then. Curtains
Were yellow. The negligee was delicate, like a *chiton.*

July's caress licked through the curtain lace,
The curtain lace, rising, struck at the ceiling,
Above my head were hands and chairs,
Beneath my head a pillow for feet.

You rose late. You wore only fashionable things,
And knocking at your door, I entered a dance class
Where passion, like a beam, threw beneath my feet
The checkered linoleum, which had broken into dance.

What did you do? Or is it as a friend
That you whirl in lace, my friend in a morning gown?
What are you surprised at, if like a man –
I am hurt, enough, there is a limit to how long,
pull, but not too hard, the string must not break,
I am hurt, enough –
                                       is it wailing in me
My overripe heart, my friend in a morning gown?

————————————————

Yesterday I was born. I don't consider myself
Anyone, and I'm still not used to my gait,
Just now, I remember, I was standing on the bridge
And saw what few see from the bridge.

Survival instinct, old man toady,
Walked at my side, at my heels, cheek by jowl, apart,
And thought: "It's worth, in these evil days,

[128] The poem is among the most frequently revisited and revised in Pasternak's oeuvre; K.M. Polivanov counts at least eight redactions. "Izbrannye sborniki Pasternaka i raznye redaktsii 'Marburga'." Reprinted in *"Marburg" Borisa Pasternaka*, pp. 82-93.

[129] Pasternak's disembodied lyric subject has been frequently discussed; see e.g. Sinyavsky, "Poeziia Pasternaka"; Fleishman, "Svobodnaia sub''ektivnost'"; Jakobson, "On the Prose of the Poet Pasternak".

[130] "On the Prose of the Poet Pasternak," *Language in Literature*, pp. 301-317. Though Jakobson's definition of metonymy is broad, he does not mean that all of Pasternak's images are metonymies; rather, he is arguing that all his imagery begins from a metonymical association of objects "by contiguity,"

Во дни эти злые присматривать в оба».

Шагни, и ещё раз, — твердил мне инстинкт
И вёл меня мудро, как старый схоластик,
Чрез путаный, древний, сырой лабиринт
Нагретых деревьев, сирени и страсти.

Плитняк раскалялся. И улицы лоб
Был смугл. И на небо глядел исподлобья
Булыжник. И ветер, как лодочник, грёб
По липам. И сыпало пылью и дробью.

Лиловою медью блистала плита,
А в зарослях парковых очи хоть выколи,
И лишь насекомые к солнцу с куста
Слетают, как часики спящего тикая.

О, в день тот, как демон, глядела земля,
Грозу пожирая, из трав и кустарника,
И небо, как кровь, затворялось, спалясь
О взгляд тот, тяжёлый и жёлтый, как арника.

В тот день всю тебя от гребёнок до ног,
Как трагик в провинции драму Шекспирову,
Носил я с собою и знал назубок,
Шатался по городу и репетировал.

Достаточно тягостно солнце мне днём,
Что стынет, как сало в тарелке из олова,
Но ночь занимает весь дом соловьём
И дом превращается в арфу Эолову.

По стенам испуганно мечется бой
Часов и несётся осёдланный маятник,
В саду — ты глядишь с побелевшей губой —
С земли отделяется каменный памятник.

Тот памятник — тополь. И каменный гость
Тот тополь: луна повсеместна и целостна.
И в комнате будут и белая кость
Берёзы, и прочие окаменелости.

Повсюду портпледы разложит туман,
И в каждую комнату всунут по месяцу.
Приезжие мне предоставят чулан,
Версту коридора да чёрную лестницу.

По лестнице чёрной легко босиком
Свершить замечательнейшую экскурсию.
Лишь ужасом белым оплавится дом
Да ужасом чёрным — трава и настурции.

В экскурсию эту с свечою идут,
Чтоб видели очи фиалок и крокусов,
Как сомкнуты веки бредущего. Тут
Вся соль — в освещеньи безокого фокуса.

Keeping both my eyes on him.”

Take a step, and again, -- instinct repeated to me
And led me wisely, like an old scholar,
Through the winding, ancient, damp labyrinth
Of heated trees, lilac, and passion.

The flagstones grew hot. And the street's forehead
Was swarthy. And from beneath its brow cobblestones peered
At the sky. And the wind, like a boatman, rowed
The lindens. And dust and drumming poured forth.

The paving stone shone like lilac copper,
But in the thickets of the park it's dark as pitch
And only insects to the sun from the bush
Fly, ticking like a sleeping man's timepiece.

Oh, at that day, like a demon, peered the earth,
Consuming the storm, out of grass and bushes,
And the sky, like blood, clotted, burning itself shut,
On that gaze, heavy and yellow, like arnica.

On that day all of you, from combs to feet,
Like a provincial actor a drama of Shakespeare
I carried with me and knew by heart,
Roamed the city and rehearsed.

The sun is hard enough for me in the day,
Which grows cold, like *salo* in a tin dish,
But night occupies the whole house as a nightingale
And the house turns into the Aeolian harp.

Along the walls in alarm tears the striking
Of clocks and the saddled pendulum rushes,
In the garden – you look with whitened lip –
A stone monument detaches itself from the earth.

That monument – a poplar. And a stone guest
That poplar: the moon is everywhere and whole.
And in the room will be both the white bone
Of a birch, and other petrified things.

Everywhere garment bags will be strewn about by fog,
And a moon will be placed into each room.
The vacationers will make a store-room available to me,
A *verst* of corridor and a black staircase.

Up the black staircase it is easy barefoot
To complete a most excellent excursion.
Only the house will melt with white horror
And with black horror – the grass and nasturtiums.

They go on this excursion with a candle,
So that they might see the eyes of violets and crocuses,
Like the closed lids of a wandering mind. Here
The whole point – is the illumination of an eyeless trick.

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Чего мне бояться? Я твёрже грамматики	What am I afraid of? I know insomnia more thoroughly
Бессонницу знаю. И мне не брести	Than grammar. And I don't have to wander
По голой плите босоногим лунатиком	Along the bare tile like a barefoot lunatic
Средь лип и берёз из слоновой кости.	Among lindens and birches of elephant bone.

Ведь ночи играть садятся в шахматы	For the nights are sitting down to play chess
Со мной на лунном паркетном полу.	With me on the lunar parquet floor.
Акацией пахнет, и окна распахнуты,	It smells of acacia, and windows agape,
И страсть, как свидетель, седеет в углу.	And passion, like a witness, turns grey in the corner.

И тополь — король. Королева — бессонница.	And the poplar is the king. The queen is insomnia.
И ферзь — соловей. Я тянусь к соловью.	And the pawn is a nightingale. I reach for the nightingale.
И ночь побеждает, фигуры сторонятся,	And night wins, the figures move off,
Я белое утро в лицо узнаю.[131]	I know white morning by its face.

1916

As is clear, the autobiographical events by which the poem was inspired are present here only in extremely oblique form. While the poem is clearly divided into three parts and alludes to the speaker's rejection by a female figure, the despair that ensues, and a rebirth of sorts, the details of this narrative remain ambiguous. Even Marburg, despite being named in the title, appears only vaguely, evoked by the "muddled, ancient, damp labyrinth / Of heated trees, lilac, and passion" through which "instinct" leads the lovelorn speaker. Instead, the abiding impression left by the poem is precisely of the indistinctness of the space through which the speaker moves and the strange logic of the events described, a strangeness that is intensified by the switch to the future tense in stanzas fourteen to seventeen but which applies to the majority, if not all, of the many actions, comparisons, and progressions that fill the poem. As I will argue, this pervasive ambiguity calls attention to the question of causality, a question that develops into a claim regarding the nature of the relationship between verse and world. I will deal with the poem's central section first before widening my lens to take in its frame.

Readings of the poem's central section have focused on the passivity of the speaker, which stands in stark contrast to the animacy of the world through which he moves.[132] Whereas the speaker, newly "born," moves through the city uncertainly ("and I'm still not used to my gait"), only navigating its "labyrinth" with the guidance of an outside force, "instinct, old toady," the objects surrounding him seem to have a will and purpose of their own. The parts of the city reach out to one another, personified, establishing a network of relationships and actions that are made dynamic by the abundance of directional prepositions ("za" [*behind* (l. 26)], "v" [*into* (l. 27)], "chrez" [*through* (l. 30)], "na" [*at* (l. 33)], "po" [*along* (l. 35)], "k" [*towards* (l. 38)], "s" [*(down) from* (l. 38)], "iz" [*out of* (l. 41)]"). These exchanges are imbued overall with forward motion by the frequent repetition of "and" [*i*], which appears a total of thirteen times in stanzas five through ten, nine of which times it creates parataxis. The features of the landscape are distinct, as emphasized by the alternation of dominant vowels in each (e.g. "plit*nia*k r*a*sk*alia*lsia. I *u*litsy lob / byl sm*u*gl"), but are coordinated, grammatically and otherwise, and together create an accretive momentum that bursts forth in the storm of the tenth stanza.

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[131] Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 1: 375-8.
[132] Jakobson, for example, writes, "The principal characters in the action are flagstone, paving stone, wind […] impending storm, sky, etc." "On the Prose of the Poet Pasternak," p. 313.

By contrast, the second half of the poem is defined by all-pervasive transformation and a tendency toward dissolution that ends in the "black staircase" (twice repeated) and "eyeless trick" of the seventeenth stanza. This movement begins with the comparison of the day, "which grows cool" with "*salo* in a tin dish" (l. 49), found in the twelfth stanza. This image returns in the sixteenth stanza ("the house will melt") and, obliquely, in the candle of the seventeenth. It is not only fatty substances that are prone to dissolution, however, as the melting house already demonstrates; in this part of the poem, "night" becomes a "nightingale" (l. 50), the house "turns into an Aeolian harp" (l. 51), and "garment bags will be strewn about by fog" (l. 60). Whereas the objects of the first part of the poem establish a network (or labyrinth) of connected but discrete objects, here the objects seem both to emerge from and merge into one other, detaching themselves from larger wholes ("A stone monument detaches itself from the earth" (l. 55)) and fracturing in order to enter new ones ("And a moon will slip into each room" (l. 61)).

A particular dense instance of these transformations is found in stanza fourteen:

Тот памятник — тополь. И каменный гость	That monument – a poplar. And a stone guest
Тот тополь: луна повсеместна и целостна.	That poplar: the moon is everywhere and whole.
И в комнате будут и белая кость	And in the room will be both the white bone
Берёзы, и прочие окаменелости.	Of a birch, and other petrified things.

(ll. 56-59)

If the first line's initial comparison seems to clarify the identity of the "stone monument" that "detaches itself from the earth" in the previous stanza, the next sentence immediately reverses this motion; while the base metaphor remains the same (TREE is STATUE), the existence of the poplar, only just revealed, is nonetheless tempered by its immediate transformation back into a "stone guest" by the light of the moon. These transformations continue through the stanza as the moonlight penetrates into the room of the house, now conjuring a tree ("white bone / of birch) that may exist only metaphorically (a shadow-dappled shaft of moonlight, perhaps) but which continues to have the weight of the 'real' tree just described, the garden's poplar. (Indeed, given the often-metonymic mode of Pasternak's metaphors, it may suggest a nearby birch.) By the same token, however, the solidity of the initial comparison's vehicle ("monument") is also reaffirmed, as its qualities are endowed upon the other objects in the room ("petrified things").

While the first part of the poem is characterized by the accumulation of detail, then, the objects of this second part shift like shadows that now loom from the dark scene, now retreat. At the same time, however, their mutability is countered by the poem's sonic texture. This effect is particularly noticeable in the stanza just discussed, in which the alternating masculine and feminine rhymes reach back into the line to create two additional rhyming couplets; so "gost'" (l. 56) and "kost'" (l. 58) rhyme not only with each other but also with the feminine rhyme pair "tselostna" (l. 57) and "okamenelosti" (l. 59), whose first and second syllables find an echo in "belaia kost'" and "kamennyi gost'", respectively. A similar, though less all-encompassing, effect is found in stanza thirteen, in which the line-end rhymes extend back into the previous words in the line ("m*eche*tsia boi" / "pobel*evshi*i guboi" and "osedl*annyi* maiatnik" / "kam*ennyi* pamiatnik"). Such effects are not limited to rhyme words but reverberate across and between stanzas, as in the trace of "bosikom" (l. 64) that is heard in "krokusov" (l. 69), "somknuty" (l. 70) and "bezokogo" (l. 71). They are amplified by this section's tendency to repeat full words (e.g., "dom" [*house*], "kamennyi" [*stone*], "pamiatnik" [*monument*], "topol'" [*poplar*], "komnata" [*room*], "belyi" [*white*], "uzhas" [*horror*], and "chernyi" [*black*]), which appear and reappear in different line-positions, grammatical functions, and combinations.

By contrast, the first half of this central part repeats words only rarely ("instinkt" [*instinct*], "shel" [*walked*], "nebo" [sky] and "gliadel" [*peered*]). While sonic echoes do occur, these are generally restricted to words' immediate vicinity and a single instance, creating bridges from word to word rather than an all-encompassing net. In the eighth stanza, for example, the first syllable of "p*lit*niak" [*flagstones*] appears again in "u*lit*sy" [*of the street*]. Each of the words in the phrase "ulitsy lob" [*the street's forehead*] reappear once in the next line, the first in "sm*ugl*" [*swarthy*] and the second in "ispod*lob*'ia" [*from beneath the brow*]. This finds its own echo to the next line's "*lod*ochnik" [*boatman*], its own first letter picked up by "*l*ipam" [*lindens*]. If the second part's dissolution of things is countered by its sonic wholeness, in other words, the first part's division into sonic elements offsets the accretive whole to which its objects belong. The two halves of the poem's central section thus enact the opposing directions contained in metonymic description, in which whole represents part or vice versa. Metonymic contiguity, moreover, functions differently in each, in the first primarily on the level of language, as adjacent words suggest the next, and in the second on an ontological, or metaphorical, level, as adjacent things bleed into and transform those in their vicinity. This would seem to align these two parts with Jakobson's distinction between metonymy, which he connects with prose, and metaphor, connected with poetry.

The two parts of the poem's central section thus appear to be quite distinct, differentiated not only by their respective temporal settings (day and night) but also by the change of tense that occurs in the twelfth stanza, in which the past of narration is replaced first by present and then by perfective future verbs. Given the past tense narration of the poem's opening section ("Day was sharp…") and the present tense of its final section ("What do I have to fear?..."), this would seem to align with a reading of the poem as depicting the speaker's progress from disappointed love of the past to the poetry of the present and future, a distinction that is further confirmed by what I have identified as the progressive (i.e., narrative) motion of the central section's first half and the recurrence (i.e. poetry) typical of its second.

Yet despite their apparent opposition, the two parts of the poem are more closely related than at first appears. This is made clear, first, by the similar position occupied by the speaker in each, both grammatically and otherwise. The first-person "I" appears in the nominative case almost as frequently in the second part (thrice) as in the first (four times), while the speaker's passive acquiescence to "instinct" in the first part is echoed by his passivity as he is offered a room in the eleventh stanza and, seemingly, joins the mysterious excursion with which this section ends. In both parts of the poem, furthermore, the speaker appears to be extraneous to the actions that occur, a position that is also implied by the frightening qualities of each of these spaces (the earth is "like a demon" in the first part, while the second features both "white horror" and "black horror").[133]

This fear is acknowledged in the opening line of the final section ("What do I have to fear?" (l. 72)), and it is here, too, that its cause—the strange logic of the two worlds through which the poem has just passed—is first made explicit (and simultaneously dispelled): "I know insomnia more thoroughly / Than grammar" (ll. 72-73). It is in this final section, too, that the

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[133] These belong to another set of crisscrossing motifs in the first and second half of the poem. If the first half is associated with the sky and the heavens and the second with the underworld (evoked by the statue rising from the dead and the excursion into the abyss of the staircase with which it ends), the first is also connected with death, via the suicidal scene with which it opens, and defined by a hellish heat; the deathly aura of the second half, meanwhile, is redeemed by its evocation of Persephone, whose annual return to the earth brings the spring suggested by the flowers and grass of these stanzas.

reason for the speaker's new certainty becomes clear. The speaker sits down to play chess with "the nights," an image that has been frequently commented upon. While many scholars equate this game of chess with the speaker's entrance into poetry, the precise nature of their equivalence tends to be left somewhat vague. I would suggest instead that the chess game represents neither poetry nor, as some have suggested, the reality to which the speaker must return. Rather, the game provides the key precisely to bringing these two realms together—a key that *Over the Barriers* as a whole has been seeking, and which, as such, positions "Marburg" squarely at the conclusion of the collection of which it is part.

I have already suggested that the second half of the poem's central section as though mirrors the first, with the initial movement from part to whole reversed in a motion from whole to part. This general tendency is realized in the structure of the poem itself, in which every stanza finds its mirror in the other half of the poem. The chess game with which it ends and the moonlight-checkered floor on which it takes place are the first clues as to this pattern, containing a clear echo of the "checkered linoleum" of the very first section. This connection is confirmed by the reappearance of the beloved's "negligee" and "morning gown" in the "nights" and "white morning" of the final section, and, furthermore, by the speaker's belated response to his own command, the imperative verb "tiani" [*pull* (l. 17)] reappearing in reflexive, first-person form in the poem's final stanza: "Ia tianus' k solov'iu" [*I reach for the nightingale* (l. 81)].

Similar patterns structure the central section of the poem, which is mirrored around the seventh stanza, in which the speaker "roamed the city and rehearsed" (l. 47). To list, first, just a few of these correspondences: the imagery associated with injury and treatment in the tenth stanza ("the sky, like blood, clotted shut", "arnica") and the twelfth (melted *salo* is used as a poultice);[134] the "clock" and "garden" in the thirteenth stanza and the "watch" and "park" in the ninth; the communing parts of the city in the eighth stanza and the labyrinth of images created by the fourteenth (discussed above); the appearance of people external to the speaker in the fifteenth stanza ("priezzhie" [*new arrivals*])[135] and the personified "instinct" in the seventh; the twice-repeated "walked" of the sixth stanza and the "excursion" of the sixteenth, in which "white horror" and "black horror" also echo the "evil days" feared by "instinct"; and finally, the use of the verb "videt'" [*to see*] in the seventeenth stanza, for the first time since the fifth.

This symmetry enacts on a large scale the reversible metonymic motion from part to whole and whole to part that we observed within each section, each stanza now seen on its own terms, now drawn into the larger structure of which it is part. This is not to speak of the many further patterns that these motifs, moving like chess pieces through the poem, establish and develop within this structure, nor of the shifting significance with which these additional patterns bestow these motifs. Indeed, it is the very existence of structure that allows for these myriad connections to emerge. For if we accept the view that the first half of the poem represents the world of reality, while the second depicts "the play of imagination,"[136] it is the chess game with which the poem ends that draws these poles together in the structure of the poetic text, the many patterns, repetitions, and rhythms of which resemble a chessboard on which the world ("And

[134] My thanks to Anna Muza for her perceptive comments regarding these stanzas.
[135] Following the pattern I have identified, these human figures are the transformed embodiment of all the things the moonlight has bought into the room.
[136] Victor Erlich, "'Strasti razriadi': Zametki o 'Marburge'", in *"Marburg" Borisa Pasternaka*, pp. 19-28 (p. 25).

poplar — king"), subjective reality ("Queen — insomnia") and art ("And pawn — nightingale") can exist in constantly shifting and productive relation to one another.[137]

While much has been made of night's victory at the end of the poem, the present tense of this final section indicates that this victory is not final; the poem, like the collection as a whole, is not about a contest between reality and imagination, or reality and art, but an investigation into how poetry brings these two spheres into dynamic contact. As the poem moves from one image to the next via a contiguous motion that takes place on both the level of reality and on the level of language, the metonymic ground along which it moves opens up an avenue of exchange between world and text in which both occupy the position of both whole and part, cause and effect—in which "the noise of the dictionary," as Pasternak describes his poetic material elsewhere, gives birth to life, just as "my sister, life" is the source of poetry.[138] As Pasternak wrote to his father in 1916 (when the poem was first composed), his turn to poetry occurred "instinctively, suddenly, and laconically [*bezotchetno, skoropostizhno i lakonichno*], like health and illness, like birth and death."[139] The turn from philosophy to poetry was, in other words, not a turn *from* death to life, from illness to health but rather the entry into a domain where such incommensurable spheres exist simultaneously.

We come closer, then, to understanding why "Marburg"—the poem named for the period of Pasternak's life that was for him shorthand for the beginning of his poetic career—is placed at the end of *Over the Barriers*.[140] The answer lies in viewing the original redaction of the poem not primarily in its autobiographical frame but, rather, in the context of the collection in which it is included. As I have shown, *Over the Barriers* represents a series of explorations into the possible relationship between the world and poetry, in which poetry's proximity to reality is asserted precisely through the attention that is drawn to poetic structure. The three poems I have considered deal with different aspects of the peculiar kind of double vision that poetry and the poetic image afford. Whether reflecting upon the interaction of verbal and visual modes of representation, as in "Dedication" or testing the limits of the literal and the figurative, as in "A Bad Dream", the poems in this collection call our attention to the conventions upon which our comprehension of the world relies at the same time as they obstruct comprehension, eschewing verbal communication in favor of a material communication that asserts the vitality latent in language as a medium and made active by the poetic image to bring different spheres into contact. In this, the final poem, the embodied speaker enacts the stance to which this process and the collection as a whole calls its readers: to view poetry neither as fully separate from life nor entirely merging with it but, rather, to become aware through the very distinctiveness of poetry's structures of the inherent poeticity of existence—to become newly attuned to the patterns and conventions that shape the world and our perception of it. The many revisions to which *Over the Barriers* and "Marburg" in particular were subject attest to the ongoing nature of this process, the necessary result of the new possibilities it reveals.[141]

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[137] In this connection, Syniavsky's comment that the poem represents "the birth of structure" is intriguing. "Diskussiia," *"Marburg" Borisa Pasternaka*, p. 55.

[138] Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 5: 23-6.

[139] Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 7: 243.

[140] Incidentally, despite the scant critical attention that has been devoted to it, Pasternak attached considerable importance to *Over the Barriers* as a whole when periodizing his life and work. As he writes, "It turned from the title of a book into the name of a period or a manner, and I subsequently brought things that had been written later beneath this heading, if their character approached that of that first book." Pasternak, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy,* p. 625.

[141] This offers one explanation for the constancy with which Pasternak criticized and revised all his major work.

In the final part of this chapter, I turn to the theory of *ostranenie* [enstrangement] put forward by Viktor Shklovsky in the same year that *Over the Barriers* was published. Reading this revolutionary theoretical concept in parallel with Pasternak's work confirms the collection's attunement to a concern with the power of poetry as a medium to reveal and shape the parameters of reality that runs much deeper than a mere record of contemporary events and reflection upon them.

Part Three: Russian Formalism and the Image

The image makes its most prominent appearance in early twentieth-century Russian literary polemics in Viktor Shklovsky's 1917 "Art as Device" [*Iskusstvo kak priem*], often viewed as a manifesto of sorts for the formalist approach. This article is one of several in which Shklovsky takes noisy issue with the notion, made popular by the Ukrainian-born philologist, Alexander Potebnya that "art is thinking in images." The Formalists' objections to Potebnya's theories were part of their more general objection to the institutionalized academia of which he was a representative, and whose foremost figures "commanded unprecedented respect in journalistic, pedagogical, poetic, and broadly intellectual circles."[142] The Formalists felt that this reverence for the scholars of the day had the adverse effect of diluting scholarship and causing it to stagnate; as Eikhenbaum writes, "The theoretical heritage which Potebnya and Veselovsky left to their disciples seemed to lie like dead capital—a treasure which they were afraid to touch, the brilliance of which they had allowed to fade."[143] The Formalists, that is, by no means entirely jettisoned Potebnya's work; rather, they sought to critically engage with his ideas as they furthered the development of literary scholarship.[144] As I will demonstrate in the reading of Shklovsky's "Art as Device" that follows, their rejection of the concept of art as "thinking in

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[142] Andy Byford, *Literary Scholarship in Late Imperial Russia: Rituals of Academic Institutionalization* (Oxford: Legenda, 2007), p. 2. The popularization of academicians' ideas led to the situation described by Boris Eikhenbaum in his retrospective essay, "Theory of the 'Formal Method'" (originally published in 1926), whereby "authority and influence gradually passed from academic scholarship to the "scholarship" of the journals, to the work of Symbolist critics and theoreticians" and became "subjective and tendentious" ("Teoriia 'formal'nogo metoda'," *O literature* (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel', 1987), pp. 375-408 (p. 378).

[143] "Teoriia 'formal'nogo metoda'," p. 378. Eikhenbaum takes a harsher view in an earlier article: "There used to be 'subjective' criticism—impressionistic, philosophical, etc., presenting its 'meditations' about this and that. There also used to be 'objective' scholarship—academic, internally hostile toward criticism, a lecturing from the cathedra full of certitudes. And suddenly all of this became a laughable anachronism. The scholarly certitudes preached from the cathedras turned out to be naïve babble and the critics' meditations a mere empty set of words, more or less like clever chatter. What was demanded was a business-like criticism—precise and concrete—that would encompass both genuine keenness of perception. Both pedantic [*intelligentskii*] criticism and scholarship began to be viewed as dilettantism; both were sentenced to death." "Metody i podkhody" (1922), trans. by Peter Steiner (cited *Metapoetics*, p. 25). Not all the Formalists shared Eikhenbaum's certainty in the absolute novelty of the movement; as Boris Tomashevsky, for example, writes: "one should not assume that the new school rejected the entire heritage of Russian scholarship. If it sometimes opposed Veselovsky's and Potebnya's ideas, it did so merely to emphasize its own independent stance" (cited Steiner, *Metapoetics*, p. 27). Recent scholarship has emphasized the Formalists' debt to their predecessors as much as their bold innovations; see e.g. Steiner, *Metapoetics*; Erlich, *Russian Formalism*; Aage Hansen-Lowe, *Russkii formalizm*.

[144] The Formalist rejection of Potebnya was part of their attempt to oust Russian Symbolism, the dominant literary and theoretical school of the period and deeply invested in Potebnya's theories.

images" was less an outright rejection of poetic imagery as such than an effort to reconceptualize the nature and functioning of this imagery. For the Formalists, this lay not in poetic language's referential capacities but, rather, in relation to what they conceived as the inseparability of poetic language from poetic structure. As I shall argue in the final section of this chapter, which turns to Yury Tynianov's classic essay, "The Interval" [*Promezhutok*], this turn away from the referential function of language and toward poetic structure was precisely a turn towards the question of how poetry might shape our perception and experience of the world.

Enstranging the Image: Alexander Potebnya, Viktor Shklovsky, and Art as Device

Alexander Potebnya (1835-1891) was a philosopher and a linguist. He taught at the University of Kharkov, where he specialized in the history and development of Russian phonetics. This work was at the center of his theory of the poetic image, which formed part of Potebnya's theoretical work on the relationship between language and consciousness, the product of which was the influential 1862 monograph, *Thought and Language* [*Mysl' i iazyk*].[145]

In *Thought and Language*, Potebnya develops a theory of language in the tradition of German philosopher and linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835). For von Humboldt, language's role is to mediate between external reality and subjective inwardness by objectifying sensory impressions and subjective experience. Its capacity to do so depends upon the unity of the word's material, or "outer", form with its "inner form," that intangible part of language that is the bridge between subjectivity and the world of phenomena, between the ongoing, creative production of language and its external form. Inner form, according to von Humboldt, is what guarantees the vital energy of language and its generative force; it is what renders language not *ergon*, a 'dead' and finished thing, but *energeia*, ceaseless activity.[146]

Potebnya embraced this view of language as ceaseless activity, as well as its corollary, namely, that language is always threatened by stagnation. For Potebnya, as for von Humboldt, this occurs when the word's external form, its sound, falls out of harmony with its inner form. Potebnya sought, however, to make these claims more precise by identifying the empirical basis of inner form; so doing, he believed, would clarify the relation between thought and language. Potebnya divided the word into three parts, rather than von Humboldt's two: inner form, outer form, and content. For Potebnya, "inner form" is not what the word means in its present guise but that part of the word which retains an echo of the ancient root from which it is derived—in which the literal referent of the metaphor from which the word first arose continues to be felt. This is the process to which Potebnya refers when he speaks of the image, for him synonymous

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[145] Although Potebnya had a dedicated circle of followers in Khar'kov, his work did not become popular until a decade after his death in 1891, when it became so widely known that it was even included in high-school courses in poetic theory. Byford, *Literary Scholarship in Late Imperial Russia*, p. 2. Potebnya had a group of ardent 'disciples' in Khar'kov, the philologists and literary historians who attended the Historical-Philological Society of Khar'kov University of which he had been President for twelve years. It was quite common in nineteenth-century Russia for professors to gain devoted followings; Dmitrii Ovsianiko-Kulikovskii, whose scholarly engagement with his work is partly to thank for the growth of Potebnya's popularity outside of Kharkov, had his own ardent supporters (ibid., pp. 105-118).

[146] John Fizer provides a detailed account of Potebnya's engagement with von Humboldt and with Romantic aesthetics more generally (particularly the work of Herder) in *Alexander A. Potebnja's Psycholinguistic Theory of Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986). Discussion of Potebnya's debt to von Humboldt can also be found in Stephen Cassedy, *Flight from Eden: The Origins of Modern Literary Criticism and Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 39-43.

with inner form. When Potebnya writes, therefore, that "the goal of imagery [*obraznost'*] is to bring the meaning of the image [*obraz*] closer to our understanding," this is not tautological: poetic imagery—tropes, sound patterns, and so on—makes the etymological trace that is the image proper newly perceptible by reviving the link between the outer form of the word and its meaning, reactivating the archaic tropes that reside within the word and which generate the constant figurative transformations that are at the heart of language's creative power. Retaining the trace of a mythic linguistic past when language referred directly to real objects in the world, "inner form" revives language by revealing its originary immediacy.

Potebnya's declaration that art is "thinking in images," so disputed by the Formalists, thus means that art, and in particular poetry, provides access to a pre-conceptual state of consciousness—a pre-rational, though not a- or irrational, way of relating to and understanding the world. In this sense, he and the Symbolists who followed him come close to the arguments found in the Western tradition discussed in the first part of this chapter, thanks largely to their work's shared heritage in Romantic aesthetics. As for Western European writers and critics, this emphasis upon the extra-rational significance afforded by poetic language becomes for Potebnya proof of poetic language's fundamental opposition to the prosaic language of everyday speech; poeticity is "the symbolism of language," as opposed to prosaicity, "the oblivion of inner form."[147]

The Formalists objected strongly to these terms, which they found both imprecise and value-laden. In the first issues of the formalist periodical *Sborniki po teorii poeticheskogo iazyka*, published in 1916-17, their main concern was to reconceive the distinction between poetic and what they termed "practical" language. The articles in *Sborniki* formulated this distinction on the basis of sound. Unlike Potebnya, the Formalists viewed poetic language's sonic element not primarily in its connection to meaning and certainly not in terms of its symbolic content; in Osip Brik's formulation, which appears in "Sound Repetitions" [*Zvukovye povtory*], an essay in the 1916 issue of *Sborniki*, "[t]he sounds […] are not only euphonious accessories to meaning; they are also the result of an independent poetic purpose."[148] Sound was, in other words, interpreted not with reference back to the object to which it referred but, rather, in the context of the use to which it was put. As the linguist Lev Jakubinsky in an essay in the same issue entitled "On the Sounds of Poetic Language", the sounds of practical language ("the language of thought") "have no independent value and are merely a *means* of communication." In poetic language, by contrast, sound "acquires an independent value"—it is significant for its own sake.[149]

This shift away from discussion of the word's "inner symbolism" is central to Formalism's rejection of the image, as defined by Potebnya. This is the topic of Shklovsky's famous 1917 essay, "Art as Device",[150] in which Shklovsky attacks Potebnya's theory and first introduces his own theory of *ostranenie* ("defamiliarization", "estrangement" or "e*n*strangement"

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[147] Alexander Potebnya, *Iz zapisok po teorii slovesnosti. Poeziia i proza. Tropy i figury. Myshlenie poeticheskoe i mificheskoe. Prilozheniia* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), p. 134.

[148] *Poetika. Sborniki po teorii poeticheskogo iazyka* (Petrograd, 1919), p. 60.

[149] *Poetika*, p. 37. The linguistic bent of these articles illustrates the Formalists' desire to replace Potebnya's vague, evaluative, and shifting terms with precise descriptions of the difference between poetic and practical language.

[150] The essay first appeared in the second volume of *Sborniki po teorii poeticheskogo iazyka* in 1917, then again, with the addition of a number of examples taken from erotic art, in the 1919 reprint of the first two *Sborniki*. This is the version found in Shklovsky's critical anthology, *Teoriia prozy*, published in 1925 and in a new edition in 1929. See Eric Naiman for more details on the changes made to the essay in each edition. "Shklovsky's Dog and Mulvey's Pleasure: The Secret Life of Defamiliarization," *Comparative Literature* Vol. 50, No. 4 (1998), 333 – 52.

as it has been variously translated).[151] In pointed opposition to Potebnya's view of the image as *the* defining characteristic of poetry, Shklovsky declares images "not essential to the development of poetry."[152] The image is but one device among many, and is as capable of existing in prose as poetry is of existing without it (Shklovsky's example is Pushkin's lyric, "I loved you…" [*Ia vas liubil…* (1829)]).[153] The image as Potebnya defines it is not even creative, Shklovsky asserts. "Images turn out to be almost immobile," he writes; "they flow, unchangingly, from century to century, country to country, poet to poet […] Images are a given, and poetry is not so much thinking in images as remembering them."[154]

This is rather an inaccurate characterization of Potebnya's theory, but it is worth dwelling upon for what it reveals about Shklovsky's own view of the image. To be sure, Potebnya's theory of the image rests on its connection with archaic etymological tropes, but the essence of the image, as he describes it, lies in the highly personal moment of "immediate signification" to which inner form gives rise—the new unities that emerge to replace old representations in each individual encounter with the word's outer form and its content. Far from immobile, the image is the lynchpin of Potebnya's conception of language, and hence poetry, as *energeia*, living and ceaseless activity.[155] Shklovsky seems to be quite wrong, therefore, when he asserts that Potebnya views the image primarily as a means of "economizing" creative effort, an approach to art that Shklovsky—citing the English philosopher and political theorist Herbert Spencer, the German-Swiss philosopher Richard Avenarius, and the Russian philologist Alexander Veselovsky—identifies as widespread.

Possibly Shklovsky is simplifying Potebnya's theory in order to yoke it to this larger argument or exaggerating for polemical effect. The misunderstanding most likely arises, however, due to the fundamental shift in orientation that Shklovsky and the Formalists are proposing. For he is quite right that Potebnya's theory emphasizes *perceptual* ease: imagery *makes perceptible* the ancient tropes hidden within the word, and if creative effort is involved in understanding the meaning of the image each time it is perceived, this work takes place *after* this initial moment of perception. Shklovsky, by contrast, is interested in the moment of perception itself as a physical fact. Referring to the work of Jakubinsky, Shklovsky identifies economy of effort as a principle not of poetry but of so-called practical language, which relies upon and results in "automatization" [*avtomatizatsiia*]: "In quick, practical speech, words are not spoken fully; only their initial sounds are registered by the mind […] automatizing a thing, we save the

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[151] As Cristina Vatulescu comments, "There is estrangement and enstrangement, making it strange, defamiliarization, and de-automatization. ... The many overlapping, contentious, and complicit terms for *ostranenie* suggest that there are many 'different kinds' of estrangement." "The Politics of Estrangement: Tracking Shklovsky's Device through Literary and Policing Practices," *Poetics Today,* Vol. 27, No. 1 (March 2006), 35–66 (p. 63).

[152] "Potebnya," *Poetika*, p. 4.

[153] Jakobson returns to this poem in his much later article, "Grammatical Parallelism and its Russian Facet" in *Language in Literature*, pp. 145-179. Jakobson disagrees with Shklovsky's opinion regarding the poem's lack of images.

[154] "Art, as Device," trans. by Alexandra Berlina, *Poetics Today* Vol. 36, No. 3 (September 2015), 151-174 (p. 158); *Poetika*, p. 102. I cite the text according to the 1919 edition and in Alexandra Berlina's translation, except where noted.

[155] John Fizer discusses Formalism's misinterpretation of Potebnya's theory in some detail, which arose, in part, from Symbolism's own misinterpretation. See *Potebnja's Psycholinguistic Theory*, pp. 124-7. My own understanding of Potebnya's theories owes much to Fizer's lucid account, which goes a long way to clarifying Potebnya's scattered writings on the topic in *Mysl' i iazyk* and *Iz zapisok po teorii slovesnosti* (Collected writings from Potebnya's notebooks, published posthumously in 1905).

greatest amount of perceptual effort."[156] For Shklovsky, the whole goal of art is, by contrast, to impede perception—to make the word unrecognizable, *strange*, extending the process of perception in order, in Shklovsky's famous formulation, "to restore the sensation of life, in order to make us feel things, in order to make the stone stony."[157]

Shklovsky's central point is thus essentially the same as that made by Potebnya, as others have noted: art should renew our perception of things (words, forms) that have been made imperceptible through habit and overuse; that is, it should destroy our too-intimate (and so, distracted and diminished) relationship with things (work, clothes, furniture, our wives), and in so doing make room for a new relationship with the word and the world.[158] Nonetheless, there is an important difference in their positions, one that indicates that Shklovsky's misrepresentation of Potebnya is indeed more than simply a polemical effort to differentiate his own theory of art from those of his predecessors. For Shklovsky rejects the idea, so central for Potebnya and Romantic philosophers of language such as von Humboldt, that this new relationship is one of more profound intimacy between being and representation, and the related notion that the sound qualities of a word, far from arbitrary or accidental, actually evoke the thing itself—that there exists, or used to exist, or might again exist a form of language that immediately flows from things and the world.[159]

Shklovsky's objections to the school of thought represented by Potebnya might be summarized thus. If Potebnya advocates for a return to the deep past of linguistic origins, i.e. myth, as a means of escaping ideologies of rationality and progress, Shklovsky argues that the desire for language to provide more immediate access to the world ultimately operates according to the same principles as *modern* discourses of efficiency: the image eases the path to understanding, rather than, as Shklovsky believes, acting precisely by "making difficult" [*zatrudnenie*]. Shklovsky is uninterested in the question of whether, and how intimately, language and things are connected to one another; his emphasis is on the perception *of* language and *of* things, irrespective of any claim as to the relationship between these two poles. Indeed, drawing attention to tangible qualities of language such as sound and appearance, Shklovsky asserts that language and things belong in the same category.

Most importantly, Shklovsky aims to detach discussions of art's effects from questions of the mind and abstract cognition, and to attach it instead to the body and the understanding that follows from bodily experience. This much is made clear by his interest in the physical process of *seeing* rather than *recognizing*, by his interest in Tolstoy's reflections upon cleaning his room,

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[156] "Art, as Device," p. 162; *Poetika*, p. 105.

[157] ibid.

[158] Cf. Shklovsky's "Resurrection of the Word" (1914), which more or less paraphrases Potebnya: "When words are used as general concepts… they become familiar, and neither their internal forms (images), nor the external one (sounds) are experienced anymore. We do not experience the familiar…" Alexandra Berlina, *Viktor Shklovsky: A Reader* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), p. 64.

[159] The symbolist interpretation of this precept diverged from Potebnya's original theory. Whereas Potebnya held that "[i]n the creation of language, there is no arbitrariness," Symbolists such as Bely, believed that articulated sound—the word's external form—was determined by a "licentious creative act" (Fizer, *Potebnja's Psycholinguistic Theory*, p. 123). This belief in the "magic of words" led to such statements as that of Bely, who writes: "when I call the sound of thunder, which frightens me, *grom* [thunder], I create a sound which imitates the thunder (grrr). In creating such a sound, it is as if I begin to create the thunder; the process of recreation is cognition; in essence I recognize the thunder" (*Simvolizm*, p. 431). Potebnya, by contrast, "did not ascribe a generative power to [external form]" (Fizer, *Potebnja's Psycholinguistic Theory*, p. 122).

and by the many erotic examples of enstrangement that fill the second part of the article.[160] Speaking broadly, where Romantic aesthetics viewed poetry as "awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom," in Coleridge's phrase, Shklovsky sees it as awakening the *body*'s attention from the lethargy of custom.

It is therefore not a matter of great concern that Shklovsky's own definition of the image is so muddled.[161] What is more important, as seen by setting the theory in the context of debates about imagery more broadly, is Shklovsky's larger goal, which is to move away from a conception of the image as a sign and towards a more physical view of the image as part of the structure of literary discourse. Generously, then, we might say that "image" means different things in this article because it is precisely not fixed. It is not a particular kind of sign but a *priem*, a poetic device that *does* something—"one of the ways, but only one of the ways, of creating a perceptible structure designed to be perceived within its own fabric."[162] Shklovsky and the Formalists are not interested in the referential function of language. Instead, they are concerned with how words as physical entities relate to other words: how language contributes to artistic perception by making its reader experience form as something concrete and dynamic. The image is not a well-wrought urn, but that which makes the urn perceptible as a constructed thing.

What matters to Shklovsky, then, is not some essential way in which poetic language differs from prosaic language, nor the access it may or may not provide to a special kind of knowledge, but rather the manner in which poetic language makes its reader aware of "how a work is made." This conception of poetic language, and the theory of the image that it implies, is clarified and made more precise by Tynianov's 1924 *Problem of Verse Language*, discussed in the previous chapter. Proposing the category of *verse* language as an alternative to that of poetic language, Tynianov extends the break with language's referential function that was at the heart of the definition of this earlier category by focusing exclusively on the structural complex in which verse language's semantic element is always imbricated.

Like Shklovsky, Tynianov explicitly opposes his theory of verse language to Potebnya and his theory of the image, which he discusses in the book's introduction and to which he returns in its conclusion. As we saw in the previous chapter, Tynianov regards the semantic aspect of verse as fundamentally tied up with rhythm; both together form the "dynamic construction [*stroi*]" of verse. Tynianov emphasizes the 'density' [*tesnota*] of the verse line, and argues that meaning emerges from this density precisely due to the constant ruptures that result as each word jostles against the next; adjacent words force their meaning upon one another, shifting and transforming the meanings of their neighbors so that poetic meaning never settles but exists only as a process—a sort of infinite metonymy. In keeping with this position, Tynianov spends little time explaining the "meaning" of the various images he introduces

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[160] These examples are missing from the original 1917 version of the article, appearing only when it was reprinted in the 1919 reissue of the first two *Sborniki*. While some commentators have connected this to Shklovsky's averred desire to "make a splash, shock people" ("As I've said, this was the era," he comments in a later interview (cited Berlina, *Viktor Shklovsky*, p. 55), scholars such as Eric Naiman view the insertion of these examples as symptomatic of the misogynistic undercurrent of Shklovsky's argument and the period as a whole. This may well be true, but does not preclude the other functions that these examples serve.

[161] This is in keeping with what Eric Naiman describes as the generally "contradictory and even haphazard" nature of the article as a whole ("Shklovsky's Dog," p. 339). It stems, in part, from a confusing tendency to treat dead metaphors (e.g. "old hat" for "twit" (accepted usage)) as poetic, i.e. as "a means of strengthening the impression," while treating somewhat obscure comparisons (e.g. "watermelon" for "lamp") as purely practical, "a […] means of thought, a means for bringing things together into groups." "Art, as Device", p. 159-60; *Poetika*, p. 103.

[162] *Poetika*, p. 4.

precisely because this meaning remains dynamic. Crucially, this is due not to an inner, mythical energy of language but to the energy that verse as a dynamic construction creates.

Though the complex theoretical nature of Tynianov's intervention might seem completely to divorce poetic language from its referential function, reading it in the context of Shklovsky's theory of estrangement reveals the alternative route by which Tynianov, and Formalism in general, believed poetic language came into contact with reality. As in Pasternak's work, the formalist route moves through the very constructedness of poetic language, its *distance* from the world, in order to reach this goal. I will expand on this claim in the conclusion to this chapter, and its final section, in which I turn to Tynianov's 1924 essay, "The Interval" [*Promezhutok*].

Conclusion:

Words, Things, and "The Interval"

"The Interval", written immediately after Tynianov had completed *Problem of Verse Language*, is nominally an overview of the contemporary literary scene. It casts itself, however, as a eulogy.[163] "Here lived poets," its epigraph runs, a line from Blok that casts the shadow of his era-defining death, in 1921, over the discussion of the new era of the "interval" that follows.[164] It is not, however, that the essay mourns a generation of dead poets, though many of its subjects would indeed die all too soon, nor that it laments the passing of the age of poetry and its supercession by prose. Rather, the essay's central suggestion is that the work of the poets at the center of its discussion has lost the energy necessary for their poetry to live. Each of the poets described in the first part of the essay—Sergei Esenin (1895-1925), Vladislav Khodasevich (1886-1939), Anna Akhmatova (1889-1966), Velimir Khlebnikov (1885-1922) and Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893-1930)—are criticized for the blind alley into which an excessive emphasis upon one aspect of verse—the lyric subject, metrical structure, theme—has led their work. Even Khlebnikov and Mayakovsky, whom Tynianov praises for "rous[ing] the bookish word," placed too exclusive an emphasis on this task, with the result that "the word moved away from things [...] it became too free, it stopped having any effect."[165]

Tynianov's central metaphor in this essay is energy. Literary history is cast in terms of the "inertia," the momentum that drives literary production during periods when its form becomes settled. Poetry's most recent period of inertia has ended, Tynianov writes, leaving lone poets wandering through the "interval"—"when there is no inertia, and which, by the optical laws of history, seems like a dead-end."[166] As Tynianov goes on to argue, however, it is precisely

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[163] "The Interval" was first published in 1924 in *Russkii sovremennik* (No. 4, pp. 209-221). The essay was republished in *Arkhaisty i novatory* [Archaists and Innovators], a collection compiled by Tynianov in 1929; in this edition, the essay is dedicated to Pasternak. Tynianov's work on this article coincided with his time as a member of the Study Group for Contemporary Poetry [*Kruzhok po noveishei poezii*] formed by Tynianov, Sergei Balukahtyi, Boris Tomashevsky and Eikhenbaum in the Department of the History of Verbal Arts at the State Institute of the History of the Arts [*Gosudarstvennyi institut istorii iskusstv*] 1923-4. See Yury Tynianov, *Poetika, istoriia literatury, kino*, ed. by A.P. Chudakov, M. O. Chudakova and E. A. Toddes (Moskva: Nauka, 1977), p. 472.
[164] The line is from Blok's 1908 poem, "Poets", where it reads, "There lived poets."
[165] *Poetika, istoriia literatury, kino*, p. 182.
[166] *Poetika, istoriia literatury, kino*, p. 169.

in such intervals that the innovations necessary for the new energy that will drive the evolution of poetic culture are made. This energy has much in common with that linguistic *energeia* so valued by von Humboldt and Potebnya, but it is by no means a mythic energy that is inherent to and latent in language.[167] Rather, it is the energy produced by the construction and structures of the verse line—the energy that the poets discussed in the opening of the essay lack, and which is produced by "that novelty of the interaction of all aspects of verse, which gives birth to new poetic sense [*smysl*]."[168]

What is this "new poetic sense"? As becomes clear in the essay's ninth section, devoted to Pasternak, it is not so much semantic as *structural*, a word I use now not only in relation to the structure of poetry but to the structure of the world. As Tynianov writes, in Pasternak's work "the word and the thing collide"—the word bounces into the thing and "wakes [it] up." How does this happen, Tynianov asks? "Firstly, due to the very wandering, the very birth of poetry among things."[169] Poetry does not mimic things, in other words, but moves among them. This wandering motion produces, Tynianov argues, "a unique store of images […] selected by random criteria; things in it are joined somehow very un-intimately [*kak-to ochen' ne tesno*], they are only neighbors, they are close by contiguity."[170] It is precisely this "random" quality that renders Pasternak's images "compulsory" [*obiazatel'nyi*].[171]

These apparently impressionistic comments, couched in overtly metaphorical language, conceal, I would argue, a quite precise claim—namely, that verse language, and Pasternak's in particular, not only does not mimic things but as though *makes things imitate it*. That is to say, the "contiguity"[*smezhnost'*] by which things in Pasternak's verse are brought together echoes the proximity of words in verse that Tynianov describes in *Problem of Verse Language*; the principles of poetic structure are applied to the world. Tynianov's description of Pasternak's images, moreover, which are chosen "at random" yet (or, so) are "compulsory" recalls the motion by which the interaction of words in the verse line produce energy (their *pro*pulsive force) precisely by the random nature of the way the words meet. When Tynianov argues that Pasternak's verse "give[s] such a turn both to words and to things that the word [is] not left hanging in mid air nor […] the thing left naked, but they [are] reconciled, fraternally entangled,"[172] therefore, this entanglement occurs not due to the word's efforts to become more *like* the thing but precisely because of the new relationships that organizing the world according to the structural principles of verse makes available.

The intimate relationship implied here by "fraternally" is not coincidental, nor is it the intimacy between word and thing sought by those who wish to claim that poetic imagery makes possible, or at least gestures towards, an absolute fusion of experience in the world and language. Tynianov's intimacy is instead precisely that which results from the random, the arbitrary, the passing—which refers not to harmonious unity but to the "sherokhovatost'" [*coarseness*] that results from the forceful collision of the word and the thing, and which makes both of them perceptible anew. Tynianov's essay thus views verse as applying a force to the world that gains

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[167] For more on the centrality of "energy" to formalist thought, see Sergei Zenkin, "Energeticheskie intuitsii russkogo formalizma", *Epokha ostraneniia. Russkii formalizm i sovremennoe gumanitarnoe znanie* (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2017), pp. 71-84.

[168] *Poetika, istoriia literatury, kino*, p. 173.

[169] *Poetika, istoriia literatury, kino*, p. 183.

[170] ibid., p. 185. Tynianov anticipates Jakobson's later essay on the metonymic principle underlying Pasternak's work.

[171] ibid., p. 184.

[172] ibid., p. 182.

its power from the structure of verse itself. This force is similar to that for which W.J.T. Mitchell calls when he proposes a method of reading imagery that strikes the image "with just enough force to make [it] resonate, but not so much as to smash [it]."[173] This approach acknowledges the "hollowness" of the idol-image, its fundamental distance from the reality it represents via conventional signs; at the same time, it reveals the material resonance that the image, in all its conventionality, makes possible.

Scholars have pointed to the inconsistency at the center of the concept of enstrangement, namely, the contradiction between the assertion that it functions both to render the word and artistic form perceptible and to "make the stone stoney," a role that some have felt conflicts with Shklovsky's overarching claim—namely, that, in order to understand art, we need to focus on devices rather than the relationship between art objects and a real-life referent.[174] As the discussion in this chapter shows, however, this contradiction is much the same as that at the heart of the image, which annuls language's relationship with the world at the same time as it revives it. This revival is not due to some essential connection between language and the things it describes but, rather, due to the very fact of our renewed awareness of the arbitrariness of this connection.

Like Pasternak, Shklovsky and the Formalists contend that it is precisely in crossing between the distinct categories of language and things that our perception of both might be renewed. Where the Anglo-American and Western European traditions are interested above all in the referential capacity of language and dwell upon the inevitable, and insurmountable, lag between cognition of the world and representation of it, the Russian tradition that I have described is more sanguine about this gap. Treating language as a material medium, Pasternak and the Formalists are interested primarily in what the effects of our interaction with this medium might be. If the Formalists' theory asserts the ability of poetic structure and the poetic image to *do* something—to transfer to the world the dynamic and dynamizing energy produced by poetic form—it is Pasternak's work that investigates most thoroughly the matter of what makes poetic language, in particular, capable of this feat. Completing and publishing *Over the Barriers* in the same years as the Formalists made their first published entrance onto the literary scene, Pasternak's work responds to the same historical and cultural circumstances as that of the Formalists. Negotiating between theory and practice, these contemporaries share a desire to reveal and revive a sense of the transformations wrought by the poetic image and poetic language more broadly on perception of and interaction with a changing world.

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[173] *What do Pictures Want?*, p. 9.
[174] See, for example, Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism*, pp. 177-80.

CHAPTER THREE:

VOICE

Introduction

The human voice is an inherently intimate phenomenon. Emerging from within, it gains its timbre from the contours of the body, speech organs, and life experience of the person speaking; voice is human interiority externalized and made physical. Yet voice is also alien to the body, which forcefully ejects it. Indeed, voice only comes into being when it hangs in the air beyond the mouth—or perhaps more accurately, when it is absorbed by the eardrums of those toward whom it is directed. Voice exists at the point of its vanishing.[1] Despite this ephemerality, voice is a deeply historical phenomenon that has resonated in quite specific ways in different cultural contexts.[2] Beyond the passage it traces between interior and exterior, voice has been asked to mediate between such binary oppositions as life and death, the human and the divine, the organic and the mechanical, the natural and the cultural, and more. Voice, that unique expression of human individuality, has simultaneously seemed able to speak to the universal questions of human existence.

This (non-)opposition between the singular and the general is central to recent debates about poetic voice, which have placed it at the crux of the lyric's curious ability to make highly personal expression available for repetition by others. Like rhythm and image, the term voice is not an invention of modern poetics but has its origins in Ancient Greece, when poetry was sung to a lyre. Oral performance ceased to be intrinsic to the practice of lyric with the invention of writing, but endured in the lyric's first-person mode and a thematic interest in song; moreover, the lyric seems to have remained a form intended for performance.[3] While the Latin lyric belongs more firmly to the domain of the written word, it retains nonetheless "a preference for the performative quality of early Greek poetry."[4] Poetry's proximity to song persists in medieval Europe, too, where the troubadour lyric was the dominant vernacular form. Here, again, even when poetry became the domain of private meditation and poetic voice lost its literal basis in

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[1] Of course, as John Durham Peters notes, each discrete sound articulated by voice must vanish to make way for the next if voice is to be at all intelligible (*The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 263).

[2] This is true of sound in general, as the growing field of sound studies has demonstrated. For one thorough introduction, see Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003). Oskana Bulgakowa briefly descibes the trajectories of voice in different European traditions in *Golos kak kul'turnyi fenomen* [*Voice as Cultural Phenomenon*] (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2015), pp. 1-10. See also Mladen Dolar's typology of approaches to voice in *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006).

[3] Jonathan Culler *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), pp. 49-55. Culler's account, to which my own is indebted, fills many of the gaps my brief overview necessarily leaves.

[4] Kathleen McCarthy, "First-Person Poetry," in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Studies*, ed. Alessandro Barchiesi and Walter Scheidel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 443-444.

sounding speech, poems continued to emphasize reperformance, offering definite but unspecified subject positions for the reader to occupy.[5] If lyric was a form for the expression of personal feeling, its iterative qualities remained at the fore.

The theoretical tangle in which our modern use of the term finds itself has its roots in the Romantic period, when, in M.H. Abrams' famous account, mimetic theories of literature were replaced by expressive theories. As originality and authenticity gained ascendancy in literary theory and practice, poetic voice became firmly attached to an individual subject; the Romantic lyric presented itself as the utterance of a unique consciousness, and devices such as rhythm or rhyme that had previously guaranteed poetic voice's openness to repetition now asserted the poet's individuality.[6] Rejecting this model, modernists moved to the other extreme, adopting in their work "egregiously artificial voice[s]" that forced readers to be aware of the poem as an act of voicing: whether "casting off […] complete masks of the self in each poem" or testing the physical voice with elaborate sonic arrangements, modernist experiments "ask us to reconsider the force of a metaphor with which we have grown comfortable," undermining not only the notion of poetic speech's origins in a unique individual but, often, the existence of a stable and coherent self at all.[7]

What is striking is that, despite these constant shifts in meaning and usage—and I have by no means catalogued them all—voice has persisted as a poetic term, remaining in place even in a century that saw the proliferation of noise-making and communication devices that might have replaced it. If poetic voice is as historically situated as the human voice, it seems also, like the human voice, to possess immanent qualities that reach across periods and national borders. These are, moreover, qualities that are found both in poetry that is recited aloud and poetry that is written down, albeit to different degrees.[8] Indeed, poetic voice most strongly resembles the human voice in its insistently interstitial position: mediating between speaker and listener, text and reader, print and performance, here, there, then, and now, poetic voice speaks first and

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[5] For this history see e.g. Sylvia Huot, *From Song to Book* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

[6] Culler provides a detailed account of this history in *Theory of the Lyric*. On the historical motivations for and repercussions of Romanticism's entanglement of voice and poem, see e.g. Donald Wesling, *The Chances of Rhyme: Device and Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980). Wesling argues that Romantic poets manipulate rhyme in order to "express the very speaking tones of the writer" and "some degree of personal meaning" (p. 50). David Nowell Smith comments on the use of rhythm to "[impose] a single "style", and thereby [assure] the presence of the poet within the poem" (*On Voice in Poetry: The Work of Animation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 5).

[7] James Longenbach, *The Resistance to Poetry* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), p. 64; Ezra Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska* (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1970), p. 85; Longenbach, *Resistance*, p. 61.

[8] Although my focus in this chapter will be poetry performance, I do not intend to imply any hierarchy between the spoken and the written word and will not concern myself at length with critiques of the voice such as that mounted by Jacques Derrida. In Derrida's argument against what he terms the 'phonocentrism' of Western metaphysics, voice occupies an ancillary role, as mere medium for the vocalization of mental signifieds, surplus and ultimately superfluous to the communication of sense. My own interest is in voice *as* medium. I am, moreover, interested not in the solitary speaker, who speaks in order to hear himself ("s'entendre"), but in voice's passage between speakers, plural. I will return to some of these arguments below. See Derrida's extensive writings on this topic and other foundational precepts of deconstruction in e.g. *Voice and Phenomenon: Introduction to the Problem of the Sign in Husserl's Phenomenology* (1967)*, Of Grammatology* (1967)*, Writing and Difference* (1967), "Différance" (1968)*, "Plato's Pharmacy" (1968). For a thorough challenge to Derrida in the terms I suggest, see Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice*: *Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. by Paul A. Kottman (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2005). The seminal work on the shift from orality to literacy is Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982).

foremost of the multiple and constant transactions that poetic communication makes possible and upon which it relies.

This chapter will attempt to identify the characteristic features of some of these transactions by examining poetic voice's significance during a particular historical moment, that of Russian modernism. I am interested specifically in the Russian modernist poetry evening, a prime example of the period's fascination with voice. Public lectures and literary readings were a common and popular part of urban life in late imperial Russia, resurrecting a trend that had flourished briefly during the era of the Great Reforms.[9] These events brought audiences into public spaces, supplying speakers with visible and responsive listeners and placing the question of the relationship between the production of speech and its reception at center stage.[10] Bringing speaker and listener together in the flesh and routinely realizing poetry's figurative voice in speech, the poetry evening acts as a counterpoint to more abstract theoretical approaches to poetic voice by repositioning voice as a medium between people and a site of dynamic exchange.

After a brief survey of theoretical approaches to poetic voice, therefore, this chapter turns to consider the consequences of poetry performance for poetic voice. I focus on Vladimir Mayakovsky and the dynamics of the futurist performance. A poet almost universally identified by and with his voice, Mayakovsky is typically treated in terms of the relationship between, and apparent intertwinement of, biographical and textual elements in his work and myth, both self-constructed and posthumous. Such discussions of life, art and "the transgressive vitality of texts" have so far had little to say about voice.[11] Certainly, Mayakovsky did not push voice's potential as sonic medium as far as his futurist contemporaries, whose experiments with *zaum'*, an invented "transrational" language consisting of strangely combined phonemes and syllables, are notorious.[12] However, Mayakovsky's early lyrics represent a different kind of innovation: exhibiting at once a modernist fascination with medium and a neo-romantic emphasis on poetic personality, they enact the inherent duality of poetic voice, always individual and simultaneously universal, and work to renew the traditional lyric by reactivating its traditional axes of address.

Mayakovsky's efforts to return attention to voice as poetic medium at the same time as to preserve its function as a means of forming communities between people bring the chapter to its final part, which considers the affective powers of poetic voice. Here, the chapter's lens widens to take in the Institute of the Living Word, established in Petrograd in 1918. Intended as "a

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[9] Such events were prohibited in 1862 due to their popularity and often-oppositional character. Christopher Ely, *Underground Petersburg: Radical Populism, Urban Space and the Tactics of Subversion in Reform-Era Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2016), pp. 45-47. A number of factors contributed to the early twentieth-century resurgence of this trend, including the emergence of new arenas for political speech in the wake of the 1905 revolution, efforts to institutionalize the Russian academy, and the commercialization of the entertainment industry and the growing popularity of new technologies such as the cinema and the gramophone. See Bulgakowa, pp. 156-164; Andy Byford, *Literary Scholarship in Late Imperial Russia: Rituals of Academic Institutionalization* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2007); Louise McReynolds, *Russia at Play: Leisure Activities at the End of the Tsarist Era* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003). I will return to this at more length below.

[10] Blok's 1908 essay, "Evenings of 'The Arts'" [*Vechera 'iskusstv'*] centers on the issue of how to declaim poetry in a manner able to affect audiences. See Bulgakowa for a summary of other contemporary discussions as to how voice should sound, pp. 159-164.

[11] I refer here to Svetlana Boym's discussion in *Death in Quotation Marks* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), p.13. Boym focuses not on voice but on the intertwinement of biographical and textual elements in the construction of Mayakovsky's 'myth'. Her insightful analysis of "the connections between the making of poetry and the making of self" nonetheless remains a touchstone throughout my discussion (ibid., p. 2).

[12] *Zaum'*, as alien as it sounds even to the Russian ear, drew on sound symbols with ancient Slavic roots. Gerald Janecek, *Zaum: The Transrational Poetry of Russian Futurism* (San Diego: San Diego State University Press, 1996).

response to a long-recognized need to study and promote the spoken word systematically," the Institute reflected a growing interest in sound and its function in verbal communication, in Russia as elsewhere.[13] Roughly equivalent to the English 'spoken word', the phrase 'living word' [*zhivoe slovo*] refers to any form of literary, theatrical, or oratorical art that is spoken aloud. In the early twentieth century, the Russian adjective "living" had further overtones, as established by Andrei Bely in his influential 1909 essay, "The Magic of Words", which distinguishes between the "living, spoken word" (or the "word-as-flesh"), a thriving organism, and the "word-as-term," the "dead crystal formed as a result of the completed process of decay of the living word."[14] As this final section demonstrates, it is in the gaps between the live, the living, and the recorded word—between voice as emanating from the body and entirely detached from it—that Russian Formalism's critical engagement with voice is to be understood.

Demonstrating the importance of local context to Russian modernist engagements with voice as a poetic device, the chapter thinks across the theory/practice divide to offer both an alternative solution to the problem posed by voice to lyric theory and a new way of conceptualizing Russian poetry's personality-driven practice.

Part One: Voice in Theory

The most influential account of lyric speech in Anglo-American lyric theory and pedagogy of the past sixty years is that enshrined by New Criticism, which proposed that poems be read as dramatic monologues of a sort, the fictive speech of an imagined *persona* rather than, as romantic theorists posited, the direct expression of the poet's powerful feeling.[15] As more than one scholar has noted, the model is not entirely satisfying, not least since it ignores all those features of lyric language that make it unlike ordinary fictional (dramatic) speech, from rhythm and sound patterning to intertextual relations and beyond.[16] The New Critical interest in showing "exactly *who* is speaking in a poem"[17] and its emphasis on the lyric as depiction of "the mind in *solitary* speech"[18] projects a lyric situation that is both too static and too one-sided, in which "the main connection implied [between speaker and reader] is that the second is listening to the

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[13] Martha Weitzel Hickey, *The Writer in Petrograd and the House of Arts* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009), p. 188. Sergei Bernshtein offers numerous examples of scholarly works written on the subject in Russia after the revolution (S.I. Bernshtein, "Zvuchashchaia khudozhestvennaia rech' i ee izuchenie" [*Sounding artistic speech and its study*] POETIKA: *Vremennik Slovesnogo Otdela, Gosudarstvennogo instituta istorii iskusstv.* 1 (1926)). Eikhenbaum cites more names, in particular Robert Boehringer and his 1911 "Über Hersagen von Gedichten" (B. Eikhenbaum. "O kamernoi deklamatsii" [*On Chamber Declamation*] in *O poezii* [*On Poetry*] (Leningrad, 1969)).
[14] "The Magic of Words" in *Selected Essays of Andrei Bely,* ed. by Stephen Cassedy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 93-110. The phrase also retained more strongly its Biblical resonance (2 Corinthians 3:6).
[15] As W.K. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks have it, "Once we have dissociated the speaker of the lyric from the personality of the poet, even the tiniest lyric reveals itself as drama" (*Literary Criticism: A Short History* (New York: Vintage, 1966), p. 675).
[16] Culler, *Theory,* p. 2.
[17] Reuben Brower, "The Speaking Voice", in *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), p. 213. My emphasis.
[18] Helen Vendler, "Introduction to *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*", in *Lyric Theory*, ed. by Jackson and Prins, p. 129. My emphasis.

first."[19] Dramatic rather than communicative, lyric speech exists in a realm separate to that of lyric reading: we are called "to delineate the exact speaking voice in every poem we read," but to do so without entering the communicative situation implied by our object of study.[20]

Attempts to move 'beyond' New Criticism (as the name of one 1985 collection has it) upset the balance in the other direction.[21] Solitary speaker is replaced by the solitary reader, whose engagement with lyric texts occurs in a slippery non-space of figuration.[22] In Paul de Man's exemplary post-structuralist essay on lyric voice, for example, lyric's intelligibility rests upon the "phenomenalization" of poetic voice, made possible by the stable axis of exchange between speaking subject and the object world posited by figures of address such as apostrophe. For de Man, this is an illusory guarantee of presence; voice is merely another of lyric's tropological strategies to defend against the disorderly play of language and the world. It is of this precarious dependence of subjecthood upon trope that, for de Man, lyric voice ultimately speaks most clearly.[23]

In the same way, lyric theorist Yopie Prins' critique of Victorian England's various appropriations of Sappho's 'voice' insists on the essential absence of this voice, even as it is identified as the central animating category of Sappho's verse. For both theorists, the essence of lyric voice lies in its insistent ambivalence, the framework it provides for human subjectivity and its simultaneous negation of all finite constructions of identity. As Prins summarizes:

> "Suspended in the metalepsis of reading, projecting the past into the future and the future into the past, I will find myself in the same non-place as the spectral "I" of Sappho; I am preoccupied by a lyric moment, the 'here' and 'now' of lyric reading, that is neither here nor there."[24]

"Neither here nor there," "preoccupied," Prins, like de Man, is absorbed in a lyric moment that, for all these critics' insistence on lyric's genesis in address, is emphatically solitary—an exercise in silent reading that poses lyric as utterance yet neglects those instances in which lyric is indeed uttered, either by a poet-performer or the reader. To read lyrically with these theorists is to read lyric in an abstract and fluctuating realm that is governed, above all, by the kind of circular motion that drives de Man's assertion that "[n]o lyric can be read lyrically, nor can the object of a lyrical reading be itself a lyric."[25]

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[19] ibid.

[20] ibid., p. 217.

[21] See *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism*, ed. by Chaviva Hošek and Patricia Parker (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

[22] Cf. Roland Barthes' now-infamous essay, "The Death of the Author", which kills off the idealized, absent author of the New Critical canon only to replace it with an equally idealized absent reader: "a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet this destination [the reader] cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted." In Roland Barthes, *Image/Music/Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 148.

[23] Paul de Man, "Lyrical Voice in Contemporary Theory" in *Beyond New Criticism*, ed. by Hošek and Parker, p. 56; Jonathan Culler, "Reading Lyric", *Yale French Studies,* 69 (1985), p. 102.

[24] Yopie Prins, *Victorian Sappho* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 247.

[25] For de Man, lyric is lyric insofar as it conceals those tropological operations that create the illusion of a speaking subject existing in relation to the object world; by definition, one cannot perform a lyrical reading, i.e., one that discerns these operations, on a lyric, nor can one read a lyric 'lyrically', i.e., accepting its strategies, once aware of

These readings of lyric voice are richly suggestive. Still, one wonders whether a way to think about voice might be found that takes seriously the numerous concrete instances of voicing to which a poem is subject, and in so doing offers a more grounded vision of the encounter between 'voice' and voice that is staged by every lyric poem, whether performed or read.[26] Both Prins and de Man deal with examples in which there is considerable distance between the living poet and the poem on the page; for Prins, Sappho's very historical absence is what provokes readers' desire to embody her, while the "transference of personhood to rhetorical entities" in de Man's readings of Hugo and Baudelaire is made possible, at least in part, by their historical remove.[27] If it is possible to critique lyric reading that "confer[s] speech upon a voiceless entity, yet in so doing also defaces it"[28] when dealing with the work of an ancient, mythologized poet, questions concerning voice appear in a different light when placed in a context such as the Russian one, where poet and audience frequently came face-to-face.

Approaches to lyric voice less abstract than the post-structuralist accounts offered by de Man and Prins do exist. They can be split into two broad groups (though there is considerable overlap in their approaches): those which deal with the question of intonation and its role in the perceived 'spokenness' of a poem, and those which address similar concerns from a less linguistically-inflected angle to consider the poem as performance or event. Intonation has long featured as a somewhat vague quality in descriptions of poetic sound, and became an object of serious study in linguistic terms only when sound-recording devices made possible the dissection of poetic speech.[29] However, where in the West intonation was not theorized seriously until the 1960s, the Russian Formalists were quick to make the linguistic phenomena that contribute to our perception of a given text's intonation a central element of their poetic theory—a fact of no little significance, and one that is connected to the widespread practice of poetry recitation.

Most pertinent here are those moments of such linguistic analyses that dwell on the fact of a poem's performance. In focusing on the projected speaker/hearer relationship of a given text, these studies have asked whether the intonation used in spoken interpretations of poetry can be analyzed according to the same categories invoked in the context of interactive speech acts, when intonation is guided by situational factors. "Suited to the assumed communicative need of the moment," this is speech that is produced piecemeal and always in response to external stimuli.[30] Reading a text aloud, by contrast, generally involves giving voice to an already existing body of words, when consciousness of the whole to which they belong influences the

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these operations. Paul de Man, "Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric" in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 254.

[26] Symptomatically, neither Prins nor de Man attends in any sustained way to the sonic quality of verse—a central aspect of poetic form, but one that the epistemology- and rhetoric-based analysis of de Man in particular almost completely neglects.

[27] Prins, p. 21. In contrast to Sappho, the details of Baudelaire's and Hugo's lives are well known; still, no physical record remains of their voices, and nor did they read their poems in front of an audience with any regularity.

[28] Prins, p. 33.

[29] Attempts at 'intonational scansion' constitute a type of psycho-physical linguistic analysis of the verse line that examines the relationship between the abstract intonational pattern projected by meter and that physically realized in speech. I leave this kind of study aside for now because it is often focused on analysis of the specific intonational effects of individual poems, even particular readings of individual poems, whereas I am trying, for the moment, to think more broadly about cultural perceptions of voice as a phenomenon of poetic speech. For a useful recent overview of the field, see Lacy Rumsey, "'Da-DA-da-da-da': intonation and poetic form", *Thinking Verse,* Vol. V (Special issue: "Intonation"), 15-49. See my chapter on rhythm for thoughts on this approach.

[30] David Brazil, "Listening to People Reading" in *Advances in Spoken Discourse Analysis*, ed. by Malcolm Coulthard (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 210.

intonation given to the rest of the text.[31] However, if indeed "'interaction with the text' … [is] an idea that differs importantly from that of 'interaction with a listener'" (and this seems indisputable), there remain certain large grey areas: how, for example, are we to describe what occurs at poetry readings when a poet intones his or her own work?[32] Is the poet reading or recalling from a printed text, or does he or she conceive of performance as a moment of—possibly responsive—interaction with an audience?

The answer to this question is clearly to some extent idiosyncratic, depending upon the preferences and intentions of a given poet, but we can follow linguistic prosodists in distinguishing between "hearer-sensitive" readings and explicitly "non-interactive" presentation of the material—that is, between performances oriented upon communication with an audience and those more concerned with an insular moment of poetic communion.[33] Intonation scholar David Brazil describes the latter as a 'ritualistic' mode, typical of religious ceremonies and poetry evenings.[34] This is a description that resonates for Russian culture, where the peculiar intonation adopted by modernist poets has often been described as "shamanistic," by contemporaries as well as more recent critics.

This same context, however, muddies the divide identified by Brazil. If it is true, as one critic argues, that Aleksandr Blok's "mesmerizing artistry," Mayakovsky's "spellbinding recitals," and the "shamanistic séances" of Osip Mandelshtam all demonstrate the Russian poet's peculiar "charismatic authority," it does not necessarily follow that the 'charisma' possessed by these poets and embodied during their poetry recitals is of the same kind or emanates from the same source, as the choice of nouns here begins to indicate: "artistry", "recitals", and "séances" imply different modes of performance and audience engagement, a suspicion confirmed by contemporary accounts of performances by these poets as well as our own reading of their work in the present.[35] Mayakovsky's oft-noted reliance on spoken intonation and gesture, for example, suggests a preferred mode that is less shamanistic than oriented toward conversational and verbally *communicative* speech; moreover, it appears to have been precisely for this sense of interaction that his performances proved so spellbinding.

It seems preferable, therefore, to think of the two poles identified by Brazil ("hearer-sensitive" and "non-interactive") as representing different types of engagement with an audience, but always both present to varying degrees in poetry recitals. The preoccupation of studies such as Brazil's with intonation—and thus, with the semantic aspect of lyric speech—must be supplemented by attention to that other central characteristic of poetic language, namely the wide variety of sonic effects that function alongside the kind of intonation described by Brazil to produce its full 'ritualistic' effect—that part of poetry that provokes in its reader-auditors the desire to join its "liturgy" and "make it their own."[36] It is, after all, those aspects of poetic speech that render it least "interactive" in conversational terms (i.e., that depart most dramatically from the cadences of 'ordinary' speech and trade in effects not strictly necessary for the

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[31] ibid.

[32] ibid.

[33] ibid., p. 215.

[34] ibid., p. 215-6.

[35] Gregory Freidin, *A Coat of Many Colors. Osip Mandelshtam and his Mythologies of Self Presentation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 7.

[36] "A good sonnet…was like a good public prayer: the test is whether the congregation can 'join' and make it their own…the whole body of sonnet sequences is more like an erotic liturgy than a series of erotic confidences." C.S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 491.

communication of sense) which provoke readerly desire to interact with a poetic text: the sound patterning, rhythmic effects, and special "iterable *now*" of lyric ("not timeless but a moment of time that is repeated every time the poem is read") that seem at the root of our desire to hear and speak voice in each poem that we read.[37] Viewed from this angle, the question of how a text speaks becomes a question not only of how the author or performer of a poem engages with the audience through linguistic means, but also of how the language of the poem itself seeks to engage the audience and in what ways it offers itself—or not—for reproduction by them.

It is a short step from here to performative readings of the lyric that pitch the oral rendition of a poem as no less 'complete' than its printed version; since the former activates poetry's vital sonic aspect, and does so differently each time, it must be viewed as not only commensurate to its written counterpart, but also evidence that the poem has a more open life than its contained status on the page would suggest.[38] Poetic utterance is, in other words, first and foremost an event, and, if the words of a poem and their graphic arrangement suggest a certain intonation pattern, the context of the live poetry performance exemplifies the way in which this inscribed—but precisely not *pre*scribed—pattern is supplemented, altered, and recast each time it is read (aloud). This conception of lyric voice is suited to the performance context that is so important for early twentieth-century Russian poetry. More importantly, affording the reader-auditor a central and active role in the function of lyric voice and emphasizing the dual position of the poem, which exists both in the individual moment of the unique performance (or printing) and yet also always in relation to its many other instantiations; it is an approach that is sensitive to lyric voice's inherent and constitutive position *in between*.

Part Two: Voice in Practice

12th February 1912: the date of the first Futurist debate in the Grand Auditorium of the Moscow Polytechnical Museum. The organizers are a group of little-known avant-garde artists that goes by the name "Jack of Diamonds". It's 8pm, and in the crowded hall "there [i]sn't room to swing a cat;" more people wait on the street outside.[39] Several strangely dressed figures appear on stage and begin to lecture the audience in shocking and confrontational manner on the subject of modern art. At one point a woman bursts in, apparently unexpected; she attacks the organizers of the debate, spits on the crowd, and announces that there is soon to be an exhibition mounted by a new avant-garde group, "The Donkey's Tail."[40] There is scandal and heckling, both on the stage and off. The debate continues until one in the morning.

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[37] Culler, *Theory*, p. 295.

[38] *Close Listening: Poetry And The Performed Word*, ed. by Charles Bernstein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[39] Benedikt Livshits, *The One and a Half-Eyed Archer*, trans. by John Bowlt (Newtonville: Oriental Research Partners, 1977), p. 78. According to an article by B. Sh[uiskii] in *Protiv techeniia* [*Upstream*], the debate attracted more than one thousand people, "many more than the hall could accommodate." Cited in Sarah Dadswell, "The Spectacle of Russian Futurism: The Emergence and Development of Russian Futurist Performance, 1910-1914" (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sheffield, 2005), p. 201.

[40] Livshits, p. 78. The woman was Natalia Goncharova, erstwhile collaborator of Mikhail Larionov, the leader of the Jack of Diamonds group. For more on these artists and their use of performance, see e.g. Dadswell, "Spectacle of Russian Futurism"; Vladimir Markov, *Russian Futurism: A History* (Berkeley: University of California Press,

24th February 1913: another debate, again organized by "Jack of Diamonds". Again, the hall is packed. Again, several strangely dressed figures take to the stage. One, "a man of enormous size, with a voice like a trombone," declares that he wishes to speak first. Told that he must wait his turn, the man turns to the audience: "Gentlemen, I beg you to defend me against the despotism of this gang that smears spit over the aspic of art." Although "they don't seem really to understand what's going on," the audience is on the huge man's side: "for a whole quarter hour the hall [roars] with applause, shouts of "Down with…!", whistles and boos."[41]

13th October 1913: the "First Evening of Speech-Creators". Another jam-packed hall, another sold out show: "'Full House' signs, mounted police, squabbles at the entrance, the crush in the auditorium—these things were now no longer casual elements of our performances but constant attributes."[42] Inside, "the heroes of the evening"—and especially, a man in "an elegant yellow-and-black-striped shirt and without a belt"—walk through the audience, further stoking the excited atmosphere. "We are destroying your old world… You hate us…", the "striped futurist" declares;[43] later, during the performance, he will mingle insults thrown at the audience ("folds of fat in the stalls" who "have cabbage stuck in [their] mouths") with his latest poetry."[44]

This is the reality behind the somewhat laconic observation in Sergei Bernshtein's 1926 article, "Sounding Artistic Speech and its Study," that, on or around the arrival of the Futurists on Russia's cultural scene in 1910, audiences grew tired of "traditional and routine" poetry recitations given by actors and were drawn instead to readings given by poets themselves—drawn, as the above descriptions show, in huge numbers; drawn despite their incomprehension of much of what they heard; drawn, it would seem, precisely because of the mutual contempt that so defined the dynamics of futurist performance.[45] Why?

Poetry evenings were a staple of Russia's pre-revolutionary cultural milieu, so ubiquitous in the first decade of the century as to move Aleksandr Blok to complain of St. Petersburg's "raging literary-musical-vocal epidemic."[46] The futurist performance represents both an extension of this trend and a break with it, and is exemplary of a more general shift witnessed in Russian poetry of this period, from the solipsistic Symbolist conception of the poet as solitary seeker after higher truths toward poetry more explicitly concerned with the question of the poet's audience or addressee: "just whom is the poet speaking to?", as Osip Mandel'shtam asks in his 1913 essay, "On the Interlocutor".[47]

1968); Jane Sharp, "The Russian Avant-Garde and Its Audience: Moscow, 1913", *Modernism/modernity*, vol. 6, no. 3 (1999), 91-116.

[41] See reports in *Moskovskaia gazeta*, 25th February 1913 and *Russkoe slovo*, 26th February 1913 (V. Katanian, *Maiakovskii: Literaturnaia khronika* [*Maiakovskii: Literary Chronicle*] (Moskva, 1961), p. 47).

[42] Livshits, *One and a Half-Eyed Archer*, p. 148.

[43] *Russkie vedomosti,* 15th October 1913 (Cited Katanian, *Maiakovskii*, p. 52).

[44] For a more extended description of the evening, including a list of Mayakovsky's proposed "theses" ("Popular taste and the fulcra of speech"; "Egyptians and Greeks stroking black, dry cats"; and so on), see Livshits: 148-51. The cabbage insult is from Mayakovsky's poem, "Take that!" ("Nate!"). The tea-tosser is Aleksei Kruchenykh, the inventor (with Velimir Khlebnikov) of *zaum*.

[45] Bernshtein, "Sounding Artistic Speech", p. 42.

[46] Blok, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 8: 55.

[47] Osip Mandel'shtam, "O sobesednike" in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, ed. by A.G. Mets, 3 vols. (Moskva: Progress-Pleiada, 2010), 2: 6. Note the title of the essay, often translated as "On the Addressee" but which in fact posits an active *participant* in a *spoken* exchange.

These changes were part of a larger process of renegotiating the function and cultural status of public space.[48] This is a phenomenon identified by Jane Sharp, who notes the coincidence of the rise of the Futurist debate with the period of unprecedented political debates spanning 1907 until the election of the fourth and last Duma in 1912, suggesting ultimately that "with overt forms of political activity possible only at tremendous risk after 1906, cultural events, particularly avant-garde performances, functioned as a parallel discourse of authority and resistance."[49] The debate, in other words, transformed the lecture hall into an interactive forum in which these artists could experiment with modes of artistic communication and in so doing equip their audiences with alternative models of politically and socially engaged speech. Where Mandel'shtam still emphasizes the necessary distance between poet and addressee, Mayakovsky effects a more radical change in orientation: on the model of live poetry performance and the Futurist debate, he seeks to open a dialogue in which the reader becomes co-creator—co-voicer—of the poetic text.

Futurist Performance and Communication in Verse

Four main categories of Russian futurist performance can be identified during the early years of Russian Futurism, roughly 1910-1914: spontaneous (or purportedly so) street "happenings"; advertised lectures and debates in university and museum lecture halls; advertised and impromptu performances in cabarets, restaurants, and other middle- and upper-class venues; and, finally, more formal performances in traditional theater settings, such as the 1913 performance of Mayakovsky's *Tragedy* and Aleksei Kruchenykh's *Victory Over the Sun* in Petersburg's Luna Park.[50] These categories attest to the varied nature of the Futurists' target audience and to the wide net these renegade artists knew they had to cast were they to succeed commercially despite their position on the fringes of the main art market.[51] Unable to print their writing in large runs due to limited financial means, they undertook instead to tour the country in person—a sort of living radio *avant la machine,* designed to broadcast their artistic program to as wide an audience as possible.[52] Despite their pointedly provocative and disdainful stance, futurist practice was very much turned outward—an orientation diametrically opposed to the coterie-centric mode of the Russian Symbolists and one that could not help but affect their poetics.

The Futurists did not use performance merely as a means to attract publicity. It was also a way of bringing to life the many formal and conceptual ideas on which the making of their art

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[48] Yuri Tsivian writes at length on the democratization of public space effected by the rapidly increasing number of movie theatres. See *Early Cinema in Russia and its Cultural Reception*, trans. by Alan Bodger (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

[49] Sharp, "Moscow, 1913", p. 103.

[50] Dadswell, "Spectacle of Russian Futurism", p. 19.

[51] The oft-cited fact of the provincial, often poor backgrounds of many of the avant-garde's foremost figures is relevant here; lacking social standing as well as funds, the artists were conscious of the insecurity of their patronage (which came, typically, from newly rich Moscow merchants) and became canny self-promoters. See Dadswell, "Spectacle of Russian Futurism".

[52] Further evidence of the futurists' awareness of the possibilities of broadcasting is their plan to release a group "phonobook" of poetry. Although an advert for this project was placed in the newspaper in 1915, there is no evidence that it was ever undertaken. See Lev Shilov, *Golosa, zazvuchashchie vnov'* [*Voices Sounding Anew*] (Moskva: Al'daon, 2004), p. 93. The Futurists were also quick to become involved with the new genre of film, releasing their first film, *Drama in Cabaret No. 13*, already in 1914 (Dadswell, "Spectacle of Russian Futurism", p. 18).

was based; as one prominent performance scholar suggests, performance was the mode in which many of these groups found their roots, and is in this sense "*avant* avant-garde"—that part of avant-garde practice where ideas later distilled into art objects were first worked out. The live gestures of performance became for many avant-garde groups "weapon[s] against the conventions of established art," the anarchic bases of performance, a "permissive, open-ended medium with endless variables, executed by artists impatient with the limitations of more established forms," positioning it as means by which avant-garde artists could challenge the dominant tastes of the bourgeois public sphere.[53] Performative and theatrical, "manifesto modernism" sought both to declare a new order of things and to bring that order into being.[54]

The readings that follow demonstrate how Mayakovsky manipulated poetic voice to this end. I focus on the question of poetic communication. Emerging at a historical moment marked by intense fluidity, when large sections of the public—many newcomers to the city and still experiencing the aftershocks of the 1905 unrest—struggled "for a sense of identity and…their own destiny," the Futurists were acutely aware of the need to engage the public via new channels.[55] They were among the first artists in Russia energetically to engage in self-advertisement as well as actively to court the attention of the press.[56] Their affection for the 'debate' or 'dispute', as they tended to advertise their evenings, demonstrates a concern to encourage maximum dialogue with the public and critical commentators; their charged language was calculated to incite the public to enter the discussion. This alertness to verbal communication with the public in the everyday is complemented by their exploration of poetry's communicative possibilities. The audience-centric mode of the Futurists changed drastically the way that voice and poetic communication were conceived.

"An Orchestra of Drainpipes": Mayakovsky's 'Performance Poems'

Information as to which poems Mayakovsky recited at poetry evenings and during the Futurists' tour of the provinces is scarce, though the slim nature of his oeuvre in these early years limits the pool of possibilities.[57] If newspaper reports occasionally quote some lines of verse, they rarely mention poems by name—presumably since reporters were hearing these poems for the first

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[53] RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art. From Futurism to the Present* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2011), p. 7; p. 9. Futurist experiments with cubist fragmentation, open form, and the poetics of "shift" ("sdvig") seem as much born of the dynamic and vacillating forum of live performance as inherited from Western European visual art. For a thorough account of French Cubism's influence on Russian Futurist visual and verbal art, see Juliette Stapanian, *Mayakovsky's Cubo-Futurist Vision* (Houston: Rice University Press, 1986)

[54] "Manifesto modernism" is the term preferred by scholars of the avant-garde such as Marjorie Perloff (*The Futurist Moment: Avant Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003)) and Thomas Puchner (*Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestoes, and the Avant-Gardes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006)).

[55] Dadswell, "Spectacle of Russian Futurism", p. 28.

[56] As Dadswell emphasizes, "the establishment of Futurism in public consciousness coincided with the heyday of printed publications, periodicals, and daily newspapers" (ibid., p. 22). According to Jeffrey Brooks, the number of dailies printed in Russia rose from 506 in 1910 to 824 in 1914, falling back to 584 in 1915. See Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read. Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1985).

[57] The philological apparatus accompanying Mayakovsky's early work is correspondingly slim, attesting to the ephemeral, largely oral basis of his poetic practice during these years.

time.[58] Based on accounts in futurist memoirs, there seem to have been around ten poems that Mayakovsky recited on a regular basis.[59] From now on I will refer to these poems as 'performance poems', in part to differentiate them from earlier lyrics published in such collections as *A Slap in the Face of Public Taste* (December 1912) and *Hatchery of Judges* (February 1913) but primarily because I want to emphasize the centrality of the performance dynamic to their genesis and intent. I will focus on just a few of these performance poems, namely, "Me Again", "Listen!", and "But Could You?". These I have selected as representative of some of the concrete ways in which poetry performance seems to have shaped Mayakovsky's understanding of poetry's communicative possibilities during his early period of public appearances, which I regard as beginning in March 1913 (the date of the "First Public Debate about the New Russian Literature", which took place in the Troitskii theatre in Petersburg on 24th March) and ending in about mid-1915.[60]

The shift in emphasis that the practice of poetry performance precipitates is illustrated most clearly by the titles of Mayakovsky's poems. Where earlier poems are titled with nouns, often features of the urban landscape, those composed during the period of intense public appearances bear titles that are more explicitly confrontational in nature and addressed to a (listening) audience ("Take That!" and "Listen!") or reference a distinct lyric subject; that is, they focus squarely on a situation of utterance as it defines either the speaker himself or the space between him and his audience. This is reaffirmed by content. These poems are marked by the presence of a strong "I" who demarcates himself clearly from those to whom he speaks and adopts a polarizing tone clearly designed to provoke the bourgeois public. Luxuriating in the "velvet of [his] own voice" even as he uses this voice to describe lurid and grotesque scenes, this larger-than-life speaker seeks deliberately to shock his listeners and to goad them into response, mingling brazen statements with mocking exposure of the audience's ultimate inability to resist this boor's charms: "ladies love my meat," as the speaker of "A Fop's Blouse" has it. Arrogant and ostentatiously lacking in regard for the limits of good taste, the speaker in these poems seems the epitome of avant-garde *épatisme*, determined to shock his public out of the comfortable conventions to which they are used. The poems are a product of the practice of performance in that they are performative in orientation—in the precise sense that these they engage not with the *what* nor even exclusively with the *how* of what is said, but, in terms of pragmatics, with how the act of utterance *works* (including in the sense of "how powerfully?").[61]

Typically, the aim of the avant-garde aesthetic—the manner in which it seeks to 'work' on its audience—has been understood as primarily to shock or offend: art is constructed as a communicative event, but one designed precisely such that it occasions a moment of *non-*communication, in which each party, rejecting the other, acquires the freedom of self-

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[58] Cf. Tsivian's commentary about memoirs that touch upon early cinema: "Memoirists, who give us scrupulous and lively descriptions of the interior of cinema auditoria, telling us how the performances took place and how the audience behaved, do not, as a rule, remember the films themselves…. Early patrons were fascinated not by films alone but rather by films *and* the environment, which, taken together, contributed to the as yet undifferentiated, overall impression of 'cinema'" (*Early Cinema in Russia*, p. 17).

[59] Exemplary accounts include: V. Kamensky, "Iunost' Maiakovskogo" in *Maiakovskii: Pro et Contra*, ed. D.K. Burlaka (Sankt-Peterburg: Izdatel'stvo Russkoi Khristianskoi gumanitarnoi akademii, 2006), pp67-111; B. Livshits, "Maiakovskii v 1913 godu" in *Pro et Contra*, pp. 112-122; V. Katanian, *Maiakovskii: khronika zhizni i deiatel'nosti* (Moskva, Sovetskii pisatel, 1985).

[60] Mayakovsky's first public appearance was in fact in February 1912, at a dispute about contemporary art; given the long gap between this appearance and the poet's second, I have decided not to take this date into account.

[61] For a discussion of the centrality of pragmatics to the avant-garde project and aesthetic, see e.g. M. Shapir, "Chto takoe avangard?" in *Russkaia al'ternativnaia poetika* (Moskva, 1990), pp. 3-9.

affirmation.[62] This is an argument supported by a superficial reading of Mayakovsky's performance poems. Yet if avant-garde poetry seeks to orchestrate a communicative event in which the participants fail to communicate and yet nonetheless emerge from the exchange somehow the wiser, what are the mechanisms of this paradoxical moment of (non-)communication, and what precise role does shock—that liberally applied but vague emotive—play in the exchange? A more nuanced picture of the avant-garde dynamic is to be found in the way in which shocking content is used to make readers think about their own position in the communicative exchange—to perform a "probing engagement with the conditions of rhetorical and representational empowerment" that places the question of voice and voicing at center stage.[63] This is a salient feature of Mayakovsky's pre-revolutionary poetics that the focus on his poetry's lyric persona and its relationship with a hostile or uncomprehending audience neglects.

"Me Again"—"But Still": Poetic Communication as Dynamic Transaction

I begin with "Me Again". Here is the poem as it appears in the First Journal:

Ещё я	Me again
Улица проваливалась как нос сифилитика	
Река сладострастье растёкшееся в слюни	The street caved in like the nose of a syphilitic
Отбросив белье до последнего листика	The river lust oozing outward into strings of spit
Сады похабно развалились в июне.	Having stripped off their bed sheets down to the last leaf
Я вышел на площадь выжженный квартал	Gardens lasciviously collapsed in June.
Одев на голову как рыжий парик	I came out into the square the scorched block
А людям страшно что у меня изо рта	Placed on my head like a red wig
шевелит ногами непрожеванный крик	And people are frightened that out of my mouth
Как трактир мне страшен ваш страшный суд	with swarming feet a half-chewed shout
Ведь меня одного сквозь горящие здания	Your last judgment is as frightening to me as a tavern
проститутки как святыню на руках понесут	After all, I am the only one who through burning buildings
и покажут богу в свое оправдание	prostitutes will bear in their arms like a saint
И бог заплачет над моею книжкой	and show to God in their defense
Не слова а судороги смешивая комом	And God will burst into tears over my book
и побежит по небу с моими стихами под мышкой	Not words a sticky lump of clotted spasms
и будет задыхаясь читать их своим знакомым.[64]	And run across the sky with my poems under his arm
	and read them breathlessly to his acquaintances.

Several preliminary remarks can be made regarding the layout of the poem itself, which, printed without stanza breaks or punctuation, displays a certain carelessness towards potential readers; it is as though the author, the sound of his performances still ringing in his ears, does not deem it necessary to provide 'instructions' as to intonation or pace. This is a poem that remains attached to the physical voice of its author-performer, with the paradoxical result that its graphic form

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[62] See Shapir's discussion, ibid.

[63] Sharp, "Moscow, 1913", p. 94. Mayakovsky's continued return to such questions throughout the 1920s attests to the importance they hold for his poetics. See, for example, Mayakovsky's 1926 essay-cum-ars poetica, "How to make verse?", in which—in the context of remarks about the revolution's dramatic effects on everyday language ("[it] threw the coarse speech of the millions onto the street, the slang of the outskirts flooded the central prospects")—he asks, "how can conversational language be introduced into poetry and how can poetry be extracted from these conversations?" Maiakovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 12: 84.

[64] *Futuristy: Pervyi zhurnal russkikh futuristov*, No. 1-2, 1914: 67. Translation my own.

possesses only a weak link to the poem as voiced event. It is a poem still at an intermediary stage between poetry-as-performed and poetry-as-read. This reading is reinforced by the title: "Me Again", it declares, unabashedly self-centered in a manner that by now Mayakovsky has established as a pattern, beginning with his May 1913 poetry cycle, *I*, and taking on tragic proportions in *Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Tragedy*, which premiered at the Luna Park in St. Petersburg in December of 1913. The poet is capitalizing on his notoriety as public personality, appearing here again as the impudent Futurist hooligan who shouts frightening and incomprehensible words at the gathered crowd: that same Mayakovsky the public all so enjoy abusing, in the press and on the stage.

Existing readings of Mayakovsky's self-promotional titling tendencies pitch the repeated use of his own name and personal pronouns as evidence of "a kind of fear that there might be an "I" which is not "myself," an "I" which has become pure poetic convention."[65] This may be so. What, though, if the obsessive return to the first-person were read from the other direction: as a reflection of the relationship not of "I" with "myself" but of "I" with "you" or "them"? I mean this not in terms of the poet's tortured relationship with an unsympathetic audience, a matter that has, in any case, already been the object of many a critic's concern. Rather, I am getting at the issue of communication, and the question of how the "I" of a poem speaks to a "you" (singular or plural), and how that "you" is being called upon to respond to this address. Mayakovsky's egocentric performance poetry paradoxically reactivates the essential availability of the pronominal shifters so central to every poem's communicative act.

The project of *épatisme* might seem to dictate that the avant-gardist adopts a stance diametrically opposed to his audience, a position seemingly exemplified in "Me Again". Closer examination, however, reveals the encounter between speaker and addressee here to be quite complex. The oozingly repulsive landscape of the first stanza, for example, is clearly calculated to provoke the reader's disgust; precisely for this reason, however, it also forces this reader to examine his or her own aesthetic tastes and value judgments. The reader who is outraged by the inclusion of such distasteful material in art moves to blame the speaker, yet is stopped short by the speaker's own clear revulsion before the landscape he describes and the diseased society it implies. Do readers condemn the speaker or the society he himself condemns, in other words— are they to trust their aesthetic instincts, or their moral ones?

This ambiguity is heightened in the fifth line as the speaker acquires body and strides out into this horrifying landscape, not least given the thin line this figure walks between arrogant joker and tragic cannibal.[66] Again, the reader's emotional and aesthetic responses flounder as she attempts to identify her position in relation to the scene: is she one of the insensitive crowd, an extension of the repulsive street, or one of the few who understand the unintelligible mouthings of this prophet?[67] Does she side with the cliquish literary culture of the Symbolists (evoked here via the poet Konstantin Bal'mont's 1900 collection, *Burning Buildings*) or this loutish poet's

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[65] Boym *Death*, p. 126.

[66] The square-as-wig is a clear reference to the Russian carnival tradition, the Lenten folk holiday that involves street festivities and costumes. For discussion of Futurism's relationship with the carnival tradition, see e.g. Joan Neuberger, "Culture Besieged: Hooliganism and Futurism", in *Cultures in Flux: Lower-Class Values, Practices, and Resistance in Late Imperial Russia*, ed. by Stephen P. Frank and Mark D. Steinberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

[67] See Pushkin's "Prophet" for the best-known instantiation of the topos of poet-as-prophet in the Russian tradition. The poet-prophet's tongue is ripped out and a burning hot coal placed in his chest. The "half-chewed shout" may also be a reference to the *zaum* language that was the Futurists' most notorious trademark (although not a feature of Mayakovsky's own work).

retinue of down-and-outs? And if the reader is to understand the poem as an essentially sincere call for sympathy and understanding, what is she to make of the comical depiction of God with which the poem ends? For even as the speaker declares the affective power of his own poetry—it touches even God—he undermines its value by parodying in this portrait its claim to divinity.

Clearly, this particular avant-garde speech act cannot be said to have straightforwardly negative effect on its audience, but functions as perlocutionary gesture through the very incongruity of the conflicting emotions it evokes. I mean that the poem prompts readers into an active analysis of their attitude, aesthetic and social, but also, and more importantly, that, undermining the notion of fixed (opposed) positions, it models a particular kind of 'flexible' communicative event—not "shackled" but "in essence dynamic", as Mayakovsky has it in one 1913 article—and, in this sense, brings art into active relation with life.[68]

Two years after the publication of *First Journal of Russian Futurists,* the poem was republished in Mayakovsky's collection, *Simple as Mooing* (October 1916). In this printing, the poem is fully punctuated, divided into quatrains and gains a stanza, the third of the new version:

Но меня не осудят, но меня не облают,	But I will not be judged, I will not be howled down
как пророку, цветами устелят мне след.	as for a prophet, they'll line my path with flowers
Все эти, провалившиеся носами, знают:	All these, caved-in-nosed ones, know:
я — ваш поэт.	I—am your poet.

The striking truncated line with which the stanza ends sounds a commanding and suddenly serious, even lyrical note—an abrupt change of tone that is simultaneously the poem's first real moment of direct address. The moment might be regarded as an intensification of the self-fictionalization already noted as a feature of the earlier version of the poem, a moment of self-aggrandizement that bestows upon the poet an extra authority loaned from the centuries-long tradition that positions him, maligned though he may be, as divine emissary of the mob. Viewed from another angle, however, this simplest of lines represents the climax of the perspectival confusion that I identified as one of the poem's central effects in its earlier incarnation. Quite apart from the question of who constitutes the "you" here (presumably not the same group that, in the first line of the next stanza, cast final judgment on the speaker, although the proximity of these two instances of "your"—the only two in the poem—seems intended to prompt precisely this confusion), the sudden switch in perspective, from "they know" to "I—am your poet", imbues the statement with a mobility that belies the static positions it marks out. The crowd is addressed via a statement that simultaneously implies the crowd's own power of speech. "I" and "you" exist only in relation to one another, as the line's striking dash makes graphically clear.

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[68] "The art of the actor, in essence dynamic, is shackled by the dead backdrop of the set". Vladimir Mayakovsky. "Teatr, kino, futurizm" [*Theatre, Cinema, Futurism*] in *Kine-zhurnal,* 27th July 1913. Reprinted in Maiakovskii *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 1: 275-7. In the same article (designated by the poet himself as a 'speech'), Mayakovsky talks about his "premonition of a special art of the actor, where the intonation even of words that don't have a definite meaning and invented, but rhythmically free movements of the human body express the most intense inner feelings." This has tended to be interpreted as referring to *zaum* (see, e.g., Perloff, *The Futurist Moment*, p. 155). Given Mayakovsky's avoidance of *zaum* in his own work and his emphasis on the dynamic nature of communication, another way to understand the phrase "not having definite meaning" may be as a reference to the different meanings words may have in different contexts; cf. "Two Chekhovs": "I am just describing the process of creation and exploring the reasons for the writer's influence on life. This influence, in contrast to the influence of sociologists or politicians, is explained not by the presentation of prepared complexes of ideas, but the weaving of verbal baskets, in which you can, at will, convey any idea to another person." Vladimir Mayakovsky. "Dva Chekhova" in *Novaia zhizn'*, June 1914. Reprinted in Maiakovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 1: pp. 294-301.

The disorienting series of shifts I have just described and the stratification of emotional response they induce call upon the reader constantly to assess his or her own position in relation to what is being said as well as to the figure saying them: the poem and its imagery are designed to shock and anger, yes, but its main intent lies less in its content than in the act of provocation it performs to a reaction that need not be so conscious as self-analysis but may be identified simply as a kind of self-awareness.[69] This self-awareness emerges from the fluidity of the communicative situation, in which the position of both speaker and listener constantly shift in relation to one another and to a series of other existing or projected aesthetic and moral values. This provides one key to understanding the new title under which the second redaction appears, "But still" [*A vse-taki*]. Hovering somewhere between discourse connective and contrastive conjunction, this title points toward the poem's underlying concern with the interstices between utterance, speaker, and hearer, and models the constant modifications of response that the poem demands and implicitly identifies as central to any communicative exchange.

Importantly, too, the vagueness of this new title's relation to the poem's content means that it could as easily be the imagined response of the reader as the speaker's own words. And indeed, despite the bewilderment or dismissal that the poem's content might prompt, its sonic texture redeems it. The reader (or listener) is shocked by the poem's content, but still… there is something about the poem that appeals, a somatic pleasure of the sort that the poem's first stanza seems to condemn but that it ultimately seduces its readers into indulging. I would locate this pleasure precisely in the mouth, the bristling texture of the poem's words combining with its strong four-stress accentual meter to encourage an oral enactment of the poem that is the source of the other, more basic, kind of self-awareness it might be said to awaken, and that shifts the emphasis away from the presence of the poet ("me again") toward the presence of the poem itself. It is not, therefore, that the poet is modeling himself upon such nineteenth-century poet-guardians of the downtrodden as Nikolai Nekrasov, nor that he is straightforwardly mocking this tradition; rather, this penultimate stanza is a reminder that we are not so distant from the prostitutes we (affect to) pity or despise: we read poetry and enjoy the pleasures of the flesh it provides. With this in mind, the final stanza is not simply parodic in intent. Rather, the image of God breathlessly reading Mayakovsky's poem to his acquaintances serves as a model of readerly response. The physicality of poetry itself ("not words—a sticky lump of clotted spasms"), as well as of God's reaction as he bursts into tears and sets off running through heaven breathlessly to share what he has read, speaks of the bodily fulcra so central to poetic communication.[70]

Challenging audiences to examine their own aesthetic and moral values, "Me Again" exploits the potential ambiguity of the personal pronoun to encourage an awareness of and flexibility with regard to their position in relation to the text. One important result of this is to make the poem's "I" available to all readers. If my conjecture regarding the earlier version's lack of graphically-inscribed intonation and its proximity to performance is plausible, moreover, the addition of stanza breaks and punctuation in the poem's later redaction emerges as a means by which to facilitate this kind of readerly reproduction—a further encouragement to poetic voicing

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[69] Cf. Sharp's comment that "Larionov's projects did not simply reflect the politics of culture in Russian daily life, nor did they advance a specific political agenda. Instead, the debates and exhibitions he organized made questions of self-representation sensible and necessary to his public" ("Moscow, 1913", p. 105).
[70] In this sense, the stanza's humorous aspect is important: laughter is primarily a somatic reflex.

that bears the trace of the poem as performed event while at the same time making it available for reperformance, thus embodying the communicative principles I have argued it lays out.[71]

A similar set of effects can be seen in the poem "Listen!", another of those to appear in the *First Journal*:

<div style="display:flex">
<div>

Послушайте!

Ведь если звезды зажигают
Значит это кому нибудь нужно?
Значит кто то хочет чтобы они были?
Значит кто то называет эти плевочки жемчужиной
И надрываясь в мятелях полуденной пыли
Торопится на небо боится что опоздал
Плачет и целует жилистую руку
И просит чтоб обязательно была звезда
Клянется что не перенесет эту беззвездную муку
А после ходит тревожный и
Спокойный наружно
И говорит кому то ведь теперь тебе ничего не страшно

Да?
Послушайте?!

Ведь если звезды зажигают
Значит это кому нибудь нужно
Значит это необходимо чтобы каждый вечер над
                крышами
загоралась хоть одна звезда![72]

</div>
<div>

Listen!

I mean if stars are lit
Does that mean somebody needs it to be that way?
Does that mean someone wants them there?
Does that mean someone calls those spitballs pearls
And sobbing in storms of midday dust
Rushes to the sky fears he's late
Cries and kisses the veiny hand
And asks that there definitely be a star
Swears that he won't survive this starless torture
And afterwards goes agitated and
Superficially calm
And says to someone I mean you're ok now not afraid

Yes?
Listen?!

I mean if stars are lit
that means somebody needs it to be that way
That means it's absolutely necessary that every
                evening over the rooftops
at least one star lights up!

</div>
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The poem's imperative title is followed by a series of questions ("If stars are lit/ does that mean somebody needs it to be that way?/ Does that mean someone wants them there?/ Does that mean someone calls those spitballs pearls[?]"). Critical accounts of the poem demonstrate a surprising readiness to take these questions at face value, both thematically (it is a reflection on "[the poet's] experience with the thought of a starless night" that expresses his "sense of worried wonder about the origin of the world") and tonally (with reference to its fabric of "alarmed questions and agitated, half-spoken thoughts").[73] Alerted by the phatic orientation of the poem's title as well as the avant-garde aesthetic from which it emerged,[74] however, this reader sees here questions that echo those posed by "Me Again": an interrogation not into the nature of the night sky, but of poetic communication itself.

Like "Me Again", "Listen!" seems superficially to be a straightforward attack on worn-out cultural models (the ubiquitous starry night sky of poetry past) and readers' attachment to them (the main body of the poem imagines a weeping man rushing to beg God to deliver him from the "starless torture" of a world, or a poem, from which they are absent).[75] More subtly, the

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[71] Note also the more exaggerated emotional emphases put in place by punctuation in later editions; conjunctions are replaced by dashes, which simultaneously preserves the gestural aspect of performance.

[72] *Pervyi zhurnal russkikh futuristov,* No 1-2 (1914), p. 4. Original punctuation. Translations my own.

[73] Edward Brown, *Mayakovsky: A Poet in Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 94-6.

[74] The poem was one of those recited by Mayakovsky during futurist 'street happenings'. See e.g. Aleksandr Tolmachev, "Poslushaite!!!" [*Listen!!!*] in *Pro et Contra*, pp. 258-9.

[75] The poem's exaggerated emphasis on finding the meaning behind stars and logically defending their existence reads also as a parody of the "common sense" that Mayakovsky identifies elsewhere as "every philistine's only

poem and its preoccupation with (f)utility critique the ineffectiveness of old poetry, and precisely its ability effectively to communicate. If the poem's emphasis on necessity, logic, and utility appears absurd given the stars with which it is concerned, there is a more serious motivation for the juxtaposition. After all, if the starry sky, that most useless—poetic, aesthetic—of backdrops, is not necessary, poetry is not necessary; so how can poetry be written that is useful but does not have to reject stars—to eschew the aesthetic element that makes it poetry? This poem is making a case for poetry's usefulness, and the kind of communication it ought to constitute.

This concern with poetic communication is illustrated, for one, by the circular structure of the poem. The questions with which the poem opens return at its close, with slight variation, and this time posed as statements ("If stars are lit/ that means somebody needs it to be that way/ That means it's absolutely necessary that every evening over the rooftops/ at least one star lights up!"). Little substantial, though, has happened between these two moments to assuage the "agitation" of the initial questions; indeed, the repetition of the poem's title, this time with more emphatic punctuation ("listen?!"), suggests that the man's anxiety has been only heightened by his visit to God ("I mean you're ok now not afraid/ Yes?"). Unconcerned with its perlocutionary weight, the star-filled poetry of the past assumes that the fact of poetic utterance is sufficient in and of itself.

The nature of this particular utterance further draws attention to the mechanisms of poetic communication. In the terms of the distinction made in the first part of this chapter between "hearer-sensitive" readings and explicitly "non-interactive" presentation of poetic texts, "Listen!" is obsessively—excessively—interactive in mode: the speaker and the weeping figure he describes seek above all some kind of affirmative response; they are hyper-sensitive to the question of whether they are being heard. In this sense, the poem acts as a melodramatization of poetry's typical axis of communication—from speaker to listener—and the priority it affords the lyric *speaker*. In this poem, by contrast, despite the emphasis placed on speaking, it is actually hard to tell who is the source of the words at different points in the poem. Does the "listen!" of the title, for example, come from the same mouth as the "listen?!" repeated later in the text? The latter seems to belong to the desperate "someone" who returns from his visit to God "agitated and/ superficially calm," which, if it does not necessarily imply that the title is also this figure's speech, alerts the reader to the title's multiple layers—it is an exhortation to listen to the lyric utterance that will follow, but also, in retrospect, a mocking echo of the desperate exhortation embedded in the text. What appears first to be a direct appeal in the 'now' of the lyric utterance takes on extra layers, with the effect of drawing attention to the utterance as utterance—to the mechanisms of lyric voicing, and the artifice it always involves.

When "Listen!" was performed at street happenings, this effect was further emphasized:

When the "strange people" saw that people were listening to them, they became silent, apart from the tallest one, dressed in a yellow blouse. He stepped forward and in a sonorous baritone intoned: "Listen! If stars are lit does that mean—somebody needs it to be that way? Does that mean—someone wants them there?..." And again, deafening everything and everyone, the others set off chattering: "O den' dzen'…. children die… ubeshchur der bul [sic]… a pregnant man… euy, euy, euy…" And again passers-by pass by, and again 'yellow-shirt', when the hysterical cries of his comrades have grown quiet,

weapon," "Otnoshenie segodniashnego teatra i kinematografa k iskusstvu. Chto neset nam zavtrashnii den'? (polezna i dlia kritikov)," *Kine-zhurnal,* No. 17 (18th September 1913). Reprinted in Maiakovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 1: 275-7.

intones in a sonorous baritone: "Listen! If stars are lit does that mean—somebody needs it to be that way? Does that mean—someone wants them there?..."[76]

Here, "listen!" is an injunction to listen to the words and poems of the other speakers present, whose proto-Dadaist performance—anticipating simultaneous poetry—relies on the chaotic mingling of barely discernible words for its effect. That is, Mayakovsky's poem calls the audience to listen to the production of voice, rather than coherent speech; it is in the act of speaking rather than the spoken that meaning is found. If the Futurists "used public space in ways that precluded passive responses," their poetry was no less oriented toward the active participation of an audience.[77] Paradoxically, the rejection of audience enacted by Mayakovsky's confrontational work sought to engage this audience as (inter)locutors, and to make them active participants in poetry understood as exchange. The extremity of Mayakovsky's position alerts us to a fundamental feature of poetic voice, its inherent openness to inhabitation by all readers.[78]

 While the Futurists' early work relied on shocking images and outrageous nonsense to register an effect, and called on audiences above all to bear witness to 'voicing-in-freedom,' Mayakovsky in particular moved toward a poetics that called on audiences to participate in voicing poetry. This is demonstrated by the addition of punctuation and line breaks to printed editions of his poetry. Let me illustrate the significance of such typographic changes for the functioning of voice in Mayakovsky's poetry via a reading of "But Could You?", written in 1913 but returned to by Mayakovsky throughout his career.

А вы могли бы?	But Could You?
Я сразу смазал карту будня,	I suddenly smeared the weekday map
плеснувши краску из стакана;	splashing paint from a glass;
я показал на блюде студня	on a plate of aspic I pointed out
косые скулы океана.	the ocean's slanted cheeks.
На чешуе жестяной рыбы	On the scales of a tin fish
прочёл я зовы новых губ.	I read the summons of new lips.
А вы	And you
ноктюрн сыграть	perform a nocturne
могли бы	could you
на флейте водосточных труб?[79]	on a drainpipe flute?

The poem has typically been read as exemplary of the "cubo-futurist" vision of Mayakovsky's pre-revolutionary work, offering a fragmentary depiction of traditional pictorial images in a cubist search for opened spatial form.[80] This reading of the poem addresses an important aspect

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[76] Tolmachev, "Poslushaite!!!", p. 259. The account misquotes several *beyonsense* poems: Khlebnikov's "Sea Surf" ("O den' i dzen' i din'!"), and Kruchenykh's "Dyr bul shchyl" and "Heights" (the first attempt in Russian poetry to write in vowels only). The "pregnant man" is David Burliuk's; the dying children, an image from Mayakovsky's cycle, "I".

[77] Neuberger, "Culture Beseiged", p. 201.

[78] The radical *zaum* texts of fellow Futurists such as Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh similarly rely, in a very literal sense, upon audience interaction for their full effect—in that, freed from semantic meaning, *zaum* poetry has in its sights instead its sonic and emotional expressivity experienced at the moment of reception.

[79] Maiakovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 1: 40. Translation my own.

[80] For full discussion of the poem in these terms, see Stapanian, *Mayakovsky's Cubo-Futurist Vision*, pp. 58-68. As Stapanian notes, several scholars have described the poems in these terms, including Khardzhiev, Lotman, and Brown, although not in the same detail as she. See Yury Lotman, *Analiz poeticheskogo teksta. Struktura stikha*

of the poem's intent, particularly in the context of the pre-revolutionary avant-garde's involvement in the visual arts. Its focus on the pictorial, however, neglects the poem's equally striking and important engagement with the sonic. Indeed, the poem's central tension is precisely that between its visual and its sonic elements—a tension figured in the poem by the dramatic shift from its first half, more visually oriented, to its second, which, reiterating the outwardly turned question of the poem's title, turns explicitly to the production of sound and its connection to human actants. The poem is not (simply) a still life in verse; it is an exploration of the conventions of poetic speech whose arrogant title-challenge and play with sonic texture seek to establish a new relationship between speaking figure and an audience that is asked not only to listen or to read but actually to speak in response.

If the poem hinges upon the axis it sets up between the poetically creative "I" and the implicitly useless "you" challenged by its title, no indication is given as to who is 'speaking' in the poem, despite the swagger of its declarations—nor to whom. Faced with the ambiguity produced by the poem's constant switches of scale, perspective, and position, we can at best identify the speaker as the generalized artist, someone able to transform the contours of everyday life. Even then, the speaker-artist not only repeatedly points away from himself at the various objects in his vicinity but is at pains also to emphasize his passive role with regard to their composition, as verbs such as "point" and "read" suggest; "smear" and "splash", meanwhile, suggest actions that are lacking in control and possibly accidental. He is above all a conductor, an image suggested by the poem's reference to music (the nocturne, the flute) and the arm gesture implied by the verb "point", as well as by Mayakovsky himself when he refers obliquely to the poem in one of the 'theses' he proposes for discussion at several futurist evenings: "A *lullaby* [Fr.] by an orchestra of drainpipes".

This being the case, there is little sense in attributing lyric utterance to any particularized fictional speaker. This is a meditation on the act of lyric speech and the production of poetic sound, with poetic voice emerging not from a human figure but generated by the text itself. Sliding through the poem in what seems like a series of anagrams, clusters of consonants (most notably, s, k, and, r) rearrange themselves around repeated open "a" and "u" vowels, the words of the poem as though generated by those that have preceded them. The potentially chaotic result of these cascading words—where shifting letters threaten to produce an effect as spattered as the paint that is spilled in the poem's first lines—is kept in check by the verse lines, the regularity of the poem's rhyming couplets fortified as these rhymes echo through other words in the lines that follow (for example, the chain "budnia" (l.1), "bliude" (l.3), "skuly" (l.4)). The poem is concerned not so much with voice as with voicing, a concern that again emphasizes the *act* of communication rather than its content. Opened spatial form is complemented by the poem's opening of lyric voice. This I mean in the sense suggested above—that voice becomes an attribute not of a particular speaker, but something co-created by the poem's phonemes—and in a more specific sense, which I turn to now.

The clear break between the first and second half of the poem, between 'painting' and address, occurs on the level of sound patterning, too, a sonic turn highlighted by the sudden appearance in the poem of foreign words: 'noktiurn' [*nocturne*] is the most jarring, but 'fleita' [*flute*] also departs from vowel sounds native to Russian. More importantly, there is a shift not simply in content but in mode, as the first half's passive verbs of revealing, showing, or reading are replaced by an active verb: "play." When read with this in mind, the apparently dismissive

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(Leningrad: Prosveshchenie, 1972), pp. 87-9; Nikolai Khardzhiev and Vladimir Trenin, *Poeticheskaia kul'tura Maiakovskogo* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1970), pp. 195-7; and Brown, p. 22.

question with which the poem ends takes on an additional sense: it is a gesture outwards, but also an invitation in. The speaker himself has not, after all, managed to play anything as delicate as a nocturne; he has made the instrument, and now offers it to the reader for their use in the production of sound, the first actively creative act mentioned in the poem. If the reader's ability to perform this task remains under some doubt, it seems not completely without point to ask.

The pivotal line for this move toward this opening-out or 'distribution' of poetic voice is the sixth, in which the speaker "read[s] the calls of new lips." The poem's voice, which is emitted by multiple sources, at multiple volumes (if one compares the possible silence of reading and the 'cries' of the 'new lips'), and on multiple temporal planes (in the past [I read], the present of lyric utterance, and the future projected by "new"), becomes radically multiple.[81] The line points to the common goal of the poem's two distinct parts: the first—in which regular rhymes and repeated sonic clusters create an easily-memorized sound fabric—models poetic speech; the second—with its varied and foreign sounds turning toward the creation of new patterns—challenges the reader to partake in its genesis.

The seemingly confrontational and polarized communicative situation set up by the poem is actually an invitation to co-creation. The poem's original layout illustrates this point further:

На чешуе жестяной рыбы	On the scales of a tin fish
Прочел я зовы вещих губ	I read the summons of prophetic lips.
А вы, ноктюрн сыграть могли бы	And you, could you perform a nocturne
На флейтах водосточных труб?	on a drainpipe flute?
Я стер границы в карте будня	I erased the borders on the weekday map
Плеснувши краску из стакана	having splashed paint from a glass;
И показал на блюде студня	And pointed out on a plate of aspic
Косые скулы океана.[82]	the ocean's slanted cheeks.

The challenge that so characterizes the later version of the poem is much less prominent here; not only does the poem lack its provocative title, but its demand to the reader, embedded near the beginning of the poem and in lines of the same length as the rest, loses much of its stridence. Less immediately striking, but no less important, is the attenuated presence of the "I", which is neither the first word of the poem, as in the later version, nor repeated so frequently.[83] In other words, in what I am positioning as the pre-performance version of the poem, the poem's status as a moment of direct and directed communication is much attenuated.

The difference is instructive insofar as it highlights the exaggerated nature of the later version's moment of address as changes made in the order of the lines render the poles of the poem's I-you axis more starkly opposed. The mere fact that this dramatic change of tone is brought about simply by rearranging the poem's lines is in itself evidence that the status of the poem as performed utterance becomes central to its intent in its new form: it is intonation, rather than content, that is key. As comparison with the earlier version indicates, moreover, it is this very polarization of the poem's communicative space that opens it up as utterance: now ending with a turn out toward the reader, the poem moves onto the intersubjective ground between the poet and his audience. This is reinforced by layout and the intonation it inscribes. Broken up and isolated on separate lines, the phrases "but you" and "could [you]" in the later version assert

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[81] In the original version of the poem, this future orientation is even more apparent, the adjective "veshchii" ('prophetic') occupying the position later given to "novyi" ('new').
[82] *Trebnik troikh: sbornik stikhov i risunok* (Moskva, 1913). Translation my own.
[83] Cf. 1913:"and pointed out on a plate of aspic" [*I pokazal na bliude studnia*] rather than 1915: "I pointed out on a plate of aspic" [*Ia pokazal na bliude studnia*].

more insistently the presence of a speaking "I" by recording his intonation, but they also open up the poem for re-voicing by the reader by making more clear where emphasis is to be placed.

The open-ended nature of the poem in its later incarnation is an affirmation of the poem as performance. The final question is left unanswered, an open space into which an audience is to assert itself—either in insulted outrage, as seems often to be the case with this poem, or responsively, taking up the challenge it poses. In both instances, the poem is not a complete artifact without the audience's response. It is neither personal expression, nor the mimetic depiction of external objects; rather, it is a call to the reader to participate in the transformation of language and reality that the poem enacts. The dynamism that has been read as a means by which to open up, in cubistic fashion, the spatial boundaries of the scene depicted also reads as a declaration of poetic practice focused not on static representation of thought or feelings but on the action of poetic utterance in all its ephemerality.

It is common to speak of Mayakovsky's earliest lyrics—those written while the poet was still a student at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture—as "cubist still-life paintings in verse," that is, as primarily reflections on medium.[84] This preoccupation did not disappear when Mayakovsky abandoned painting for performance; it evolved. Indeed, Mayakovsky's work of this period wholly identifies poetry with the medium of voice: the poem is an act of voicing, rather than artifact fixed to one particular source.[85] His lyrics encouraged audiences to consume poetry not so much for its content as for their ability as speakers to take momentary ownership of it—to take its words into his or her mouth and to give voice to them.[86] Where traditional actors' declamation of poetry posed the lyric as a dramatic monologue, emerging from a fixed and tacitly fictional source, the poetry evening and the 'opened' performance poem to which it gave birth pose the lyric as a dynamic intersubjective occasion— poetic transaction and not simply graphic object, repeated rather than single event. The final part of this chapter will consider how this poetics squares with the continued importance of the lyric persona in Mayakovsky's work and in Russian modernist culture in general.

Part Three: Voice and Authenticity

> A distraught Gorky wept all over my vest. He was upset by the verses.
>
> *Mayakovsky. I Myself [Ia sam] (1922)*

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[84] See e.g. Stapanian, *Mayakovsky's Cubo-Futurist Vision*.

[85] Lili Brik, Mayakovsky's great love, devotes more than ten pages of her memoirs to describing all the different situations in which Mayakovsky would recite poems—"whether his own or other people's" [*svoi, chuzhie li*]— during everyday life: "When somebody responded to a request of his to do something immediately with the answer, 'I'll do it tomorrow'"; "if somebody nudged him in the tram"; "in conversation with someone who knew little about art"; "referring to somebody's glib response"; "when he was bored"; "if, when playing poker, his partner winced at getting a bad card"; "on the street, while walking." See Lili Brik, "Iz vospominanii" in *Imia etoi teme—liubov! Sovremennitsy o Maiakovskom*, ed. V. Katanian (Moskva: Druzhba narodov, 1993), pp. 139-153.

[86] Cf. one telling misquotation of Akhmatova: "I have a certain smile / like this, a barely audible movement of the lips", against Akhmatova's original, "a barely *visible* movement". ibid., p. 143.

In the winter of 1915, Lili Brik demanded Mayakovsky get new teeth; he was missing half of his own, and those that remained were crooked and black. "For whatever reason, I was disturbed by this," Sonya Shamardina [Mayakovsky's first love] writes; "I couldn't stop thinking about his mouth with the bad teeth—so strongly was that mouth connected, to my mind, with his whole poetic persona."[87] The comment locates Mayakovsky's poetic ability in the same place as does his first long poem, *A Cloud in Trousers*, whose speaker is "inside out, all lips", as well as countless contemporary reviews, portraits and memoirs.[88] Mayakovsky's mouth and the voice that emerges from it are the crossroads at which the most intimate parts of the poet's person and his poetic persona meet and merge. It is discourses around voice that offer the most direct route to the complex issue of why Russian modernism, for all its formal experiments, is marked by a pervasive tendency creatively and interpretively to link poetic expression with the poet as biographical personage—of why the connection between poet, voice, and text was so firm that it was widely held that "every poem has an abundance of nuances that only the author's voice can convey."[89] My aim in this final part of the chapter is to ask how this faith in recitation by the author and other cultural practices of reception emerged from and shaped contemporary discussions around voice and oral performance—most audible, the following will show, when judging the *authenticity* of the voices sounding on the public stage. Could a man with false teeth speak from the heart?

I have so far argued that Mayakovsky's pre-revolutionary poetics display a metapoetic orientation that reveals their underlying concern with the opening out of poetic voice—that Mayakovsky's own strident tones had the paradoxical intent of inciting his listeners to reflect upon, respond to, and adopt his words for their own. I want now to reconcile this reading of Mayakovsky's work with the more common one, namely, the conviction that his deeply autobiographical oeuvre is concerned primarily with 'me', Mayakovsky, and the spiritual struggles this 'I' endures. To do so, I turn to an implicit and important category of this chapter as a whole, reception. Reception is intrinsic to voice's nature, which, relational and always directed towards someone else, is emitted only in order to communicate with another—much as, arguably, poetry is always uttered with an audience in mind.[90] While reception is a difficult category to analyze, particularly with regard to sound, that most ephemeral of 'texts', what is at stake here is not people's interior experience of hearing, but the social and cultural grounds for these sonic experiences. Rather than serving as interpretive framework for the poems themselves, the intensely affective response to the 'authentic' and 'sincere' work of Mayakovsky and many other Russian modernist poets will be read for what it tells us about the cultural practices of listening and emotion from which Russian modernist poetry emerged and to which the Russian modernist context gave rise.

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[87] Bengt Jangfeldt, *Mayakovsky: A Biography*, trans. Harry D. Watson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), p. 69.

[88] For one vivid example, see a cartoon published in *Izvestiia* in 1927 featuring its contributors. Mayakovsky stands at the front of the group, holding a page of what seems to be poetry with his mouth open wide; expressive lines indicate that sound is coming out of his mouth. He is the only one of the fifty contributors caricatured here to have his mouth open and be speaking. Jangfeldt, pp. 406-7.

[89] Shilov, p. 8. Cf. Mayakovsky's later assertion, in "Rasshirenie slovesnoi bazy" [*Widening the Verbal Base*] (1927), that "in every poem there are hundreds of the most subtle rhythmical, metrical and other peculiarities, conveyable by no one but the master himself and nothing but the voice." Maiakovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 12: 163.

[90] See Jonathan Culler's essay on apostrophe, in which he contends that even those poems purportedly addressed to Grecian urns or the West Wind are uttered with an audience of human listeners in mind. "Apostrophe," *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp. 135-154.

In the Russian modernist period, emotion is the nexus from which two poles of lyric reception extend: on the one hand, the tendency to read poetic utterance as emerging directly from the living poet's mouth and feeling person and, on the other, Russian Formalism's oft-referenced desire to separate the evolution of art "from the vagaries of individual personality," from the emotional impulses of the artist and from the emotional responses of his audience.[91] As such, this part of the chapter combines a reading of Mayakovsky's 1915 poem, *A Cloud in Trousers* [*Oblako v shtanakh*]*,* with analysis of the formalist method and its relation to voice. When formalist studies detach the poet's voice from his body and dissect it in search of the sources of its power, they do so precisely with a view to undermining notions of authenticity, sincerity, or lyric intimacy that, they felt, had so hindered the analysis of 'literariness' until that point. Nonetheless, their attempts to move beyond metaphors of voice and speech in their discussion of the lyric continually return to the physical voice, which emerges as the medium through which the Formalists, and particularly Boris Eikhenbaum, sought not to evict emotion from art but, rather, more accurately to describe literature's elusive and essential affective function within the parameters set for the study of the literary work by the formalist program.

If the last part of this chapter argued for an understanding of lyric voice alert to those linguistic mechanisms of lyric designed to make it available for repeated enunciation—its reliance upon sound and the essential openness of its shifters—this part turns to the role of emotion in lyric's negotiation between the singularity of the fictional situation it posits (our important sense that lyric words are spoken by someone, to someone) and the iterability upon which it relies (its capacity to resonate and be repeatable in different contexts).

Mayakovsky's "A Cloud in Trousers": Singular or Iterative?

> It may be the coldest day of
> the year, what does he think of
> that? I mean, what do I? And if I do,
> perhaps I am myself again.
>
> *Frank O'Hara, "Mayakovsky" (1957)*

"Down with your love! Down with your art! Down with your regime! Down with your religion!": "four cries" that, according to Mayakovsky, coincide with the four parts of his first long—and perhaps best loved— poem*, A Cloud in Trousers* (1914-1915). Added retrospectively (they appear in the poet's introduction to the 1918 printing of the poem, the first to be uncensored), these cries have struck many critics as evocative but imprecisely applied. Quite apart from the poem's felt lack of any such "systematic method or symmetry," the repeated 'your' of this "catechism" (Mayakovsky's phrase) would, they feel, be more properly replaced by 'my': this is a poem about "*my…* pain-filled, unrequited love, *my* aesthetic ascent of Golgotha, *my* revolt against injustices, *my* struggle against a cruel and absent God."[92] That early

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[91] Caryl Emerson, "Literary Theory in the 1920s: Four Options and a Practicum" in *A History of Russian Literary Theory and Criticism: The Soviet Age and Beyond,* ed. Evgeny Dobrenko and Galin Tihanov (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 2011), p. 64.

[92] Jangfeldt, p. 61. Brown comments: "This exegesis is certainly ex post facto" (114). For a thorough and convincing demonstration of the integrated nature of the poem's apparently discrete parts, see Robin Aizlewood, *Verse Form and Meaning in the Poetry of Vladimir Maiakovskii: Vladimir Maiakovskii. Tragediia; Oblako v shtanakh; Fleita-pozvonochnik; Chelovek; Liubliu; Pro eto* (London: MHRA, 1989), pp. 81-90.

publications of the poem (in the 1915 literary almanac *Strelets,* as well as embedded in a 1915 article by the poet, "On the Various Mayakovskys") bore the subtitle "a tragedy" has cemented this reading of the poem as primarily a portrait of the misunderstood speaker-hero's tragic struggle.[93]

The substitution of 'my' for 'your' is neat but, I think, ultimately unsatisfying, given the various 'May(akovsky)s' to which the possessive might refer—not to speak of the multiple possible referents of the "your" this "my" is offered to replace. The disagreement about the proper possessive in this instance highlights precisely the instability of shifters that I have suggested lies at the center of Mayakovsky's attempts to rejuvenate poetic communication.[94] The point is borne out by the poem as a whole, which, organized according to the principle of "sudden transition," is characterized by an extreme fluidity of address.[95] Now speaking to his would-be lover, Maria, now calling to the urban crowd, now turning to an icon of the Mother of God (another of the poem's many Marias), the direction of the speaker's voice shifts between and even within stanzas; the I-you(s) axis is as dramatically mutable as the central figure himself, whose defining feature is his metamorphic essence, most succinctly expressed in the poem's title image:

Хотите —	If you prefer,
буду от мяса бешеный	I'll be pure raging meat,
— и, как небо, меняя тона —	or if you prefer,
хотите —	as the sky changes tone,
буду безукоризненно нежный,	I'll be absolutely tender,
не мужчина, а — облако в штанах!	not a man, but a cloud in trousers![97]
(ll. 21-26)[96]	

The poem is a summation of the provocative period of performance from which it emerged.[98] Like the performance poems discussed in part two of this chapter, the address-obsessed *A Cloud in Trousers* is structured around a series of abrupt shifts in emotional tone, as the speaker asks

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[93] This original subtitle (sometimes modified by "second") establishes a clear link with Mayakovsky's sell-out 1913 play, *Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Tragedy.*

[94] Viewed from this angle, the original subtitle's gesture towards the dramatic origins of the poem highlights the poem's status as performed or spoken word more pressingly than its generic orientation.

[95] Most interpret these "sudden transitions" negatively. See, for example, Markov, p. 310 ("If the first and last cantos of *A Cloud in Trousers* are clear and simple, the ideological parts sandwiched between them are fragmentary, contradictory, and not quite articulate. It was obviously easier for Mayakovsky 'to turn himself inside out so that nothing is left but lips' than to preach"); V. Pertsov, *Maiakovskii. Zhizn' i tvorchestvo* (Moskva, 1976) 1: p. 297 ("Rather than a coherent and well-conceived development of the theme, we find complex associative links between subjective conceptions, logic that has broken down").

[96] Maiakovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 1: 175.

[97] V.V. Mayakovsky, "A Cloud in Trousers", trans. P. Lemke, in *Russian Poetry: The Modern Period*, ed. J. Glad and D. Weissbort (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1978). The poem' s erotic themes, obsession with metamorphosis, and title image have suggested to some a link with Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and the story of Zeus and Io, a connection that lends credence to the suggestion that this is a poem about the nature and genesis of poetic speech, a major theme of Ovid's work. See e.g. Irene Masing-Delic, "Sansculotte Improvisers and Clouds in Trousers: Poetic Metamorphosis in Pushkin and Mayakovsky" in *Metamorphoses in Russian Modernism*, ed. Peter Barta (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2000), pp. 113-148.

[98] This is, in fact, how the poet himself positioned the piece: "At the same time, he called "Cloud" a 'programmatic' (in *I Myself*) work for the period to come" (G.S. Cheremin, *Rannii Maiakovskii* [*Early Maiakovskii*] (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1962), p. 93).

the audience to sympathize with him even as he waves a knife in their face.[99] Demanding the same constant reassessment of position and attitude as the earlier performance poems, this poem remains focused on poetry's potential as medium to communicate to its audience not only content but a new mode of speech and expression.

At the same time, the poem's plot is, undeniably, comprised largely of intimate, biographical details. The action begins in Odessa, a stop on the Futurists' tour of the provinces in 1913 and the site of a real-life love affair, or at least the beginnings of one, with a woman whose rejection of the poet is the subject of the poem's first part, which narrates the speaker's tortured wait for his lover's arrival and his dejection after her late entrance and swift departure ("In you came/ […] "Guess what?/ I'm getting [*vykhozhu,* literally, "going out"] married"). Further biographical color is added by a phone-call the heartbroken speaker makes to Mayakovsky's mother and sisters. In the ensuing parts— which see the speaker take to the streets—references to futurist activities, haunts, and poets (e.g., David Burliuk, Igor Severianin), to Mayakovsky's earlier poetry, and to his reputation as an "impudent so-and-so" (as "On the Various Mayakovskys" puts it) solidify the impression that this is a direct and candid account of the poet's own experience. This impression is intensified by the dramatic shifts and transformations that characterize the poem's language and imagery. Veering from meat to cloud, man to woman, warmth to cold, love to hate, tenderness to cruelty and back again, the poem is characterized above all by the intensity of its emotional coloring.

And indeed, responses to the poem have tended toward the emotional, whether it be the weeping with which Mayakovsky's reading of the poem was often met, or the tendency in Mayakovsky scholarship to extrapolate from the speaker's wretchedness to read the poem as an expression of the poet's own spiritual suffering. I will return to the weeping soon. First, I want to suggest one way in which the poem's personal tone contributes to its crucial metapoetic intent.

The speaker's obsessive attempts to communicate with the variety of figures and groups with which he comes into contact enacts in hyperbolic terms a struggle to articulate and come to terms with the relationship of the internal to the external, of self to world, that is at the center of traditional lyric. Likewise, the speaker positions himself as the ultimate poet-prophet: he is "the most-golden-mouthed", the "thirteenth apostle", a "shriek-lipped Zarathustra".[100] Yet the poem is not simply parodying traditional poetry. The hypertrophied nature of the speaker's self-aggrandizement, along with the dramatic nature of his sufferings in the poem—as exemplified by the strikingly moving and much-remarked image of the speaker's burning heart—make of the speaker an exaggerated version of all poetic speakers, figures who suffer so that their readers

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[99] Cf. Mayakovsky's declaration, in "O raznykh Maiakovskikh" [*On the Various Mayakovskys*], that if he doesn't tire of "grinding and grinding out lines—then isn't it only because [he] know[s]: they will be knives in your hands when [the revolution comes]" (Maiakovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 1: 346). The poem also contains clear references to the Futurists' 1913-14 tour of the provinces and to Severyanin, an 'ego-futurist' known for his *poezovechera,* who joined Mayakovsky et al. for parts of the tour and irritated Mayakovsky on account of his popularity, as well as 'quotations' from all the performance poems discussed in the previous part of this chapter.
[100] "Most-golden-mouthed" is the most literal translation of "zlatousteishii", which I have chosen for its closeness to the English "silver-tongued"; other possible translations include "eloquent" or "articulate". The word has strong religious associations; John of Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople (c. 349 – 407 AD) and an important early Church father, is called "Johann the Golden-Mouthed [*Ioann Zlatoustyi*] in Russian. For an overview of Nietzsche's influence on Mayakovsky, see Bengt Jangfeldt, "Nietzsche and the Young Mayakovsky" in *Nietzsche and Soviet Culture: Ally and Adversary,* ed. Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 35-57.

might find shape for their own pain.[101] Indeed, the speaker explicitly positions himself as a martyr who bears the pain and tortured writhing of those in the "tongueless street." But if the speaker's pain is magnified by his consciousness of the eternal return to which its status as poetic utterance fates it, it is also enlarged to make space for all those who might need to occupy it. Emphatically singular and tied to its speaker, *A Cloud in Trousers* offers a radical embodiment of lyric's essential affective—and consequently iterative—weight: we feel with this speaker and feel for ourselves too, which is another way of saying that we hear his speech and gratefully adopt it for our own. In this sense, the 1918 "catechism" might be best understood as a rallying cry, a chant offered to the crowd to be taken up and hurled at whomsoever it chooses.[102]

To return, then, to the weeping, the most famous source of which is Maxim Gorky—who reportedly fell on the poet weeping after hearing him recite his new poem at Kuokkala in the summer of 1915.[103] In fact, there is some disagreement as to which of the two was the more moved: some reports have Mayakovsky reading through his own hysterical cries; some, both men crying in each other's arms. Ultimately, however, what is most significant about such accounts is not who was more disposed to tears but, rather, that these emotional responses are offered as testament to the absolute sincerity of the work and its affective force. Reviews of the poem were also keen to emphasize this point: one extols the poem as proof of Mayakovsky's "genuine, undeniable talent and beautiful, honest sincerity;"[104] another commends the "moving" nature of the poem's "vital places;"[105] yet another asserts fervently that the book "will be felt as *one's own* ("svoe") by everyone […] [it is] as frightening as everything genuine and alive is simple."[106] Such reports attest to the importance of discourses surrounding sincerity and authenticity at this time, and point to the reasons for the repeated return to such value judgments: the conviction that poetry's meaning was no more important than its affective resonance, a sentiment amplified in the proliferating accounts of weeping via which it was relayed.[107]

To highlight the role of emotional practices in responses to poetry is not to undermine the real emotion possibly—probably—felt by poet and readers: far from it. It is, though, to push against polarizing theories of lyric voice, according to which a poem must be understood either as the fictive speech of an individuated speaker or as entirely conjured by the reader. To say a poem speaks is to want to be spoken to, just as to put voice to the service of constructing a lyric subject—that 'fiction of the self' so many theorists wish to deny—demonstrates a desire to find for the abstractness of lyric utterance the stable and interpersonal basis it otherwise lacks. If

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[101] This is in part also achieved by the poem's imagery, which frequently estranges stock phrases (as in the "burning heart" example just cited) through vivid extension and transformation of their structuring metaphors, and in so doing, redistributes and makes newly tangible their emotional and semantic weight.

[102] Vinokur comes to a similar conclusion about this poem and Mayakovsky's oeuvre as a whole, which he sees as above all an effort to find a language for the urban masses. *Maiakovskii. Novator iazyka* [*Maiakovskii: Innovator of Language*] (Munich: Fink, 1967).

[103] Kuokkala, on the Gulf of Finland, was a popular summer destination for Russian literati at this time. A stroke of luck at cards had enabled Mayakovsky to join them in the summer of 1915.

[104] S. Budantsev, "Istinnyi lik" [*A True Countenance*] in *Pro et Contra*, p. 306. The title phrase has strong religious connotations in Russian.

[105] Newspaper review of a performance of the poem at the Stray Dog Cabaret on 20th February 1915. Cited Katanian, *Maiakovskii*, p. 66.

[106] K. Bolshakov, "V.V. Maiakovsii. Oblaka v shtanakh. Tetrapykh" [*V. V. Maiakovskii. A Cloud in Trousers. Tetrapych*] in *Pro et Contra*, pp. 324-5.

[107] Responses to futurist performances struck a similar set of notes. See newspaper reports gathered in V. Katanian, *Maiakovskii: khronika zhizni i deiatel'nosti* (Moskva, Sovetskii pisatel, 1985), pp. 58-61.

Mayakovsky sought to give people a medium through which to speak, poetry's no-less important function in early twentieth-century Russia was to provide a medium through which to feel.

"On Chamber Declamation": Voice and Emotion in the Theory of Boris Eikhenbaum

> "Verse declamation is currently becoming an issue every bit as vital as obtaining firewood, matches, boots, etc."
>
> *Boris Eikhenbaum. "On the reading of poetry" [O chtenii stikhov] (1919).*

In apparently stark contrast to the tears with which Mayakovsky's subject-centric drama was routinely drenched stands the approach taken by the formalist scholar, Boris Eikhenbaum. In a 1923 essay entitled "On Chamber Declamation" [*O kamernoi deklamatsii*], the formalist critic praises performances at which, eschewing the mimicry, gesture, and costumes of traditional, theatrical declaimers, poets read their work out in tones that struck their audience as monotonous, lacking sense or expressiveness:

> …thanks to this I perceived the text of the poem and experienced it as I wanted. I felt that the poem was being presented to me [*podaetsia*], and not acted out [*razygryvaetsia*].

The physical and audible presence of the *poet* has the paradoxical effect of making the *poem's* voice more available to the listener. A truly poetic declamation allows the reader to perceive and experience the poem as he wants. The poet must therefore be a "third party" [*tret'e litso*] at the recital; the two main participants in the exchange are the reader-auditor and the lyric's own voice, which exists in the poem neither as the imprint or recording of a fictional character nor the voice of the poet but as an almost independent, living entity: as Eikhenbaum has it, "the neutralization of personal emotions is the fundamental aesthetic law for arts that use the word and *live* in reproduction."

It is not only the poet or declaimer, however, who must strive for such neutralization. If Eikhenbaum's frequent negative references to obtrusive mediation (in the form of 'razygryvanie' or 'mimika') during recitation impute inauthenticity to the part of the actor, who consciously 'deceives' readers by imposing psychological significance upon the words that is all his own, it is the reader-auditors' excessively 'authentic' reaction that is criticized; they ought not to react from the gut, but to 'neutralize' their personal emotions and respond according to a learned aesthetic instinct. "Everything else (all possible 'moods')" is an imposition from without, Eikhenbaum declares, and leads to a false understanding of the work.

The key to this seeming paradox—whereby authenticity is demanded and at the same time censured—is to be found in work developed in an article written the year after "On Chamber Declamation", "Thoughts on Art: Art and Emotion" (1924). Here, Eikhenbaum divides emotion into two types, the personal [*dushevnyi*] and the aesthetic or spiritual [*dukhovnyi*]. The former category, which includes such emotions as joy, anger, and passion, belongs to our private lives, whereas the latter, "non-individual and not directly connected with our intimate, personal world…affect us regardless of our inner emotional state and may be shared by an entire group of

people…despite differences in life experience and individual emotional complexion."[108] Aesthetic emotion is related to personal emotion, clearly, but the artwork always involves a transformation of everyday emotions, and not simply their mimetic representation.

This categorization of emotions would seem to align Eikhenbaum and the formalist school he represents with the cognitivist approach to emotion in art that dissociates it from bodily arousal, instead treating it as a medium of communication that, like language, is subject to conventions and learned from others. Certainly, he advocates an approach that implies that "some feelings (often viewed as the "highest" or "most true") can be experienced only if one has acquired a certain acquaintance with the material."[109] To experience a poem 'as one wants,' Eikhenbaum implies, one needs first to know what one ought to want, according to aesthetic norms and the conditions established by the work-as-system. Yet Eikhenbaum objects not to bodily or emotional arousal *per se*, but rather to their artificial counterparts, the emotions induced via the "violent force" [*nasilie*] exercised by actors upon poems and their listeners.[110] By contrast, the "monotonous" manner adopted by poets—which "obscures logical stresses" and "does not mark out emotions"—allows for the poem's rhythm to emerge, that all-important basis of lyric speech, which communicates emotion to listeners on a somatic level rather than via psychological mimicry.

As Eikhenbaum's study makes clear, the Formalists remained aware of and receptive to the central role of emotion and its dual bodily and cognitive roots in the reception of a work of art; simply, they sought to redirect the prevailing discourse of authenticity away from psychological approaches to literature and toward the truth of the work itself. The article demonstrates an attunement to emotions as practice that points to his article's deeper intent—to challenge the stature accorded to that vague quality, 'sincerity', in contemporary poetic practice, certainly, but also to find a more precise means of describing the affective axis that such platitudes, lacking in substance as they may be, nonetheless identify.[111]

Eikhenbaum's work on the declamation of verse takes its lead from the work of German philologists such as Leipzig-based Eduard Sievers (1852-1932), the foremost proponent of so-called "Ohrenphilologie", a sound-based approach to verse analysis that, in contrast to the traditional "Augenphilologie," emphasizes the text's oral composition and its aural reception. The formalist scholar objects, however, to Sievers' "insistence on observing actual verse declamation in order to determine the phonetic features of 'correct,' 'author's' performance (*Autorenleser*)"—an objection that arises from Eikhenbaum's desire to distinguish poetics as a

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[108] Carol Any, *Boris Eikhenbaum: Voices of a Russian Formalist* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 50. Cf. also "On Chamber Declamation": "Emotions of the second order I would call 'formal' in the sense that they are not connected with the intimate content of personal life and are not born immediately and instinctively of this content, but relate to personal life as form does to material. The process of artistic creation is characterized, evidently, by the exertion of intellectual or formal emotions and the weakening of personal ones."

[109] Monique Scheer, "Are Emotions A Kind Of Practice (And Is That What Makes Them Have A History)? A Bourdieuian Approach To Understanding Emotion", *History and Theory*, 51 (2012), 193–220 (p. 216).

[110] Cf. Eikhenbaum's own, very bodily, emotional reaction to a futurist performance in 1914: "I ran headlong for the stairs, b.c. I felt that, a little more and I would cry out, throw myself onto the stage and begin a fight." Letter to Liubov Gurevich of 9 February 1914.

[111] This would become a central matter of debate in the post-revolutionary period. Was art a useful tool for propaganda? According to Lunacharsky, only under certain circumstances; if art "excites the feelings of the audience and readers and has a direct influence on their will," the only appropriate art should deal with "the expression of national ideas and feelings—ideas and feelings that are Revolutionary and Communist." See Anatolii Lunacharsky, "Revolution and Art", in *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde 1902–1934*, trans. and ed. John E. Bowlt (New York: Viking Press, 1976), pp. 191–92.

science distinct from linguistics.[112] If linguistics works with the observable phenomena of everyday, practical language, poetics was to deal with "creative intention [*telos*] realized through invented devices [*priemy*]."[113] This is in line with the formalist notion of the literary work as a dynamic system based not on lived experience but its own network of associations and devices, and the theorists' insistence on the absolute distinction between everyday or practical language and that of poetry; as Roman Jakobson has it in his 1921 essay, "Modern Russian Poetry", "the object of literary science is not literature but literariness, i.e. what makes a given work a literary work." The question that remains at the end of Eikhenbaum's article on verse declamation, therefore, is whether the poet's voice and its monotonous, "inept" quality are part of what makes the poem a literary work, or whether it is simply the best solution to an intractable problem, i.e., the awkward fact that lyric poetry, "self-contained speech constructed on a rhythmic-melodic basis," must be voiced to exist.[114] Is the voicing of a poem "an intervention from outside [that] is required to complete its meanings," or an intrinsic element of the work—a poetic device?

Despite Eikhenbaum's quarrel with Sievers regarding the necessity of differentiating poetics from (scientific) linguistics, the book-length study that preceded "On Chamber Declamation", the 1921 *Melodics of Russian Verse,* does in fact rely on a strict—and somewhat problematic—linguistic concept, the supposedly compulsory nature of intonation patterns. This is consistent with the contention in "On Chamber Declamation" that poems should be 'presented' to listeners in as neutral a tone as possible; the implication in both instances is that there is a direct relationship between the abstract intonational pattern projected by meter and that physically realized in speech. The physical voice remains outside the poem, the 'melodics' of which, inscribed in verse syntax, exist independently of their realization.

For all this emphasis on the self-contained nature of lyric speech, the fact remains that Eikhenbaum returns repeatedly to the act of enunciation and verse being performed—on voice as first and foremost neutral medium, perhaps, but still: this is an o/aural conception of verse that relies on poetry being both voiced and heard. I would argue that all of Eikhenbaum's studies concerning verse declamation during this period emerge from this basic assumption: that, as he has it in his 1918 essay, "The Illusion of *Skaz*", "verse… is a special category of *sounding*: it is conceived as *enunciated speech*, and therefore its text is nothing but a transcription, a sign."[115] Viewed from this angle, voice is "part of the artistic work," an essential element of the system of the poetic work and all "arts that use the word and live in reproduction."[116]

In his review of Eikhenbaum's *Melodics,* Viktor Zhirmunsky criticizes his fellow Formalist for failing to account for how verse melodics affect meaning.[117] Of course, this is precisely Eikhenbaum's methodological gambit, and part of his determined effort to move away from the kind of semantic or psychological interpretation of the verse phonotext epitomized for him by Andrei Bely's reading of Pushkin's champagne-popping prosody ("Is poetry, then, simply a rebus?") and so prevalent in Russian criticism of the time. Sounds in verse "are self-

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[112] Timothy Sergay, "'A Music of Letters': Reconsidering Eikhenbaum's *Melodics of Verse*", *Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 59, Issue 2 (Summer 2015), p. 201.
[113] See Sergay's summary, ibid.
[114] As defined in "On Chamber Declamation".
[115] *Skvoz' literaturu,* ('S-Gravenhage: Mouton & Co., 1962), pp160-67. My emphasis.
[116] "On Chamber Declamation". My emphasis.
[117] See V.M. Zhirmunsky, "Melodika stikha (Po povodu knigi B. M. Eikhenbaum 'Melodika stikha', Pb., 1922." *Mysl'* 3 (1922) in *Teoriia literatury, poetika, stilistika*, ed. N. A. Zhirmunsakaia (Leningrad: Nauka, 1977), pp. 56-93.

sufficient and self-signifying; they do not 'accompany' and do not simply 'correspond'."[118] Instead, according to Eikhenbaum's theory of verse 'melodics', "the intonations of speech gain a melodious character and, entering into a relationship with rhythmic cadences, compose themselves into melodic movement."[119] The role of intonation in the verse phonotext is both syntactical and rhythmic, in other words, and if the rhythmic element is always for Eikhenbaum the dominant of the two, the study of verse must nonetheless be founded upon the recognition of their continual interaction. Voice is the place where these two elements meet. Hearing a direct route to the psychology of an individuated speaker in poets' voices is undesirable, but voice as an embodied medium, when allowed to carry the words impersonally, is essential to poetry's very being. At the intersection of mind and body, static page and living entity, voice and verse declamation of the ideal, "monotonous" kind are vital for the Formalist because they embody the living literary process, without which there is only death.

Blok's Voice and "The Voice of Blok"

Death was an all too common feature of life during the years of civil war and famine following the revolution. In August 1921 came the turn of Aleksandr Blok, the most widely adored poet of his generation, whose death threw the struggling populace into deep mourning. In an attempt to fill the silent space that was left, Sergei Bernshtein, Eikhenbaum's colleague at the Petrograd Institute of the Living Word, turned to the recordings he had made of the poet in 1920. The result was a lecture—later article— entitled simply "The Voice of Blok".

Bernshtein was not the only one. Descriptions of Blok's voice are so numerous as to almost drown out their object, particularly given the unison in which they sound. Almost every account includes one or several of a select group of adjectives: "reserved" [*sderzhannyi*], "hollow" [*glukhoi*], "infirm" [*slabovolnyi*], "dispassionate" [*bespristrastnyi*]. Reading across these descriptions, a consensus emerges that the primary feature of Blok's voice was its monotonous, unemotional tones. Yet this unimpressive, seemingly even disinterested voice managed to entrance a whole generation—and precisely for the reason that, as such descriptions of the poet's voice almost universally conclude, there was nothing "poetic" about his manner, none of the affectation so typical of traditional, actorly declamation. It was his "unskillful" and "unsophisticated" delivery of verse that was felt to be its most valuable and potent quality.

If we struggle to hear the poet's own voice through this cultural static, much else is made audible. Most intriguing is the tension that emerges between the general awareness that the poet was pioneering a certain stylized mode of poetry recitation and simultaneous insistence on the absolute authenticity of the poet's voice. "The Voice of Blok" illustrates this tendency well.[120]

Based on recordings made of the poet reading sixteen poems on 21st June 1920, as well as observations made during the poet's performances 1914-1920, Bernshtein's study, like other commentaries, emphasizes above all the contrast between Blok's "stony" figure and his highly emotional—"agitating and agitated" [*volnuiushchii i vzvolnovannyi*]—vocal performance.[121] Bernshtein extends and specifies this distinction. The source of audience's 'agitation' is twofold,

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[118] B. Eikhenbaum. "O zvukakh v stikhe" [*On Sounds in Verse*], in *Skvoz' literaturu,* pp. 201-208.
[119] As defined in a shorter article of almost the same name ("Melodika stikha" [*Melodics of Verse*], in *Skvoz' literaturu*, p. 212).
[120] The article was written in 1921 but continued to be revised by Bernshtein in the light of ongoing discussions at the Institute of the Living Word until 1925. It was published for the first time only in 1972.
[121] The description is Mikhail Kuzmin's, but becomes a leitmotif of Bernstein's article.

prompted, on the one hand, by "the […] combination of natural vocal features and the pronunciation habits of his ordinary—'extra-declamatory' [*vne deklamatsii*]—manner of speaking, and, on the other, distinctive artistic devices, employed to aesthetic ends."[122] Features of the poet's style of recitation—such as his habit of pausing frequently or the trembling in his voice—are, rather than habits consciously cultivated by Blok in line with his "artistic intentions," naturally connected with the poet's physiology; they are detectable in Blok's everyday speech, too. Even those elements of Blok's performance—"imprecision", for example, or the sporadic employment of techniques such as extending stressed vowels—that are identified as purposeful attempts to imbue artistic structures with "freedom" may also, Bernshtein ventures, be the result of Blok's shallow breath (504).

What is interesting here is the consistent attention paid to the boundary between the natural and the aesthetic, the bodily and the artificial, and the repeated suggestion that there is little that separates the two. This is significant, firstly, for the question of art and emotion. In contrast to Eikhenbaum, Bernshtein repeatedly emphasizes and praises the "emotionality" of Blok's reading style, especially when it blurs the line between artistic performance and "natural" [*prirodnyi*] emotion.[123] This very cross-contamination, by a twist of interpretation, is then paradoxically that which is most authentic about the poet's voice, whose trembling is the measure and guarantor of this authentic soul's inner conflict—his natural need to express himself to an audience always painfully aware that the only means of doing so was to recite, with all the falsity this brought. The "aesthetic experience" of Blok's voice is implicitly also an emotional experience; the harder it is to distinguish between the two, the better.[124]

It would be easy to dismiss Bernshtein's study as yet another variant of the psychological (physiological?) approach to literature, an impressionistic account of Blok's declamatory style in scientific clothing that is quite distant from the formalist program; this is to an extent the case. Yet the choice of physical voice as psychological entry point into Blok's work deserves attention. The poems diagrammed for intonation that accompany Bernshtein's text betray a desire much akin to Eikhenbaum's for the poem to be voiced; in his meticulous and elaborate system for marking up Blok's poems to inscribe in them the poet's speaking voice is heard an urgent sense that Blok's poetry without these traces of voice is *incomplete*. While Bernshtein concedes that his diagrams do not bring out anything more about a poem's intonation than could be gleaned from the written texts themselves—a statement that implies he shares Eikhenbaum's base assumption, that intonation is a fixed aspect of written speech—he concludes his article with a passionate assertion of the physical voice's importance for understanding the emotional power of the poet's verse:

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[122] "Golos Bloka," reprinted in *Blokovskii sbornik II* (Tartu: Tartuskii Gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1972), 454-525 (p. 459).

[123] "Natural" is a repeated epithet in the article. Bernshtein explicitly disagrees with the formalist approach, and with Eikhenbaum, stating: "the poetic work is not only a 'thing'… but also a sign of a specific, namely aesthetic experience of its creator" (ibid., p. 507).

[124] Cf. Nikolai Chukovsky's description of a Blok recital: "Blok read hoarsely, in a deep voice, slowly and with difficulty, shifting from foot to foot. He as though found the words only with difficulty, and moved his feet around when the necessary word didn't occur to him. All this produced the impression that these tortured verses were being created right here, in front of everyone, on the stage" (p. 17).

"Studying his declamation… we learn, how [Blok] wanted to present his verses to the listeners; by the same token, we come to understand, too, the specific pathos, the secret engine of his poetry."[125]

Blok's manner of recitation may "illuminate the image of the poet and his relationship to his creations" (498), but its most valuable aspect is the way it communicates emotion to his readers.

Eikhenbaum and Bernshtein alike locate the primary source of poetry's value in its ability to communicate emotion; both see in poetry an essential conduit for culture and the life it sustains. Where Eikhenbaum places his trust in the work's own ability to record and transmit this living artistic heritage, Bernshtein—zealous archivist of poets' voices—is, ironically, less sure. Despite his pride at the treasure he has traced into wax for generations to come, Bernshtein's article is motivated precisely by his fear that these recordings alone are not enough to preserve Blok's voice; only the annotations of a living witness will bring them fully to life and pass on to new generations the "particularly intimate link" that "we—'born in deaf years'—his contemporaries" enjoy with the now-dead poet.[126] In both cases, a sense of the absolute cultural necessity of preserving the poet is linked inextricably with the voice and its poetic transcription.

Concluding Remarks

When Aleksandr Blok heard one of Bernshtein's recordings of his own voice reciting his poetry in 1920, the poet is reported to have recoiled in horror; "one should not divide the voice from the living person," he said.[127] Given the ubiquity of sound recordings by this time, explanations of this remark that reference the estranging effect of new sound recording and communication technologies such as the phonograph and the telephone seem misplaced.[128] Over and above a generalized "suspicion of technology" (connected to a Symbolist sense of its inability genuinely to transform human life), the comment seems to point to Blok's sense, typical for his generation, of the absolute interdependence of the voice of the author, the "living word" and poetry's status as uniquely 'authentic' (natural, organic) medium.

Yet what is the difference between a voice captured on the phonograph and that repeated—mimicked—by a lyric poem? Blok's remark suggests that there is something about the act of retracing that happens when a poem is voiced by its new reader that promises to revivify the original in a way that listening to a recording might not. This assertion is based not on a vague sense that poetry provides access to some intangible essence that might otherwise be lost (although this certainly seems to have weighed on the mind of modernists), but on the quite

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[125] Bernstein, "Golos," p. 499.

[126] ibid., p. 458.

[127] S.I. Bernshtein, "Moi vstrechi s A. A. Blokom", in *Al. Blok v vospominaniiakh ego sovremennikov*, 2 vols. (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel', 1989) 2: 357.

[128] For one example of such an argument, see Weitzel Hickey, *House of Arts*. Blok's diaries suggest that he, for one, had overcome the estranging effect of communication technologies long before 1919; according to his notes, he seems to have telephoned various acquaintances almost daily about the most banal of matters throughout the 1910s. As early as 1908, meanwhile, Tolstoy cheerfully adopted the phonograph as an alternate form of correspondence, using it to record responses to letters. "Pass along my greetings to your family," he dictates in one. "I'm sorry that this letter is so short. I'm speaking into a phonograph." Cited Shilov, *Golosa*, p. 22.

palpable fact that, encouraging its readers to move their own lips and tongue around its words, a poem stages a moment of communication that is not only emotionally intimate, but also—demanding and emphasizing spatial and temporal proximity—physically so. Blok's fear of "divid[ing] the voice from the living person" is, in other words, a fear less of the inauthenticity of technological media than of the passive positions into which these media threaten to place the reader-auditor as well as speaker, no longer active participants in the intimate exchange between the individual and the general upon which the lyric rests.

Compare this instance to another—that found at the end of Pasternak's 1931 artistic autobiography, *Safe Conduct*, where we find Mayakovsky, lying dead in a coffin. As in the days after Blok's death, Mayakovsky's new silence yawns emphatically through this scene and many other contemporary accounts of his suicide. "It was quite quiet," Pasternak's final chapter begins; but ringing in the text's ears are the cries of Mayakovsky's sister, with whose voice the previous chapter ends:

И чувствую—	And I feel
«я»	"I"
для меня мало.	is too small for me
Кто-то из меня вырывается упрямо.	Some other body is bursting out.
Allo!	Hello?
Кто говорит?	Who is speaking?
Мама?	Mama?
Мама!	Mama!
Ваш сын прекрасно болен!	Your son is wonderfully ill!
Мама!	Mama!
У него пожар сердца.	His heart is on fire.
Скажите сестрам, Люде и Оле,-	Tell his sisters, Lyuda and Olia
ему уже некуда деться.[129]	he's got nowhere else to go.[130]

This is the one-sided telephone conversation that appears in Mayakovsky's 1915 *A Cloud in Trousers*. In *Safe Conduct,* however, the situation of the poem has been reversed: now Mayakovsky is the silent other at the other end of the line ("He's not saying anything. No answer!").[131] His body, however, remains a powerful presence in the room, a figure with whom his sister can reminisce "almost as with someone living." Indeed, the sister, speaking in "Mayakovsky's *own* voice" as she "declaims" his poetry, as though brings her brother back to life, revivifying him as the poet he was in public even as the painful intimacy of her farewell and her repeated use of the affectionate "Volodia" call to the private person who has died.[132]

If the intimate relationship between sister and now-dead brother is at the center of Pasternak's scene, the way in which it is displayed reminds us that intimacy always involves a level of exposure—a baring of emotion, on the one hand, and a bearing witness, on the other.[133]

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[129] Maiakovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 1: 179-80.

[130] "A Cloud in Trousers", p. 13. Translation modified.

[131] "'Volodia!' [the diminutive form of Vladimir], she cried to the whole house. A moment passed. 'He's not saying anything,' she shouted even louder. 'He's not saying anything. No answer! Volodia. Volodia!! How awful!'" Boris Pasternak, *Okhrannaia gramota* in Pasternak, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 3: 236. Translation my own.

[132] My emphasis.

[133] Cf. Blok's "agitated and agitating" voice: the two-way street of voice as affective medium. Voice, which comes from within and emanates outward, always also involving "a relation with another unique existent" (Cavarero, "For More Than One Voice", p. 5).

In the scene just described, the original intimacy of Mayakovsky's poetic self-exposure is heightened by the intense intimacy of the sister's grief for her brother, itself thrown into yet sharper relief by the circle of friends who watch from a greater distance; this circle is watched by another, still more distant circle, that of the readers for whom Pasternak describes the event, and to whom it is offered as the boundary line between one era and the next.[134]

Viewed from another angle, however, the moment of familial intimacy at the center of this scene is somewhat odd: why, one might ask, would a sister confronted with her brother's dead body choose to speak through poetry?[135] The moment points to the cultural faith placed in poetry's promise of intimacy. Reciting the poem from memory and using her own breath and lips to make it present again, Mayakovsky's sister accesses a vital link to the past that Pasternak then offers to the reader. Voice is not simply an echo of days now past, but, embodied in lines that the initiated reader's own ear and tongue also trace, an intimate medium that reaches across space and time.[136] Instantly recognizable as Mayakovsky's, the lines index the new silence of his voice but simultaneously provide access to a poetic community in which his spirit still lives.

The scene thus stages the question that motivates the poetic and theoretical production of the modernist period: what kind of communication is poetry, can poetry be? In the three chapters of this dissertation, I have described the multiple ways in which poets and theorists asked and attempted to answer this question; their response has consistently turned out to relate not so much to the communication of information as to the exchange of something at once more physical and more abstract than meaning. When Blok tests the constraints of poetic rhythm against the chaotic events of history, for example, he finds in the limits of form a means by which to communicate a sense of time's passage; he discovers, moreover, that poetic rhythm—controlled yet unpredictable, predictable yet uncontrolled—reveals and expresses something about time that is otherwise intangible. In turn, Pasternak finds in the poetic image a means by which to effect communication between world and text that relies not on the semantic bridge between word and the thing to which it refers but the material structures of language as a medium and the ambiguity its conventions make inevitable. Mayakovsky is singular among the poets examined here for his engagement with communication as a verbal exchange; nonetheless, this exchange is understood precisely in terms of the physical voice to which it appeals and upon which it depends. These insights are the same as those ultimately reached in formalist theory, which responds to the same set of historical circumstances with similar ends in mind; for all the figures addressed in this dissertation, poetry is a material medium and a means by which the structures of the world and experience in it are not only brought into focus but shaped and even changed.

The poetic telephone call put in by his sister and Pasternak is a moment of failed communication: the line has gone dead, in both senses of the word. Yet the moment also gestures

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[134] Cf. Boym: "While intimate experiences are personal and singular, the maps of intimate sites are socially recognizable; they are encoded as refuges of the individual." "On Diasporic Intimacy: Ilya Kabakov's Installations and Immigrant Homes", *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 24, No. 2, *Intimacy* (Winter, 1998), 498-524 (p. 500).

[135] While poetry often features at funerals, it seems precisely the distance that poetic language provides that recommends it as a means for processing grief. Even the elegist, who mourns a loss in words of his own choosing, seeks, in Peter Sacks's formulation, "substitutive sign[s]" that allow for consolation by placing the speaker "at an essential remove from what [they] replace." *The English Elegy: Studies in Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 6.

[136] Cf. Lauren Berlant on "how memory works to create portable scenes that remind one of past intimacies and perform their strange reappearance in unusual spaces." "Intimacy: A Special Issue", *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 24, No. 2, Intimacy (Winter, 1998), 281-288 (p. 288).

towards what might be called poetry's basis in exchange—its essence as both the transcription of an originary voice and the means by which voice is made to sound in others. Voice and poetry become medium, in the final sense of the word: a way not only to reach the dead but to conjure them back into being. This is implicit in Bernshtein's study, too, and a fact that is poignantly clear when, seeking to test the scholar's hypotheses against our own experience of Blok's voice, we listen to the distant, muffled sounds of barely audible speech that are all the old and scratched records of it have managed to convey this far into the twenty-first century. Though poetry may not bring the dead back to life, the poetry and theory examined in this dissertation attest to the vital force that form retains and reproduces across times and spaces.

As the medium by which the internal is made external, voice is that elusive element in poetry that "retains and projects the force of individual sense experience and yet reaches toward intersubjective meaning…sustains and transforms the threshold between individual and social existence."[137] In an era marked by the increasing separation of bodily and mental experiences of time and space and the splintering of subjective experience, the different voices adopted, conjured, or heard in poetry are essential orientation points for understanding the ways in which the tasks and possibilities of poetry were envisioned and asserted.

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[137] Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 2.

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